

NCONL

# Legislative Advocacy Toolkit

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2012 Annual Conference

6/1/2012

# NCONL Members: Tool Kit (Checklists) -How to Be an Effective Health Advocate

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The Health Advocate Tool Kit is to assist our NCONL mission and provide its members tools (informational checklists) to carry out health advocacy activities at the local, state, and national level. Health advocacy typically encompasses direct service to an individual or family as well as activities that promote nursing, health, and access to health care in communities and the larger public. Advocates support and promote the rights of the patient in the health care environment, help build capacity to improve community health and enhance health policy initiatives focused on available, safe and quality care. Health Advocates are suited best to address challenge of patient-centered care in our complex healthcare system. The IOM (Institute of Medicine) defines patient-centered care as: Health care that establishes a partnership among practitioners, patients, and their families (when appropriate) to ensure that decisions respect patients' wants, needs, and preferences and that patients have the education and support they need to make decisions and participate in their own care. Patient-centered care is also one of the overarching goals of health advocacy, in addition to safer medical systems, and greater patient involvement in healthcare delivery and design.

For example, advocacy of promoting nursing education in North Carolina, “Transforming the nursing profession and, in so doing, improving health and health care in North Carolina, is the goal of the North Carolina Future of Nursing Action Coalition. Action Coalitions are the driving force behind the Future of Nursing: Campaign for Action, a collaborative effort of AARP, the AARP Foundation and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to implement solutions to the challenges facing the nursing profession and to build upon nurse-based approaches to improving quality and transforming the way Americans receive health care (RWJ, Human Capitol, May 29, 2012). The campaign is based on a groundbreaking report by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) called The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health that laid out a strategy to transform the nursing profession to ensure that all Americans have access to high-quality, patient-centered care in a health care system where nurses contribute as essential partners.

As part of the AONE Legislative Priorities, 2012, Promote the Value of Nursing to Healthcare, members are asked to

“Provide nursing leadership to articulate Value of Nursing in improved patient outcomes, care coordination, quality, safety and delivery of cost effective care through an emphasis on wellness, prevention of disease, and management of complex and chronic conditions. Therefore, this philosophy has also been embraced by the NCONL Position Statement supporting the IOM Future of Nursing Report. And part of this support, is for its members to be health advocates in their communities, local and state government. This health advocacy role is primarily, as an educator of facts and quality care experiences to those who conduct health policy decisions.

**Therefore, this tool kit is based on the following strategy:**

Health policy advocacy (activism) can include a handful of strategies. For example, above has a combination of seven key strategies to build and support policy reforms at the state and local levels. For example, they



can be applied to issues related to healthy eating, physical activity, childhood obesity, mental health programs, nursing practice, and or health system changes. Organizations can use the following strategies to support policy reforms and other public health issues:

I. Community Mobilization. Provide opportunities for individuals and organizations throughout the state to share their perspectives with policy makers about the need for policy reforms. Bring advocates and policy makers together to work toward common policy objectives.

II. Research. Publish Policy Briefs and other materials describing health issues and recommending specific policies to address these issues. These materials are designed to provide the general public, policy makers and other decision-makers, and advocates with tools to inform the policy development process.

III. State and Local Data. Policy Briefs often describe health-related data by city, county, and/or state legislative district, relating information to levels at which policy makers, their constituents, local advocates, and the media can more fully understand how health issues are affecting their communities.

IV. Scientific Advisory Panels. Establish scientific advisory panels to assist us in developing policy recommendations included in the Policy Briefs we publish.

V. Media Advocacy. We work with media advisors and local media spokespersons to ensure that our Policy Briefs and associated policy recommendations receive as much media coverage as possible. We also make ourselves available to the media as a source of information about the issues we address.

VI. Policy Maker Education. We develop relationships with state and local policy makers and educate local elected officials about the importance of establishing policies to promote healthy eating and physical activity. We provide state and local elected officials with personalized data and technical assistance to help them develop needed policy reforms.

