



Campaigning for vaccines in Australia

Meningitis Centre of Australia has campaigned for many years to extend immunisation against meningitis-related diseases in Australia.

Bruce Langoulant has been campaigning on meningitis for more than 30 years. His involvement started when his six-month old daughter contracted meningitis at Christmas 1989. Thankfully, she survived but was left with significant impairments, which have driven his efforts to ensure other families do not suffer in the same way.

The bedrock of campaigning, according to Bruce, is the personal experience of families affected. He has openly shared his daughter's story in Australian media and collected letters detailing the experiences of hundreds of other families, which have proved a powerful advocacy tool.

Of course, sharing stories can be challenging and bring difficulties. Bruce himself received negative comments in the media for working with a drug company to promote a meningitis vaccine. In his case he felt it was worth it in order to make the case for vaccination and help other families, but he advises that it may not be right for everyone. "People need to feel comfortable doing it and feel confident that it is part of wider campaigning and could make a difference. Above all, it is important to ensure the interests of survivors are always protected."

As well as sharing stories, Bruce and MCA have built long-term relationships with politicians from all parties, engaging with them particularly around election times.

Organisation:

Meningitis Centre of Australia (MCA)

Location:

Western Australia

Background:

MCA is a small organisation with four part-time staff including an Executive Officer

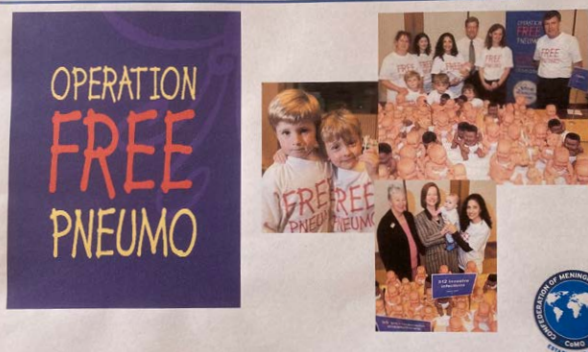
Contact:

Bruce Langoulant,
Chair of MCA Board

Change objective:

Extend meningitis vaccination in Australia

Impacts on parliament



The final decision:

Free Pneumo for all Aussie Infants

June 2004

Abbott signs off on \$178m vaccine plan

Goal achieved: The Pneumococcal vaccine was added to the national immunisation schedule and therefore free for all children.

For the 'Free Pneumo' campaign (2001-4), MCA worked to convince then Health Minister Tony Abbott and opposition Shadow Minister Julia Gillard that the pneumococcal vaccine should be included within the national immunisation programme. Opposition commitment to introduce the vaccine, made during the 2004 election campaign, levered a similar commitment from the government.

A win-win situation and every child born since January 2005 now receives this life-saving jab.

"Its personal stories that engage the media and sway politicians. They make it real... real suffering happening to real people, just like them. It changes minds in a way that the data and the science can't."

Bruce Langoulant

Results and impact

MCA has successfully campaigned for the inclusion of HiB (1992-3), Pneumococcal (2004), and MenACWY (2017) vaccines in regional and national vaccination programmes. They are yet to win the argument for the MenB vaccine as cases are currently low due to COVID social-distancing measures (as of 2021), but they continue to work on the issue.

Key learnings

• Build on the CoMO Change Equation.

The equation puts patients, families, and their stories as the bedrock of campaigning... combined with evidence, analysis, and expertise from health professionals and researchers... all targeted at opinion formers (such as media) and decision makers (such as MPs) ... which adds up to CHANGE It's a tried, tested, and often successful formula.

• **Be patient.** Campaigning is often a long-term process. There will be setbacks, and periods of stagnation where not much happens, but eventually things can change. External events will affect your campaigning (elections, pandemics, etc). Be patient and keep at it over the long-term.

• Mend the roof while the sun shines.

When you're not campaigning, make sure your website and resources are up-to-date so that when cases rise and families need information about signs and symptoms for instance, they can easily find what they need.

Further resources:

- [Meningitis Centre Australia](#) website
- Confederation of Meningitis Organisations (CoMO) [members resources](#) including CoMO change equation (members need to log-in to access)

Advocacy tip

Use the power of personal stories.

Bruce and MCA collected hundreds of handwritten testimonies from affected families, showing how meningitis had impacted their family member – and their own work, family, social and economic lives. They subsequently used them in campaigning and published them in a book, *Meningitis: a Tragedy by Instalments* in 2008.

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