Good enough?
Breast cancer in the UK

Your guide to meeting your MLA

breast cancer now
Our new report shows the government must act to make sure research breakthroughs reach patients. Help us by meeting your MLA and explaining why breast cancer is so important to you.
Why do I need to get involved?

Our new report, *Good enough? Breast cancer in the UK* highlights the key issues in prevention, diagnosis and treatment that need to be addressed to make sure the results of the latest research can reach breast cancer patients and healthcare professionals.

We’re ready to work hard with the government and the NHS to address these issues over the next year.

However, we can’t do this without your help. The best way for us to make the case for change is for people who’ve been affected by the disease and their friends and families to speak out about their experiences. You are best placed to help politicians understand the challenges we’re facing – your voice is the most powerful one we’ve got!

That’s why we’re asking you to arrange a meeting with one of the politicians who represent you in the Northern Ireland Assembly, an MLA, and ask them to champion breast cancer within their parties.

Your MLAs have been elected to act for you so they will want to hear about your experiences and why you care about breast cancer. They meet people from your area every day, so don’t be afraid to ask them for help.

Melanie Kennedy, 39, is a single mother to two young sons from Bangor.

Mel is living with secondary breast cancer and is campaigning with us because, like us, she believes things need to change.

“I’ve been fighting not only for my life, but for the lives of women who are not in the same health I am.”
Our campaigns get results

Thanks to the commitment of 115,000 Breast Cancer Now supporters who signed our #KeepKadcyla petition in early 2017, innovative cancer drug Kadcyla is now routinely available on the NHS in Wales, England and Scotland – and is on the way to being made routinely available in NI for the first time ever.

This landmark decision, made possible by people like you, is changing lives. It means women like Bonnie – who have secondary breast cancer, which is incurable – now have the chance to get precious extra time to spend with their families.
Setting up a meeting with your MLA

Arranging a meeting with your MLA is easier than you think.

All MLAs hold regular surgeries so that their constituents can visit them and raise local issues, voice concerns or ask them to support a particular campaign like this one.

You will have five MLAs for your area, so please choose to visit the one you feel most comfortable meeting.

Once you have decided which MLA you’d like to meet, call or email their office and ask to book an appointment to see them. It’s a good idea to let them know you’ll be coming to talk about breast cancer beforehand, so they have some time to prepare.

Preparing for your meeting

Before the meeting, think about what you want to say. If you’re comfortable doing so, please prepare to share your own experiences.

*Good enough? Breast cancer in the UK* highlights some of the key areas where Breast Cancer Now is asking the government to drive forward progress.

The back page of this guide is a briefing, which you can take with you and leave with your MLA. Print it out and then you can use this during the meeting to add to your story if you want to.

If you feel very strongly about another issue, and you’d like to focus on that, that’s absolutely fine. By sharing your own experience of breast cancer, or the experience of a loved one, you’ll help us to keep breast cancer high up on the political agenda in 2018.

Contacting your MLA

To find out who your MLA is and how to get in touch with them you can:

Search your postcode at [theyworkforyou.com/ MLA](http://theyworkforyou.com/ MLA)

Phone the Northern Ireland Assembly on 028 90 521137
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In the meeting with your MLA

Follow our five top tips for an effective meeting.

1. Arrive early
Try your best to arrive ten minutes before your meeting is due to start. MLAs often have packed diaries and are likely to be seeing many constituents as well as you. Generally, appointments last about 20 minutes, so if you’re late you’ll have less time to get your points across.

2. Talk about why it matters
Start by introducing yourself. Let them know what you have come to talk about and how the particular issue you’re raising concerns you personally.

3. Stick to your points
Speak clearly and stick to your key points. You don’t need to be an expert. Don’t worry if you can’t answer their questions; tell them you’ll find out (we might be able to help), and then get back to them after the meeting with the answer.

4. Ask your MLA to take action
After you have explained why you care about breast cancer and spoken about your own, or a loved one’s experiences, please ask your MLA to write to champion the recommendations of the Good Enough? report within their party.

5. Leave behind our report summary
Don’t forget to take a copy of the back page of this guide along with you and leave it with your MLA following the meeting. It will be a useful reminder of some of the points you’ve raised, and the actions they could take.
After the meeting with your MLA

It’s important to thank your MLA and remind them of what you’ve agreed.