VII. Partnership Building. Policy change happens when a point of agreement is reached among various constituencies about the need for change. Partnership building—with local advocates, policy makers, funders, and health, education, social service and other organizations—to be the most critical component in building momentum toward policy change.

(Reference: © 2012 Copyright California Center for Public Health Advocacy)

### Tool Kit Checklists Examples:

1. Effective Communications
2. Collaborations and Coalitions
3. Research - Finding and Using Data
4. Visiting with a Policymaker
5. Calling a Policymaker
6. Tips No Advocate should forget
7. How to Create Fact Sheets and Action Alerts
8. Writing Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor
9. Writing /Visiting a Policymaker
10. Tips for talking with reporters
11. Tips on Public Speaking
12. Sample script for calling a policymaker
13. Sample Letter Raising a Concern
14. Sample Letter Opposing a Proposal
15. Sample Letter Supporting a Proposal

# If you only have 5 minutes to make a difference...

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*Advocacy doesn't have to take a lot of time, and it doesn't have to cost anything.*

*Don't let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do.*

**1. Call your legislator** -- You don't need a bill number, or a doctorate in health policy. Just tell them what concerns you, what you read and can't get out of your mind, your latest great idea, whatever. And if there is a bill, definitely call them. They would much rather hear from you before the vote than to get an angry call afterwards. They not only welcome such calls, they have staff hired waiting for you to call. Get their phone numbers from the blue pages in your phone book or go to our Legislative advocacy page. If you're not sure what to say, go to our tool How to call your legislator.

To call your legislators: Home numbers are listed in the blue pages of your phone book (they list them for a reason, it is OK to call) At the Capitol: Senate Democrats \_\_\_\_ #Senate Republicans House Republicans House Democrats

**2. Get on the mailing list of an advocacy organization that addresses the issues you care about** -- You can join our CT Health Notes listserv and learn about upcoming issues, events, research, and other upcoming issues in Connecticut's health care. You can also join lists for more specific organizations, from mental health to cancer to political lists. For more information, please go to Collaborations and Coalitions.

**3. Inform someone** - Share your concerns with a friend, family member, even someone standing next to you in line. Never underestimate how powerful word-of-mouth can be. And it's a small world; you never know who you are talking to.

**4. Write a letter to a policymaker** - Writing down your concerns might take more than five minutes, but it is fairly simple. And as with phone calls, policymakers expect to receive letters, in many cases they rely on getting information from the public (and they trust you far more than a lobbyist). You will also most likely get a response, usually written, explaining the issue more fully and letting you know what they intend to do about it. For more, go to our tool How to write to policymakers.

**5. Visit a policymaker** - Honest, this can be under the five minute limit. You may get a knock at your door or be greeted coming out of the grocery store during campaign time by a candidate with literature. Don't run away. Take a minute to stop and ask him/her what they would do about your issue if elected. If you want to make an appointment, go to our tool How to visit with a legislator.

**6. VOTE** - It is critically important that everyone who is eligible to vote exercises that right. But you can do more to support candidates that support the issues you care about. For more, go to our tool How to work with campaigns. For more on voting, go to the Connecticut League of Women Voters website, <http://www.lwvct.org>. If you aren't registered, the League site has the form you fill out.

# Legislators - Who are they?

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***Contrary to popular perception, legislators do not make a lot of money (as legislators at least) and do not have legions of staff at their disposal. The base salary is \$28,000 a year. By and large, they are committed public servants who make significant personal and financial sacrifices with long hours, hard work, and lots of angry feedback. Most legislators spend far more in the course of representing their district and running for office than they ever make as legislators. It's not as glamorous as it looks.***

*No man undertakes a trade he has not learned... yet everyone thinks himself sufficiently qualified for the hardest of all trades, that of government. -- Socrates*

