



Political lobbying and awareness raising in Spain

Asociación Española contra la Meningitis (AEM) has worked with a professional political lobbying organisation to gain access to health decision makers in Spain.

In Spain, the national government sets health policy, including on vaccination, but the 17 autonomous regions can go beyond this and add to the national immunisation calendar. Unfortunately, Meningitis B vaccine is not currently recommended by national policy and is offered by only three regions. AEM is advocating for all regions to routinely offer the vaccine to infants.

AEM recognised that ensuring universal MenB coverage for every child in Spain required developing relationships with politicians and advisors in all regions. For several years they attempted to do this but struggled to make connections

and get meetings with decision makers. Elena Moya comments: "We didn't speak their language or understand the political process; when decisions were made for instance and at what stage to talk to them."

In Feb 2021, a personal connection led to the offer of pro-bono support from a professional lobbying organisation, which has opened up new opportunities. AEM has now met with all political parties at regional and national level, virtually or in person – sharing evidence about the impact of Meningitis B and the importance of the vaccine.

Organisation:

Asociación Española contra la Meningitis (AEM)

Location:

Spain

Background:

AEM is a small volunteer run organisation working on meningitis-related health issues in Spain

Contact:

Elena Moya, Vice President

Change objective:

To extend provision of meningitis vaccines to all Spanish regions and raise public awareness about meningitis symptoms, treatment, and after effects.



“Working with professional advocates has been transformational,” explains Elena Moya. “The lobbying organisation has helped us to develop our political understanding and take a more strategic approach to campaigning.”

AEM has also invested in high-quality campaign materials, including brochures and pop-up banners featuring the stories of survivors, which they hoped to display in public venues around Spain. Unfortunately, COVID stopped the ‘Faces of Meningitis’ awareness roadshow in March 2020. Whilst it has been hard to return to many public spaces, AEM has taken up an invitation to display materials in a network of private hospitals, in Madrid, Santiago de Compostela, Vigo, and Valencia – reaching hundreds of thousands of patients and visitors.

AEM have also produced the first children’s storybook about meningitis vaccination (Valentina Superheroína), funded by sponsorship from companies and foundations. The story features a girl who loves superheroes but is afraid of vaccinations. Valentina overcomes her fear when the paediatrician and her mother persuade her of the ‘superpowers’ of the vaccine – a powerful and innovative way to get the meningitis message across.

“Small, patient-led organisations really can make a difference. France changed its policy on the MenB vaccine, as the result of pressure from civil society. That inspires us to keep going to ensure that every region of Spain offers the same protection.” Elena Moya

Result and impact

Several regional health authorities have responded positively to AEM’s advocacy and indicated that they will look at providing the MenB vaccine. The most significant decision came from Catalunya, one of the most powerful regions in Spain, with the Public Health Officer announcing (October 2021) that the vaccine will be offered free to all children from January 2022.

Meetings have also been set up with the authorities in Galicia to discuss provision of the vaccine. In late November, a PNL (Project of Non-Law) put forward to Congress by one national political party, demanding that the Ministry of Health introduce the MenB vaccine into the national immunisation calendar covering the whole of Spain.

Key learning

- **Political lobbying takes time.** You need to build relationships, keep in contact with decision makers, share evidence and personal stories with them, and be clear about what you are asking them to do. Be patient and keep at it.
- **Stories are powerful.** The AEM brochure features people affected by meningitis in different ways, from limb loss to hearing loss and full recovery with no lasting effects. People really identify with the individuals portrayed and it’s been a powerful awareness raising tool.
- **Take advantage of unexpected opportunities.** Working with private hospitals provided the entry point to awareness raising when other options were closed due to COVID.

Further resources:

- [Asociación Española contra la Meningitis](https://www.asociacionespaola.com) website
- [Valentina Superheroína](#)
- [Faces of Meningitis campaign \(Las Caras de la meningitis\)](#)

Advocacy tip

Professional political lobbyists can help with lobbying. They can often open doors that are otherwise closed to small organisations. Some will work pro-bono, so it’s worth exploring this option.

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