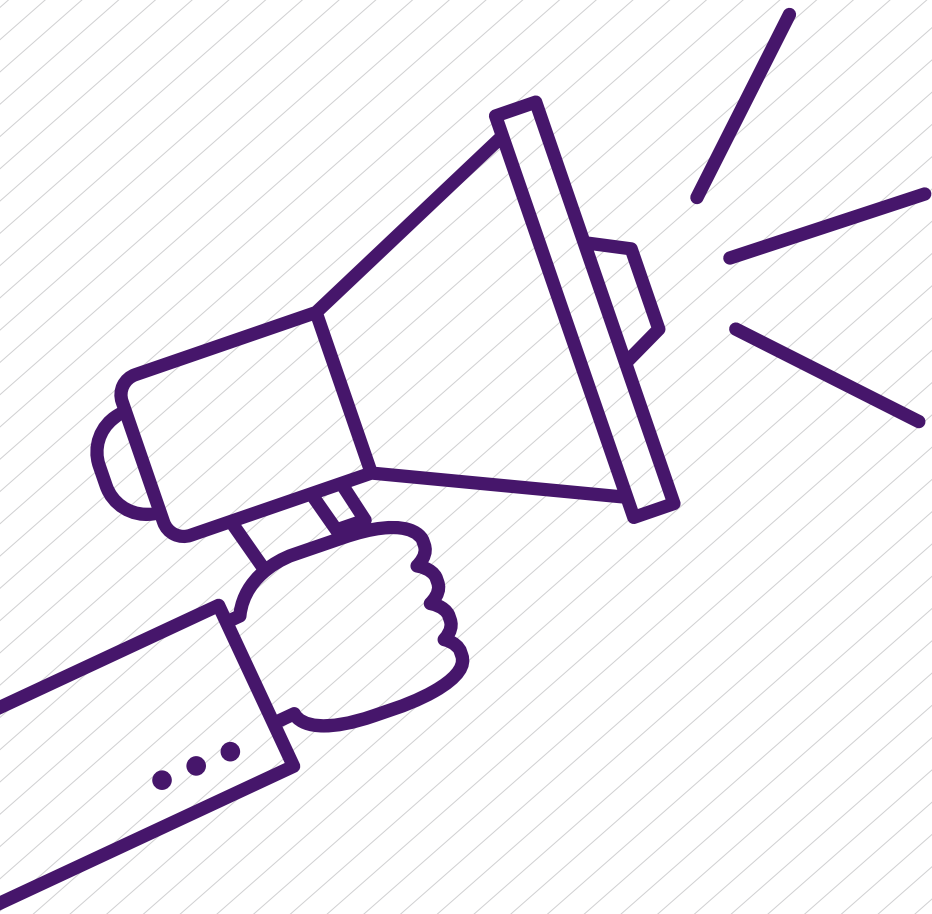




CONGRESSIONAL CHECK-UP

A Physician's Guide
to Communicating with Congress





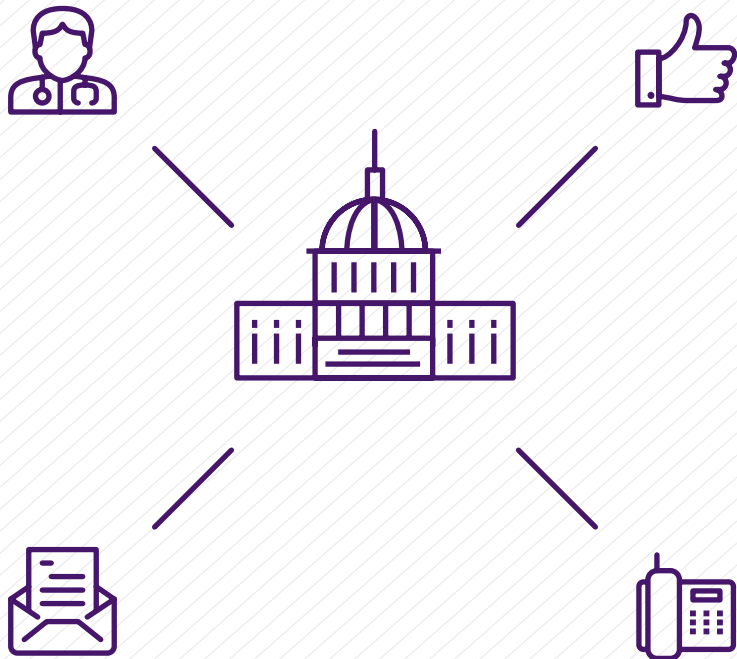
Make Your Voice Heard

As a physician, resident or medical student it's imperative members of Congress hear from you while they create, debate and enact health care legislation. The decisions made about how to govern the U.S. health care system impact everyone, yet no one is more qualified to help guide these decisions than those who deliver quality care to patients.

