



# Grassroots Advocacy 101

Cancer Support Community

# Advocacy is Critical in Healthcare

The best healthcare programs work to ensure excellent care, access without disparity, and affordable costs. **Advocacy to help ensure that policies and regulations have the outcome that elected officials and regulators intend is important to ensuring patients receive the healthcare they need.**

Since the implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in 2010, there has been a growing emphasis on measuring patient experiences and using that information to improve care.

It is critical for patients and caregivers to be educated and engaged in their own healthcare decision-making and to share their stories and perspectives with others to continue to drive a patient-centered approach to healthcare delivery.

# Will My Voice Matter?

**Yes! Telling your story to the right people can be impactful and help to improve lives.** Whether you are a patient, family member, caregiver, healthcare provider, or advocate, your voice can and will make a difference.

**Your story and perspectives matter – personal stories are much more memorable and impactful than lengthy or dry reports.** Through your advocacy on a particular policy change, you have the ability to shine a spotlight on an issue that is not well-understood or previously may have received little attention.

**Policymakers look for ways to better understand the healthcare issues important to their constituents.** They often cite the voices of constituents and advocates as examples of why a policy should change. **Your specialized, direct experience is key** to helping them do just that.

# The Basics of Advocacy

## What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is how we, as interest-holders, can influence public policy. Advocacy is any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, or argues for a cause, or the process of publicly supporting or defending on behalf of self or others. Anyone can advocate in support of a cause and encourage progress toward solutions. Many people think that advocacy is intimidating or that it can only be done through lobbying to change policies or laws, but that is not the case. You can be an advocate in many ways.

## Some examples of advocacy include:

- Contacting legislators to voice support or opposition for the issue
- Educating friends and family on issues
- Voting
- Writing a letter to the editor or op-ed
- Participating in a health-related activity in your community
- Sharing your story on social media
- Attending a local town hall meeting
- Staying informed and aware of issues that are important to you

# The Levels of Advocacy

Each level of advocacy has the potential to build a foundation for another level – expanding your reach and impact.



## Local Community Advocacy

Local community advocacy involves bringing attention to a particular issue that might affect others within your neighborhood, town, or community. Collaborations on a local level can help influence both the development and implementation of public policies.



## State Advocacy

There are also opportunities to engage with elected officials and regulatory agencies at the state level. Research to identify if any state-level advocacy organizations or associations are already tackling your issue before starting this journey on your own.

As a state resident, you are a constituent to whom elected officials have a direct responsibility. State regulatory agencies perform their role through state health departments, state insurance agencies, state medical and pharmacy boards, and other agencies. Even one advocate's voice can make a difference within these agencies and boards.



## Federal/National Advocacy

Advocacy at the federal or national level is an important way to impact change in federal laws and policies. On a legislative front, successful advocacy can be accomplished both on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. and in your elected official's home state or congressional district office where elected officials and their staff regularly meet with constituents to hear their stories or concerns.

To learn more about advocating with federal and state legislators and within federal and state regulatory bodies, reference the chapters on Engaging with Elected Officials and Engaging with Regulators.

# Overview of the Legislative Process

## HOW DOES A **BILL BECOME LAW?**

### IT ALL BEGINS WITH AN IDEA

Every piece of legislation starts with an idea. A Senator or Representative with an idea drafts and then introduces a bill.



### BILL ASSIGNED NO. & COMMITTEE DEBATES

The bill is assigned a number and sent to a committee that considers specific topics.

The committee debates the bill and must approve it so that it can move forward to be voted on by the entire Senate or House.



### HOUSE & SENATE DEBATES

The full House or Senate debates the bill. If approved, it moves to the other chamber to start the process over.

If both the House and Senate passed the bill in different versions, a conference committee creates one final bill.

### FINAL VOTING & SIGNED INTO LAW BY PRESIDENT

Once it passes both the House (which needs 218 out of 435 votes) and the Senate (which needs 51 out of 100 votes), the bill must be signed by the President to become law



# Overview of the Legislative Process

Gaining an understanding of how laws are made will help you determine where your advocacy efforts can have the greatest effect.

**The basic steps in the legislative process all come from an idea.** The idea does not have to come from an elected official, it can come from an advocate. If you gain the support of an elected official with your idea, they can take action by drafting a new bill or supporting an already introduced bill.

The process for passage of a bill is similar at the federal and state levels. Ultimately, a bill passed by Congress is signed (or vetoed) by the president; a bill passed by a state legislature is signed (or vetoed) by the Governor.

Congress and most state legislatures are structured similarly, with a House of Representatives and a Senate. Just as in Congress, state legislatures have committees that focus on specific topics, like healthcare policies. **As bills move through state legislatures or Congress, they are informed by the expertise of committee members to determine how policy should be addressed. These committees are informed by advocates like YOU and can make adjustments and changes to a bill before it is voted on.**

# Engaging with Elected Officials

**Building a strong relationship with your elected officials and their staff is an important aspect of advocacy.** Before any meetings, do your research.

On your elected official's website, you can learn more about their goals, priorities, and positions on particular issues and different pieces of legislation.

**Before you meet, learn key facts about your prospective audience, such as:**

- Their political party affiliation – While this can influence their priorities, keep in mind that bipartisanship is often essential, and support from legislators on both sides is usually needed to pass a bill
- How long they've been in office and what motivated them to run for election
- Their priority issues of concern and legislation they have sponsored or supported in the past
- Their specific committee assignments
- Caucus membership (such as the Cancer Caucus, Congressional Black Caucus, or other issue-based caucuses)
- Their professional background and family life

Not only will they appreciate your effort and knowledge, but you'll be in a better position to frame your priorities in a way that will resonate with them.