1. Theoretically, the job is part time. But most spend at least 40 hours a week on the work -- between late hours at the Capitol, meetings with staff, colleagues and constituents, running for office, travel, paperwork, and other duties.
2. The most important thing for advocates to remember about legislators is that they work for their voters. You are unlikely to receive support if you ask a legislator to vote against the interests of a major employer or institution in their district. They don't get re-elected for their policy expertise but by their constituents; their job is to represent those concerns.
3. They represent a broad range of interests, backgrounds, experiences, biases, and networks. They are as varied as Connecticut is.
4. Legislators are, by and large, a friendly and gregarious group of people (it helps in getting elected). They welcome input from advocates. Some will seek you out for information. I've spoken to many potential advocates who are intimidated about approaching a legislator. There is no reason to be anxious.
5. Do not make assumptions about legislators and their views. Some of the best child advocates in the legislature do not have children. Some Democrats are far more conservative than some Republicans. You never know.
6. They are not experts on every policy area the legislature considers. No one could be.
7. According to our surveys of policymakers, legislators rely most heavily on state agencies, legislative staff, advocacy organizations, provider groups, community groups, journals and publications, and the media for information about health policy, in that order.
8. They trust legislative staff, consultants, state agencies, journals and publications, national policy organizations, advocacy organizations, and academic sources, in that order. They do not trust the media.
9. Overall, legislators are just like us - all of us. As a group, they are approachable and genuinely appreciate input from advocates. They would much rather get a friendly call before a vote than an angry one afterwards

# Effective Communications

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Communications are critical. The perfect fact sheet with just the right arguments that's easy to read and gives legislators the perfect solution will do no good if it never gets to the right legislators. The perfect action alert with all the right information delivered just before the vote will do no good if it is missing the legislators' numbers for advocates to call.

*The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug. – Mark Twain*

**One** - Decide what you are trying to communicate. Do you want them to do something, stop something, learn something, attend a public hearing, or add money to the budget for something.

**Two** -- decide whom you are trying to reach. Who is the audience? The same flyer may work both as a fact sheet for legislators and as an action alert for advocates, but it may not. The same fact sheet may not work for all legislators - some will want to know what a program will do to reduce the number of uninsured, others want to know if it works in other states, others want to know what it will cost. One fact sheet with all those messages may be too busy.

**Three** -- frame the message. This will follow from the answers to the first two questions. Keep the message simple - a headline of just a few powerful words. Test your message on a few people from the target audience.

**Four** -- choose a few facts or a story to make the point. Less is more. For help, go to Research - Finding and Using Data.

**Five** -- design your communication. Word of mouth can be extremely effective. If you want to address a misconception among legislators, the best way might be to enlist a few friends in the legislature to have a conversation with your targets.

Written communications can be effective - they are permanent and you know that the message doesn't change as it goes out (unlike personal communications). You can include artwork and/or color to attract attention.

According to research, both legislators and staff prefer short, one or two page fact sheets. Brief memos were a close second.

To create a fact sheet or action alert, go to [Create a Fact Sheet or Action Alert](#).

**Six** -- decide how to get it out. Unfortunately, there was no clear answer from our 2002 Policymaker Survey about a universal means to effectively communicate with policymakers - some prefer emails, some mailings, and some only personal communications. Timing or your resources may decide for you. If the vote is tomorrow, mailing won't work. You may need to enlist someone to go to the Capitol to hand a fact sheet to legislators. For an action alert to 100's of advocates, you may not have the money for a mailing and have to rely on phoning or emails.

**Seven** - timing is critical. Not only must the alert arrive in time to make a difference, but there must also be preparation for it. Sending alerts only when you want people to do things is about as effective as politicians who only visit the district at campaign time.

**Eight** - Send regular updates informing people about the issue. However, only send information when you have something to say. Don't send empty, worthless updates, or readers will not open the next one.