Members of Congress depend on subject matter experts, like you, to create effective legislation that helps their constituents. Since there are few issues that affect constituents more intimately than health care, the need for physicians to explain and advocate for patient-centered policies is paramount. However, it takes thoughtful, deliberate engagement with Congress to successfully advance your positions.

Want to have your voice heard? The American Medical Association (AMA) created this guide to help physicians, residents and medical students navigate and cultivate relationships on Capitol Hill. Within this guide, you'll find information about:

- Where to reach members of Congress.
- How to effectively communicate with members of Congress.
- What resources the AMA has available to support your efforts.



Reach Lawmakers Where They Are

There are several ways to reach your members of Congress, and it's important to understand each avenue to determine which option best suits your goals.



In-Person Visits

Meeting with a member of Congress or their congressional staff is a very effective way to discuss specific issues or legislative priorities. Remember it may be difficult to meet with members because, as a public servant, their time is not entirely their own and they may have several conflicting obligations. However, meeting with a member's staff who specializes in your area of interest, such as the health legislative assistant, can be just as productive and can start a dialogue with the member.

Careful planning and having clear goals for the meeting are key to conducting a successful in-person visit. Specifically, we suggest that you:

- Contact the member's scheduler and request to meet directly with the health legislative assistant and the member, if available.
- Explain the purpose for the meeting, including what one to two issues you want to discuss, and whom you represent.
- Arrive on-time and be patient if the member is late, cannot attend or if the meeting gets interrupted.
- Prepare an agenda to help the conversation stay on topic and rehearse with your fellow attendees.
- Bring visual-aids and other collateral to leave behind that illustrate your key points simply and succinctly.
- Outline how you or the group you represent can assist the member and their staff achieve common goals.
- Ask for a commitment when it's appropriate to do so (i.e. cosponsoring legislation, voting yes or no).
- Know the counter-arguments, anticipate questions or potential pushback and prepare thoughtful, compelling responses.
- Follow-up after the meeting by writing an email or letter that thanks the member and/or staff for their time, recaps agenda items and reiterates any requests.
- Update the AMA, your state medical society and/or your specialty society about your experience.

Request to meet directly with the health legislative assistant and the member.



Phone Calls

Phone calls are an effective way to voice your concerns, and can be particularly powerful in the days or hours leading up to important votes. Although you will rarely speak to your member directly on the phone, the congressional staffer should know the member's position on particular issues and will relay your concerns to the member.

Remember, members have multiple offices and it can be useful to call both their Capitol Hill office where their legislative staff experts work, as well as local offices to reinforce your concerns. If you don't know a member's phone number, call the AMA's Physicians Grassroots Network at (800) 833-6354 to connect with their Washington, D.C. office directly.



Emails and Letters

Written communications are most effective early in the legislative process and provide the best opportunity for you to frame future interactions. Reading feedback from constituents is something many members of Congress prioritize, and most offices keep weekly, and in some cases daily, counts of feedback they receive on particular issues.

AMA provides action alerts for specific issues to help you get the writing process started. However, written correspondences have more impact if they include personal stories and original thoughts. We suggest using our action alerts to help organize your thoughts, but edit them accordingly to insert your own voice, tone and personal anecdotes.

If you send a letter via postal service, be sure to write it on personal or business stationary. If you don't have printed stationary, type your name and address at the end of the letter and sign above your contact information. This will eliminate any doubt about who you are and how to reach you.

Please be advised that while hand written letters are often more persuasive, due to security screenings, it may take weeks for an office to receive your letter and respond.




Social Media

The advent and popularity of social media has transformed how constituents connect with their members of Congress and revolutionized how we think about digital advocacy. Through platforms like Twitter and Facebook, you can directly reach every U.S. Representative and Senator instantly. When people leverage this unfettered access with specific, consistent messages or direct calls to action about a time-sensitive issue or upcoming vote, it can yield powerful results. Be sure to indicate whether you are a constituent and update your profile to follow your elected officials. Also, while members of Congress are on recess, engage with them on social media as they are more likely to be personally using their accounts.

