



## PAPER VS ONLINE E-PETITIONS. WHY DOES NHPPA COLLECT SIGNATURES IN PRINT ONLY & NOT ONLINE?

Many people feel this is cumbersome, time consuming and inefficient in this day and age. It is an important issue to consider when deciding how to make our elected representatives sit up and listen to us. Even with the very recent adoption of e-Petitions in Canada, paper petitions will continue to have a considerable effect on our government and policy makers. The effort it takes is far larger. But so is the potential for making an actual difference. Signatures represent crowds of voters, and thoughts of Members of Parliament (MPs) are rarely far from the next election. Politicians know what it means when an individual puts a real pen to real paper, so when you sign an 'old fashioned' petition. Your MP knows you have an invested level of engagement. Anyone who has collected signatures for a paper petition will know that each and every name represents an active commitment to the issues. Even greater than a signature on a petition, is a handwritten letter. The power of personal words written to your MP about your grievances regarding legislation or policy has tremendous gravity. A handwritten letter about your support for the Charter of Health Freedom would be a substantial follow up. The mechanism to request change through a paper petition has been, and still is, one of several well-respected ways for citizens to communicate with their government and is part of our constitutional rights. Whatever the details of the system, politicians do take notice of petitions.

## E-PETITIONS FOR AWARENESS

"Clicktivism" has entered our language to describe the momentary support of a cause when it appears on a screen without any true engagement. We do not think this is fair. Although awareness campaigns don't make change legally binding, they still carry the weight of public opinion. Online campaigns have been changing the world since 2007. Websites such as [change.org](http://change.org), [greenpeace.org](http://greenpeace.org) and [avaaz.org](http://avaaz.org) have shown that international statements of discontent, demands for human rights, ecological responsibility or social justice bring awareness on a global scale—almost instantly. In successful online campaigns, the excitement and reach of an e-Petition is usually just one part of a diverse public strategy for

change; including protests, calling/writing authorities, sharing of information through technology as well as attracted or paid media. Online activist networks can result in citizens of a jurisdiction feeling empowered and work to take the issue through a legitimate process to make lasting government change.

## CANADA'S NEW E-PETITIONS

In 2008, when the Charter of Health Freedom petition was drafted and sent to the Clerk of Petitions to be certified, there was no online option. So what has changed to have Canada accept e-Petitions?

The presentation of petitions has been a feature of the Canadian House of Commons since the time of Confederation. But a lot has changed since 1867. The process of petitioning has been tabled and reviewed in the House of Commons since 1994. The Standing Committee of Procedure and House Affairs began to examine measures to achieve more direct participation by citizens, including debates on petitions. In 2003 the Committee noted that e-Petitions were being used successfully in other parts of the world and recommended that a system of e-Petition be developed. Concerns and questions about failed e-Petition systems arose during a subsequent review that led to the idea not being eagerly acted on. Eleven years later, in 2014, a thorough study on effective e-Petitions took place resulting in the Committee becoming convinced that a system for the House of Commons was not only feasible but desirable. The Committee recommended that, "the ancient right of petitioning be expanded, given the evolution in the means of communications, through the establishment of an e-Petition process." It was emphasized by supporting MPs that e-Petitions will help more citizens engage in the democratic process between elections. The House of Commons administration is developing a complete process that will be ready after the fall 2015 (42<sup>nd</sup>) federal election.

All e-Petitions will be required to follow a multi-step process to protect the integrity of petitioning and the privacy of Canadians. For example e-Petitioners will have to fill out forms declaring their citizenship, draft their e-Petition to cite their action to remedy a grievance complying with language and integrity guidelines, select an MP to serve as its sponsor, identify five other individuals who support the e-Petition, seek verification of legitimacy from the Clerk

of Petitions, promote their e-Petition hosted on Parliament's website for a maximum of 120 days and work to have 500 or more individual signatures gathered to have it considered for response by the government. Paper petitions can be open for an indefinite amount of time and require 25 signatures per petition page to warrant a response from the government within 45 days. To get the details required to develop your own paper or e-Petition contact Marc-Olivier Girard, the current Clerk of Petitions at [marc-olivier.girard@parl.gc.ca](mailto:marc-olivier.girard@parl.gc.ca)