**Nine** - Evaluate. Find out if your alert or fact sheet got the action you wanted. If not, revise your comm  
FACT SHEETS AND ACTION ALERTS



# Advocacy Decision Tree

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***You've identified a problem. There ought to be a law or policy, right? Well, maybe there already is and it has never been implemented, maybe it's not being enforced, maybe there is no money in the budget to implement it, or maybe there isn't a law. How do you find out?***

***To help answer that question, we've designed this decision tree. Answering the questions, in order, will help you identify the action step needed and connect you with the resources to make it happen, both here in the Health Advocacy Toolbox and elsewhere. For more info on the Toolbox, go to [How to use this site](#).***

Most of the examples on this page concern health care, but the principles apply to other issue areas as well.

1. Is your issue governmental or private? To help decide, go to [Government or private](#).
2. Is your issue appropriate for federal, state and/or local government involvement? Go to [federal, state or local](#).
3. Maybe there is a law on your issue. To find out, search Connecticut state statutes. If there isn't a law and you feel that there should be, go to our [Legislative Advocacy](#) page.
4. If the problem is that there is no money in the budget for the program or issue, go to our [Budget](#) page.
5. Does the law direct an agency to draft regulations? If so, go to our [Regulations](#) page.
6. If there is a law, maybe it isn't being enforced. Go to our [Enforcement](#) page.
7. If the program isn't being implemented or implemented well, you need to advocate with the agency responsible. Go to our [Administrative Advocacy](#) page.
8. Maybe your issue is very ambitious and a law won't solve the problem. For example, no law will solve the stigma of accessing mental health care or create universal health care (at least not yet). You need to move public opinion. Go to our [Public opinion](#) page.

# Research - Finding and Using Data

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***It is critical to remember that you are not trying to convince yourself -- you are already a true believer. You need to move policymakers who have different agendas, other distractions, different ways of learning, and much less time to devote to your issue than you have. A fact that may be extremely meaningful to one person may be irrelevant to another. You are looking for the fact/story/whatever that will move your target(s).***

*I'd rather be approximately right than exactly wrong.*

1. Based on surveys, policymakers trust information from legislative staff and state agencies the most. Start there searching for information. Even if the staff quote another source, use the more trusted citation in your work.
2. Especially search for "official" goals or benchmarks.
3. Search federal sources next, such as the Census, CDC and CMS (formerly HCFA). Next use journals, academic institutions and trusted non-profit sources, such as the Kaiser Family Foundation and Health Affairs. Advocacy organizations, provider and professional organizations are moderately trusted. Media and industry organizations are least trusted.
4. Use your own information - both statistics from your program and stories from your experience. This is very powerful.
5. Remember to cite your source. "Consider the source" is often repeated at the Capitol. Information from a disinterested party is more persuasive. Nonpartisan organizations that take great pains to remain neutral carry more weight.
6. Be creative in finding sources of information. Wider searches of the state website or a general search engine may find your information in a place you never would have thought to look.
7. Supporting information from an unlikely source can be very persuasive. For example the Wall Street Journal (not a consumer oriented publication) ran a front-page article describing how Merrill Lynch lowered their health care costs by expanding benefits for employees.
8. DO NOT SKEW INFORMATION - Do not take quotes out of context. Do not use "fuzzy math" to make a point. Eventually you will be found out. You can never get your reputation back.
9. Be careful in using small numbers or data from very small populations. That is not a reason to exclude the data, just frame it clearly. For example, "While his patient list is not long, a local pediatrician estimates that the number of uninsured patients in his practice increased 25% last year."
10. Be certain that definitions are the same when making comparisons. For example, one survey may label a respondent as uninsured for answering no to "Do you have health insurance now?" while another survey may frame their question, "Have you been without health coverage in the last year?" Do not assume that because two numbers are from the same source, that they are comparable.
11. Make reasonable adjustments. For example a dollar of health care in 1950 would cost far more now - spending would increase in a program that was just keeping services level. Also, adjust for population. Ten infant deaths in one year would be far different in a small town than in a big city.
12. Pay attention to information that does not support your position. It is critical to know what your opponents are going to say and to be ready to respond.
13. Contact friends and follow up on their recommendations. People often know where to find things that are not available on the web or not easily accessible. Or they may know someone else who knows.
14. Check your numbers three times. Have someone else check your work.
15. Don't overanalyze, if it will delay the work. Too many great reports - beautifully formatted, perfect research - are released too late to

