

The involvement of patients, families, and other long term care advocates in the legislative process is critical to ensuring there are quality healthcare options today and for future generations. Only you can give your federal, state, and local legislators the most accurate picture about how the issues really affect the quality of and access to your healthcare. Below are some tips for contacting your lawmaker and advocating on the issues of importance to you.

Meet With Members During a Recess or Interim

If you are interested in an issue happening in the United States Congress, you will want to meet with your U.S. Senator or Congressman. At certain times of the year, including the entire month of August, Congress takes time off from business in Washington known as a “recess” and members return to their districts.

If your issue is happening in the Texas State legislature, you will want to meet with your Texas Senator or Representative. The Texas Legislature meets in Regular Session for about five months every other year. The remainder of the time is known as the “interim” when legislators return to their work and home in their district.

Both recess and interim periods provide an excellent chance to meet with your lawmakers on your “home turf” and give them a more personal explanation of why your issue is important. Placing a phone call or writing an original letter is an effective form of communication, however, the personal visit rates highest priority and the issues brought up are attended to more quickly and seriously by the lawmaker.

Begin by using [“The Who Represents Me”](#) link to find out who your lawmaker is and their office’s contact information. Prior to a recess or during the interim, request an appointment through the district office. Let the office know what the major issues are you would like to discuss, and who will be meeting. It is likely your lawmaker’s schedule is very busy, so it is important to make your appointment well in advance and be flexible. Fifteen minutes is a realistic duration for your meeting. If you are not able to speak directly to the lawmaker, request to meet with their health policy aide. Staff members often meet with constituents and many times have a deeper understanding of the issue—treat them in the same manner as you would the lawmaker.

Effectively Advocate Your Issues

Do your research. Prior to the meeting, get to know your lawmaker. Understand which political party they are affiliated with, which committees they serve on, and if they have an official stance on your issue.

Know your issue and create a story. Know what you are going to say when you arrive, and come prepared with effective handouts to leave behind. If there is a bill you are interested in, include the bill number. Understand both sides of the debate on the issue/bill, so you are able to prepare the lawmaker for what to expect. Present the facts and statistics that support your point of view. Use a personal anecdote to further support your opinion. Tell your lawmaker how the issue affects you and your community—persuade your legislators that what may seem like an arcane point really affects their constituents deeply.

Offer solutions. Suggest to your lawmaker what you'd like to see done to fix it. Let them know what he/she should do: make speeches, cosponsor legislation, write to the appropriate agency or vote for/against a bill. Make sure you send a letter or have a meeting at least a few days prior to a vote, so the lawmaker has time to consider the issue.

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Follow up. Build a relationship with the lawmaker by being credible and reasonable every time you meet. Follow up quickly with any information you were not able to provide in the meeting. Send a thank you letter, explaining your gratitude for their leadership and taking the time to meet with you. Kindly remind the lawmaker that you are a constituent and you always vote. Indicate that you look forward to following up on the status of the issue.

Have fun being a part of the democratic process and having your voice heard!