

Senate Inquiry into Access to Australian Parliament House by Lobbyists



In December 2023, the Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration opened an Inquiry into access into Australia Parliament House by lobbyists, including current transparency arrangements relating to the lobbyist register. As the peak non-Government cancer control organisation in Australia, Cancer Council appreciated the opportunity to provide feedback to this Inquiry.

From Cancer Council's perspective, the Australian Government Lobbyist Register, which allows the public to understand corporate lobbying activities, is currently poorly enforced, lags behind international transparency standards, and has a narrow scope, only covering commercial 'third-party' lobbyists. The Federal register and system does not provide information on who is meeting with which politicians, how often, and what was discussed. These current arrangements offer opportunities for private interests to influence policy development outside of public view.

Cancer Council has significant concerns about the extent, and inadequate transparency of lobbying activities by companies involved in products or services known to cause cancer, or increase cancer risk, such as alcohol, tobacco, and ultra-processed foods. For example, there is currently no systematic transparency on who tobacco companies are meeting with in federal Parliament, and who is facilitating that access, meaning that tobacco and e-cigarettes executives and their lobbyists could meet with a Minister without any official public record or oversight.

Cancer Council provided recommendations to improve transparency and accountability in the lobbyist register system, including:

- Broadening the scope of the Federal Lobbyist Register and Lobbying Code of Conduct,
- Incorporating within the Lobbying Code of Conduct the government's [Guidance for Public Officials on Interacting with the Tobacco Industry](#),
- Requiring regular and timely mandatory disclosure of meetings with in-house and commercial lobbyists on the Register as well as on government department websites,
- Strengthening regulation on revolving door appointments.

Cancer Council also has recommendations to improve transparency and accountability for the sponsored pass system for lobbyists to access Australian Parliament House including:

- Parliamentarians should be required to disclose details of all passes they have sponsored,
- Publishing a Parliamentary Passes Register on the APH website,
- Requiring all lobbyists holding sponsored passes to disclose these details,
- Implementing a ban and revoking any current sponsored parliamentary passes for all lobbyists acting on behalf of the tobacco industry.

Further information on this Inquiry and a copy of Cancer Council's submission can be found on the Parliament of Australia [consultation page](#).