# Calling a Policymaker

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***Public officials expect to get calls from the public -- many have staff dedicated to the task. They rely on calls and letters to help them make the best decisions.***

1. Look up their office or home phone numbers . It is OK to call elected officials at their published home numbers - they are listed for a reason. (But don't call late at night.) Legislators' published home numbers and numbers at the Capitol are listed in the blue pages of your phone book.
2. Prepare for the call. Write down the issue you are calling about and what you would like the official to do. See Sample Script for phoning a Policymaker.
3. Identify yourself - give your name, where you live and why you are calling.
4. Ask if this is a good time to talk - if not, when would be a good time to call back.
5. Be polite, courteous and respectful of their time.
6. Always remember to ask for the action you want.
7. Say your piece, then listen. Don't interrupt or argue.
8. If they want more information, let them know that you will get it to them.
9. If they have questions you cannot answer, say so. Then get the answer and call them back with it.
10. Finish the call by thanking them for their time and their support (if they are supportive).
11. You may speak to an aide or an answering machine - leave a message with the issue you are calling about, your name, number and the best times to reach you.
12. Don't be discouraged if they haven't returned your call in a few days, just call back.

To contact policymakers:

- I. House Democrats
- II. House Republicans
- III. Senate Democrats
- IV. Senate Republicans
- V. Governor

# Tips No Advocate Should Forget

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*I'll leave this truth for others when I'm dead. Just be sure you're right, then go ahead.*

*-- Davy Crocket, written in his copy of Ben Franklin's autobiography.*

## **1. Always be polite.**

Several years ago, I had the misfortune of speaking to a group of at least a hundred community college students at the Capitol. Their budget had been cut in the Governor's proposal (along with everything else) and they were angry. They were right that the community colleges are cost effective and an important investment in Connecticut's future. There were about a dozen legislators ready to address them. Mind you, these were their friends (their enemies did not accept their invitation to speak -- go figure). They were as rude as possible without being violent. Hecklers yelled, "Are you going to take a 20% cut in your salary?" and similar remarks. Legislators who hadn't yet had their turn to speak were slipping out the back door. Then it was my turn - the topic of my talk was supposed to be "How to advocate effectively". I told them to all go home and come back next year. "Does this work for you in real life? You yell at people and they hand you money?" Needless to say, this was not an effective lobbying exercise.

This is all about creating relationships - and you don't want people running away when they see you coming next time.

## **2. Say thank you.**

Even nice people forget to say thank you. It only takes a minute. You can send a note, an email, or make a call - just do something. Don't only thank the policymaker you met with or who voted your way, but also the staffer who set up the meeting or gave you a heads up that your issue was in trouble. Staffers never get thanked - they really appreciate it. And they run the system - Never forget that. (Yes, I used to be a legislative staffer and I still have posted over my desk at home the thank you notes I got from constituents and advocates.)

## **3. Get your story straight.**

Be prepared. You don't have to do a lot of research. Just your story is fine, but think through what you are going to say. Practice on a friend if that helps. Have someone gentle proofread your letter. You may not have a lot of time in a meeting and many readers won't go past the first paragraph or two of a letter. If you can make a fact sheet or include one from an organization, that is great. Make sure you include your contact information - name, organization you are representing (if any), address, phone, and email (if you have one). Don't assume that the envelope with your return address will stay with the letter.