## CAN A PAPER & E-PETITION MERGE?

No. Although this is an excellent step to allow more citizens to engage in the democratic process, the online system will not be able to support the Charter of Health Freedom. Paper petitions that have been started will have to remain as such. There is no developed process to merge the Charter of Health Freedom petition, or any existing paper petition, with that of a new e-Petition. The NHPPA will not be able to resubmit the Charter petition and have it draw signatures as an e-Petition. It would be a significant amount of work for the Clerk of Petitions or the Privy Council to cross reference the signatures gathered on the print petition with those collected online. NHPPA would have to start a new Charter of Health Freedom e-Petition this fall, from scratch. It would have to go through the validation and acceptance process. So, if you want to have your say about your freedom of choice in natural health, help us reach another significant landmark by physically collecting signatures and sending them to the NHPPA. Download and print the petition from NHPPA's Petition Station Support Action Kit at [www.nhppa.org](http://www.nhppa.org).

## HOW LONG WILL THIS TAKE?

Depends on the public. Since 2008 the Charter of Health Freedom petition has reached record levels for a paper petition. This year we are planning on running campaigns through natural health practitioners, industry stakeholders and the public to break the 100,000+ mark. This take several months or a few more years. We may not even stop collecting signatures once the selected MP decides they will bring the Charter to the House! NHPPA has a detailed tracking system that will continue to serve as an in-house tracking system. Any new signatures after the presentation of the Charter petition to the House of Commons will be added to the first 4000+ pages that exist.

## WHY IS MY ADDRESS NEEDED?

Proof of Canadian citizenship. Both paper and e-Petitions which have been drawn up and presented correctly can be presented during routine parliamentary proceedings by an MP. All signatures on valid petitions must be original and mailing addresses must be added to confirm that all signatories are Canadian residents. Only Canadian citizens are entitled to petition Canada's Parliament.

## HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Help us raise the record breaking unique signatures we need to support making the Charter of Health Freedom law.

Download and print the petition from NHPPA's Petition Station Support Action Kit at [www.nhppa.org](http://www.nhppa.org)

Collect a minimum of 25 signatures.

Mail completed petition sheets to the address at the foot of each petition page.

Keep up-to-date with the Charter's petition numbers by subscribing to NHPPA!

Everything you do makes a difference. Your voice is powerful, it changes our petition count and together with tens of thousands of others it can restore our individual right to think for ourselves.

## WHY SIGN THE CHARTER OF HEALTH FREEDOM PETITION?

Freedom to choose. Until recently we were free to access all safe and effective natural health products and practices. There was no requirement for approval from Health Canada to access natural medicines or practices. We are now in a situation where individual Canadians are no longer free to access the natural health products (NHPs), natural health practitioners or practices that worked for us, without interference. When Health Canada criminalizes a treatment the focus is to remove the product and/or practice at all costs. They don't take health consequences of people into consideration. Everyday Canadians have suffered by our government making health decisions for us. If you think this is wrong and you think this takes away people's freedoms, we ask you to sign the petition.

Signing the Charter petition means you support your constitutional and Charter rights to choose the natural health products and practices you wish. You are standing up for every citizen who is being harmed, knowingly, and with little or no recourse to law, by bureaucrats. The Charter of Health Freedom could stop the regulatory crisis. It could end the criminalization of natural health industry. It is a fully-formed piece of legislation which would regulate for fraud, adulteration and misrepresentation without a presumption of danger for products and practices which have been used safely for generations. The Charter of Health Freedom was drawn up by a consortium of natural health industry stakeholders and legal experts originally designed to address problems with the NHP Regulations. Those groups involved with creating the Charter foresaw many potential restrictions to Canadians' ability to manage their own health and they created a solution that is needed more now than when it was drafted.

## GETTING THE PETITION TO OTTAWA

MPs know that real signatures mean engagement. We are ready to speak with any MP who understands what is at stake, politically and legally. Not all MPs are going to be able to see the implications of the current regulatory scheme for the natural health products industry, practices, practitioners and the public. We need to identify the MP with the commitment and vision for Canadians' rights to present our petition to Parliament. Make this the year you have a conversation about health freedom with your MP. If they listen, let us know. We are building a shortlist of MPs. Email [info@nhppa.org](mailto:info@nhppa.org) if you would like to set up a conversation between your MP and Shawn Buckley on the process and possible outcomes of asking for significant regulatory reform. When we find the MP who wants to table our petition in the House of Commons, all 4000+ pages of the Charter of Health Freedom petition must be sent to the Clerk of Petitions for certification. That would be a remarkable sight to see after almost a decade of effort!