To stay attuned, we suggest following the below social media accounts and sharing content that resonates with you and your network.

AMA


The AMA's official social media pages.


 @AmerMedicalAssn

 @AmericanMedicalAssociation

PATIENTS ACTION NETWORK

Community of patients advocating for access to quality care and protecting the patient-physician relationship.

 @PatientAction

 @PatientsActionNetwork

PHYSICIANS GRASSROOTS NETWORK

Community of physicians committed to strengthening the medical profession's voice in Washington.


 @PhysGrassroots

 @PhysiciansGrassroots

AMPAC

The bipartisan political action committee of the American Medical Association.

 @AMPACOnline

 @ampaccampaign

Effective Methods for Communicating with Congress

The goals of communicating with members of Congress are to present the best arguments in favor of your position, and ask for their consideration in a respectful and deliberate manner.

To effectively communicate with Congress, we recommend the following:



UNDERSTAND THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS.

Members have much more influence over legislation within their committees and subcommittees of jurisdiction because it's these subgroups that often lead the process for drafting and vetting large pieces of legislation. Your AMA Advocacy staff can guide you on which committees are most important on any given issue.



IDENTIFY ONE OR TWO TOPICS OF INTEREST.

If you want to discuss your ideas about expanding access to health care, don't get side tracked with a conversation about taxes or other unrelated issues. Sticking to the point will keep the conversation focused and productive.



USE YOUR PERSONAL STORIES.

As a leader in the medical community, your experience provides excellent, humanizing evidence to support the basis of your arguments and sharing these perspectives will help build trust.



CONNECT POTENTIAL IMPACTS TO PEOPLE.

U.S. Representatives are up for election every two years and Senators every six, meaning they depend on the support of their constituents and care deeply about how a law will impact communities they represent, so help them connect the dots.

The sooner you're able to start a dialogue, the more valuable your input will be.



BE RESPECTFUL AND HONEST.

Put yourself in the shoes of your member, how do you prefer to interact with people who want to convince you to see things from their perspective?



FOCUS ON THE SPECIFIC LEGISLATIVE ISSUES.

Keep financial or political support out of the conversation. Threats of retaliation or *quid pro quos* are counterproductive to the goals of communicating with Congress, not to mention illegal, and will make building a relationship an uphill battle, if not impossible.



OFFER YOUR EXPERTISE.

Introduce yourself to the member of Congress and their staff. Offer yourself as a resource to provide perspective on health care ideas and issues that matter to your member. Rather than always asking something from your legislator, building a two-way relationship can have a meaningful and lasting impact.

It may take time and patience to achieve meaningful results from your interactions with Congress so it's a good idea to connect with your members early in the legislative process and establish a rapport with their congressional staff. The sooner you're able to start a dialogue, the more valuable your input will be as they navigate turning ideas into laws.

AMA as Your Grassroots Partner

The AMA has several programs specifically designed to help you communicate with your members of Congress and other elected officials. We encourage you to explore the below resources for more information.

Physicians Grassroots Network (PGN)

The PGN is a group of physicians, residents and students across the country committed to strengthening the medical profession's voice in Washington. It amplifies their voices, works with legislators and medical professionals to discover solutions, and influences legislation through grassroots communication efforts. Learn more about the PGN by visiting physiciansgrassrootsnetwork.org.

Very Influential Physician Program (VIP program)

We designed the VIP program to help physician advocates like you effectively leverage your existing relationships or build new ones with members of Congress and their staff. VIPs are leaders in advancing patient-centered health care policies. Being a VIP gets you access to exclusive newsletters, updates and advocacy webinars specifically tailored for the VIP program. Learn more about the program and how to become a VIP by visiting physiciansgrassrootsnetwork.org/vip.

Patients Action Network (PAN)

The PAN enables a growing base of patients to mobilize on important health care issues. Started in 2004 as a response to legislative issues that we feared would harm the patient-physician relationship and restrict patients' access to health care, the PAN now consists of more than 1.4 million patient advocates. Empower your patients by encouraging them to join, and learn more by visiting patientsactionnetwork.com.

Physicians Grassroots Network Hotline


Call the AMA's Physicians Grassroots Network Hotline at **(800) 833-6354** to connect to your members of Congress.

Find Us on Twitter and Facebook

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