## **4. NEVER, EVER make up an answer.**

"I don't know" is a perfectly acceptable answer. "I'll find out and get back to you" is even better. Don't wing it. If you're not sure, say so. If you find out later that you made a mistake or things changed, and something you said isn't true, call them right away and fess up. They will understand. Mislead someone just once and you have damaged your reputation forever. Policymakers have to rely on the information they are given. This is all about creating relationships - you want to be a trusted source.

## **5. Trust your champion.**

Find a champion for your cause (it can be a legislator, a staffer, someone at an agency, an organization, a lobbyist, another advocate, whoever). Then trust them, do what they tell you to do. The legislative process is complex, regulatory processes are even worse. The rules change all the time - trust the professionals. For more information, see [The Proper Care and Feeding of a Champion](#).

## **6. Patience.**

Understand that things take time. I was at a social event with several Senators a few years ago. We were complaining that the legislature was moving extremely slowly because the two houses were split between the parties. A retired Senator asked, "So things are pretty hung up and no bills are passing?" We said yes. He said, "Good. The people are safe."

It SHOULD be hard to pass a bill or change the system. Laws are there for a reason. By and large, things work pretty well here in Connecticut. Only a very few bills pass the first year they are introduced. Be patient and don't burn any bridges.

## **7. Understand that everyone wants what they want.**

I remember once sitting outside the office of a very powerful legislator waiting to meet with him about expanding health care programs for poor children. He was very sympathetic; he wanted to give us what we asked for (who would disagree). But just before he met with us, he met with people who want more funding for childcare. And after us, waiting his turn outside his office, was a small business owner from his district who needed some tax relief or he was going to lose his business and several people would be unemployed. He wanted to help him as well (wouldn't you).

While your issue is your top priority, you need to understand that policymakers have to balance everyone's priorities.

Not too bad, only seven things to remember. And you didn't really need me to tell you the first two.

# Classic Advocate Mistakes

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*To save you some time, some classic traps that advocates are prone to are as follows:*

## **1. Learn the system first.**

Too many advocates don't take the time to learn the history and culture of the system they want to influence. Their naiveté can doom a good idea and waste a lot of time. Too often, a group of advocates works for a couple of years to get a bill passed, only to find that it doesn't get implemented because there was no money for it in the budget. So they work for another couple of years to get it funded. But it still isn't implemented, because no one talked to the agency that was supposed to do it.

## **2. They don't have to "get religion", they just have to vote yes.**

We all care deeply about our causes, but that doesn't mean that everyone else will. A very wise Senator said this to me while I was lobbying one of her colleagues. I explained the issue and got his commitment to vote for it. But instead of saying thank you and leaving well enough alone, I kept pressing (for what I don't know). Just let it be - they don't have to become a "convert", they just have to vote yes.

## **3. Don't leave without closing the deal.**

Too often, an advocate makes a case with a policymaker, who says they agree completely, this is a serious problem, Connecticut really needs to address this, etc. The advocate leaves feeling great, having made her point, but later learns that the policymaker didn't support the proposal. It's human nature to hear what you want to hear, but advocates need to listen carefully. If you want them to vote yes, ask for their vote specifically. If you want them to fund a program, ask for it specifically. Be polite, but endure the silence as you wait for their answer. Make no assumptions.

## **4. Advocates who don't follow through.**

Programs are not done even when they are implemented - they have to be evaluated and adjusted accordingly to be sure they are solving the original problem. It is critical to keep up the pressure all through the process.

## **5. Don't take it personally.**

Policymakers have to balance a lot of very worthy competing interests. You won't win every time. Be gracious, don't burn bridges. Wait for the next opportunity. Another note, the end of the legislative session and near committee deadlines, a great deal of pressure builds, tempers run high, things are said, and feelings get hurt. Don't take it personally.

## **6. Be patient.**

Calvin Coolidge said, "Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent." Nothing happens overnight. Put your idea out there, and tend it. Monitor and wait for opportunities.

