

**Charity campaigning and political activity – guidance for volunteers**

You may be aware that there are local elections across much of England on 2 May. There will also be a General Election to Parliament between now and 28 January 2025.

While remaining impartial, the Association sees elections as a great opportunity to raise awareness of MND among candidates of all parties and support Campaigns Volunteers to do this in their local area. So, every year we update our guidance to volunteers on what to do – and what not to do.

This guidance is for all volunteers but is particularly relevant for **campaigns volunteers, branch chairs, group leaders, social media officers** as well as any volunteers who are also active members of a political party.

Legal background

There are certain rules based in law that apply to campaigning during an election period. The Charity Commission and Electoral Commission both set rules for charity campaigning, including these two key points:

**1) To be lawful, all actions charities taken by charities need to be within the scope of their charitable objectives**.

For the MND Association, one of these objectives is about seeking to ensure people living with and affected by MND receive the help and assistance needed. Another is about supporting research into MND. A keyway these objectives are met is through political campaigning for change from decision makers such as the Government or local councils.

**2) To be lawful, all political campaigning undertaken by charities must be politically neutral and independent from political parties.**

Charities must ensure they act in a way which at no point suggests endorsement of a political party or candidate.

So, while elections offer a good opportunity for charities like the MND Association to raise awareness of their issues and build support for their political campaigns, it is important this work is always done fairly across all political parties.

There are special rules that apply to activity during election periods, and that means extra care needs to be taken.

[Under UK Law](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/4/contents/enacted), the ‘regulated period’ around an election period (where the [Charity Commission](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission) will be scrutinising activity) is now set at 12 months before an election. During this period, it is important to uphold high standards of impartiality.

What does this mean in practice?

Here are some top tips for Association volunteers during an election period:

**Remain impartial** - **at no time must your branch/group indicate its support for a particular candidate or political party.**

This includes activity on social media (see below) or for example displaying candidates’ campaign materials at meetings or events, or any sort of financial giving towards a candidate or party.

**Contacting candidates**

One of the most important ways to demonstrate impartiality is to ensure if you are contacting prospective parliamentary candidates about the ‘MND Guarantee’ campaign, you contact all those standing in your local constituency.

For example, if you want to contact the conservative candidate for a meeting, you must also offer a meeting to all other candidates who are standing. These candidates do not have to accept, but you must show you are seeking to meeting with those across the political spectrum.

**Be careful on social media**

Social media is a great way of raising awareness of MND. However, if you are posting on local branch or group social media, or on an account clearly linked to the Association (e.g. where it is clear that you are an Association volunteer) please keep it **politically neutral at all times**.

For example, you can post about a candidate you have met or who has pledged to support people with MND if elected, as long as your post is impartial. That means it doesn’t call for people to vote a certain way, endorse a political party or party’s policy or criticise another candidate/political party.

What you do or say on your personal social media accounts is of course up to you.

However, to minimise any possible risk, if you are actively and publicly campaigning for a political party during an election and are also an Association campaigns volunteer. we’d advise keeping your Association campaigning off your social media during this time – use branch/group accounts instead.

Questions

If you have any questions or would like further guidance on any point, please get in touch with us at campaigns@mndassociation.org or 0203 8758910.

Further reading

This paper is a brief summary of the rules governing charity campaigning. Further information can be found in the following documents:

The Charity Commission:

Guidance on Charities, Elections and Referendums - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/political-activity-and-campaigning-by-charities>Guidance on social media use:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/charities-and-social-media/charities-and-social-media>

Campaigning and Political Activity Guidance for Charities (CC9) - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/speaking-out-guidance-on-campaigning-and-political-activity-by-charities-cc9/charities-elections-and-referendums>

The Electoral Commission: Guidance on the rules affecting non-party campaigners

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/non-party-campaigners-uk-parliamentary-general-elections>