After your meeting, it’s a good idea to email or write to your MLA, thanking them for meeting with you and confirming you’d like them to raise the issues in the Good enough? Breast cancer in the UK report with the rest of the MLAs in their party.

Bear in mind that it may take them some time to get a response. If you haven’t heard anything from them in three weeks, get back in touch to ask them if there’s been any progress.

Spread the word

Please tweet about your meeting and spread the word on Facebook. If it helps, you can use our example tweet pictured.

We would also love to know how your meeting goes. You can email us after your meeting on campaigns@breastcancernow.org
Thank you for your support

We can only create change with the support of incredible people like you by our side.

There are lots of different ways you can get involved in our campaigning work, including:

- Signing one of our petitions
- Sharing one of our campaigns on social media
- Emailing your MLA

More campaigns

You can find out more about how to get involved in more of our campaigns at breastcancernow.org/campaign
To mark Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Breast Cancer Now – the UK’s largest breast cancer charity – have published Good enough? Breast cancer in the UK.

This report highlights that, while much improvement has been made for people with breast cancer over the past two decades, progress is stalling and opportunities are being missed to save more lives.

Please support this campaign on behalf of your constituents affected by breast cancer.

Act now and write to the health spokesperson in your party, asking them to support the recommendations of Breast Cancer Now’s Good enough? Breast cancer in the UK:

1. An updated, integrated strategy for improving cancer outcomes in NI should be developed and implemented, and supported by appropriate funding.

2. A review of the process for implementing NICE guidance to ensure that breast cancer medicines are available to the patients that would benefit from them more quickly should be carried out.

Download the report at breastcancernow.org/goodenough

About Breast Cancer Now

Breast Cancer Now is the UK’s largest breast cancer charity, dedicated to funding research into the disease. We believe that, by 2050, everyone who develops breast cancer will live.

We’re bringing together all those affected by the disease to improve the way we prevent, detect, treat and stop breast cancer.

And we’re committed to working with the NHS and governments across NI, Scotland, Wales and England to ensure that breast cancer services are as good as they can be, and that breast cancer patients benefit from advances in research as quickly as possible.
Good enough? Breast cancer in the UK

Why is this so important?
As a result of advances in diagnosis and treatment, more women are surviving breast cancer than ever before. 96% of women diagnosed with breast cancer in NI survive one year, and 81.1% survive five years or more.

While there is much to celebrate, there is still much more to do. Around 300 people in Northern Ireland die every year from breast cancer.

And national survival rates still lag behind similar developed countries such as Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Canada and Australia.

NI, unlike England, Wales and Scotland, does not have a current cancer strategy. An updated, integrated strategy for improving cancer outcomes in Northern Ireland should be developed and implemented, and supported by adequate funding.

We have the opportunity to stop people dying from breast cancer. By implementing the recommendations from Breast Cancer Now’s report we can:

Prevent more cases of breast cancer
1,456 people were diagnosed with breast cancer in NI in 2015, compared with 989 in 2006, and incidence continues to climb. There were an estimated 16,300 women living with or beyond breast cancer in NI in 2013.

In up to 15% of cases, there is a family history of breast cancer. Preventative medicines such as tamoxifen could reduce this risk, however only 51% of GPs are aware that these drugs could be used to prevent breast cancer in these cases.

Improve treatment and care
The best treatment, delivered quickly, can save lives. Medicines that can improve both survival outcomes and quality of life are not reaching patients as quickly as they should.

We have one of the lowest uptake rates of new cancer drugs compared with the largest European economies, helping to explain some of the gap in cancer outcomes between the region and other developed countries. A review of the process for implementing NICE guidance to ensure that breast cancer medicines are available to the patients that would benefit from them more quickly should be carried out.

Diagnose breast cancer earlier
The earlier breast cancer is diagnosed, the greater the chance of survival.

Breast diagnostic services are facing a workforce crisis. 32% of radiologists across NI, England, Wales and Scotland are due to retire in the next five years, with a further 11% due to retire by 2025. This will have a significant impact on the ability of the screening programme to meet current demand and our ability to diagnose breast cancer quickly.

“‡I’ve been fighting not only for my life, but for the lives of women who are not in the same health I am.‡”

Melanie Kennedy, 39, is living with secondary breast cancer and a mother to two young sons from Bangor.

For more information, please contact the Public Affairs team at Breast Cancer Now on publicaffairs@breastcancernow.org