**Remember to remain respectful & professional in all interactions!**

# Developing Key Messages

**The first thing you should do when speaking to an elected official or staff member is introduce yourself** and why you got involved in this advocacy issue, then you can share your key message.

**A key message should articulate your goal in one sentence or thought.** Keep it straightforward, strong, and concise.

Your message should always include:

- The issue
- Who it impacts
- The ask – what do you want to happen, and what change are you advocating for?

# Telling Your Story

Storytelling helps us understand and empathize with one another. Because of this, stories can be excellent tools in an advocate's toolbox.

Tips to help you tell your story effectively:

- **Prepare & organize your thoughts ahead of time** – focus on the most meaningful highlights of your story, and practice telling it in 10, 5, and then 2 minutes to ensure it is clear, personal, and impactful.
- **Tailor your story to the audience** – highlight how the issue impacts their priorities, community, or values to make a stronger connection and increase your impact.
- **Speak from the heart** – sharing emotions and real experiences makes your story more relatable, memorable, and powerful than formal language or complex terminology.
- **End your story with a clear and specific ask** – whether it's urging support for legislation, raising awareness, inviting collaboration, or anything else.

**Learn more about how to use storytelling to inspire action & drive change [HERE!](#)**

# Examples of Advocacy Activities

# Meetings with Legislators

## (In-Person or Virtual)

**Meetings with elected officials and/or their staff are often a very effective form of communication.** A personal connection engages them in a way no other form of communication can. You can set up meetings by calling or emailing your elected official's office directly.

**Keep in mind that meetings with staff are extremely valuable.** They are typically the individuals who brief the legislator and can become your own advocates within the office.

### **Sample meeting agenda:**

- Introductions and appreciation for their time
- Explain the purpose of the meeting, including clearly stating your key message & ask
- Share your story
- Answer questions openly & honestly – ask their advice!
- Repeat your ask and request their support for their position
- Leave behind or email written information that outlines your story, provides additional facts, and includes your contact information
- Thank them for their time

# Phone Calls

**Contacting your elected official on the phone is easier than you might think.** If you are trying to connect with someone in Congress or in your state legislature, visit their website to find their contact information.

While speaking directly with your elected official is ideal, discuss your issue and ask with a staff member if the legislator is unavailable. Office staff are very important, so get to know them well! They have the ear of the elected official and can help facilitate your interactions.

**Before you make a call to an elected official's office, be clear on the following:**

- Why you are calling
- The issue you are talking about
- Your key message & ask

# Letter Writing

Writing an advocacy letter or email to an elected official can also be an effective form of communication.

**Your letter or email should have 5 basic characteristics:**

1. Appropriate address & salutation (if email, include issue or bill number in the subject line!)
2. A request for their attention and action on a specific issue
3. The relevant bill number, if one exists
4. The basics of your story
5. An offer to serve as a basic resource

**Visit [CSC's Action Center](#) for an easy way to send advocacy letters to your members of Congress advocating for one of CSC's legislative priorities!**

# Social Media

**Social media is a powerful advocacy tool** – it helps us connect, share personal stories, and build momentum around issues that matter to you and your community.

**Elected officials are paying attention.** Most use social media to track what is happening in their districts and states, making it a great platform to bring awareness to issues and call for action.

**Make your posts count.** The most effective social media posts include:

- Personal stories that show the real-world impact of issues
- Eye-catching images or graphics
- Short videos that capture emotion and urgency

# The Importance of Follow-Up

Follow-up is crucial. Hearing a message multiple times is much more effective than hearing it once. Communication with elected officials is tracked by their offices to keep a pulse on key issues and important things happening in their district and with their constituents. Phone calls may be categorized, letters may be compiled, emails may be saved, and follow-ups will be noted.

Follow-up ensures that the door stays open for future communication or interaction, their questions are answered, and your story and issue remain top of mind.

Ways to follow-up include:

- A note thanking them for their time (after a meeting or phone call)
- An email or phone call asking about the progress on your issue
- Additional information on the issue and news about next steps

# A Planning Guide for Your Advocacy Efforts



## 1. Define Your Mission

- Understand your vision and mission
- Identify the relevant key issue(s)
- Assess your areas of strength, resources, and expertise



## 2. What is Your End Goal?

- Define your primary goal: new law or policy, change existing laws or policies, raise awareness



## 3. Do Your Research

- Are there other organizations or associations tackling this issue?
- Do you have the resources available to accomplish the goal?



## 4. Define the Target Group

- Specific legislators or regulators (local or elsewhere)



## 5. Collaboration

- Other patients or advocates
- Media (e.g., newspapers, radio stations)
- Local community leaders and constituents
- Are there potential organizations / collaborations to form?



## 6. Develop Your Message

- Consider the amount of time you'll have to deliver the message
- Develop clear and specific talking points with a specific ask
- Determine who will deliver the message



## 7. Effectively Deliver Your Message

- In person or virtual meeting (i.e., arrange a meeting with a policymaker on an issue, influence a state proclamation)
- On the phone (i.e., Getting a certain number of advocates to participate in a call in)
- Email
- Letter (i.e. Submitting comments to a regulatory agency)
- Mobilizing others through social media (E.g., Twitter, Facebook)



## 8. How Will You Measure Success?

- Did you achieve your goal?
- If not, how will you modify your approach?
- What will you do differently next time?
- Was it a success?



Thank you for being an  
advocate!

If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to  
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