## **7. Advocates must be flexible.**

If your proposal won't work, for whatever reason, find another that does the same thing. Reasons can be political, financial or just personal. Find a way around it. Get creative - repackage it, route it through a different agency, whatever.

**These are just a few of the common traps. Hopefully this will help you avoid them.**

# Fact Sheets and Action Alerts

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***The point of a fact sheet or action alert is to get the reader to do something and take action. More information than you need to convince them is a waste of the reader's time and risks losing their attention. Make it as easy as possible for them to take your action. If you want them to make a call, give them the number. If you want a legislator to vote yes on a bill, give him the bill number and title.***

*Thunder is good, thunder is impressive, but it is lightning that does the work. -- Mark Twain*

1. One page is best
2. Make it readable - use at least 12 point font
3. Keep the text brief - no one wants to read tons of information in small font
4. Keep the most important information in the first paragraph - what the issue is, what action is needed, and label the main message(s)
5. Give references for more information - in electronic communications you can offer links
6. The fact sheet must be self-contained - do not refer to previous documents or assume that they remember the information
7. Use bullets when you can
8. Leave lots of white space
9. Make it very clear what you want them to do - Bold, text boxes, and graphics add emphasis
10. Give them all the tools they need to take the action - do not say "call your legislator" instead give them the numbers; give legislators the bill number you want them to vote fornications strategy.

# Writing to Policymakers

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**Letters are an extremely important tool in advocacy. Public officials expect to receive mail from constituents. They depend on input from the public to do their jobs. Often legislators rely on letters and calls to help decide how they will vote. Letters are one of the best ways to communicate your message - you have time to be sure you are understood and it is permanent - they can refer back to it as needed.**

*On an occasion of this kind it becomes more than a moral duty to speak one's mind. It becomes a pleasure. --Oscar Wilde*

1. You don't have to be an expert, just explain your point of view.
2. Be brief. You don't get extra points for more words or extra statistics. Try to keep it to one page.
3. Be polite, respectful and reasonable.
4. Use your own words - do not pull out a thesaurus.
5. Personal stories and observations are the most persuasive
6. Be clear - avoid jargon or overly technical language.
7. Be specific about your concern and what you want the official to do about it.
8. It is best to address only one issue in a letter.
9. If you are a constituent, say so in the first paragraph.
10. Call the official's office or visit their website beforehand to get the correct address, title and spelling. For example -- who should be addressed "The Honorable" and who shouldn't.
11. Be sure your letter is legible. It doesn't have to be typed, but it should be easy to read.
12. Ask for a response.
13. Include your name, address, phone number and other contact information on the letter. Don't rely on your return address -- envelopes often get separated from letters.
14. Triple check your work. Have a friendly "editor" look it over before you send it.
15. If you don't hear soon, call to be sure the official got your letter. Ask again for a response.
16. Share the response with any coalitions or partners you are working with.
17. Follow up and find out how the policymaker acted on your issue. Write to thank them, if appropriate.
18. You can "recycle" the language from your letter in letters to other policymakers, to the same policymaker next year, a letter to the editor or a fact sheet.

## **OP-ED GUIDELINES**

***Those who wish to write for the Other Opinion page should preferably have expertise or personal experience with the subject they are writing about. It's best to take sides in a debate about a public issue. We do not publish poetry or anonymous or pseudonymous articles.***

Here are guidelines for writing for the page:

1. Get right into the subject. Make your position clear from the beginning.
2. Keep your sentences short, and don't try to make too many arguments in one article.
3. Be sure that all names are correct and all quotations are accurate.
4. Be sure to end your article with a forceful conclusion.



5. Submit your story, typed or printed double-spaced, with a self-addressed envelope so we may let you know whether it's been selected for publication. Be sure to include your job title, home address, day and evening telephone numbers and Social Security number in the event you are paid for a published article.

# Tips for talking with Reporters

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If you are successful in creating relationships with the media and become a "source" on your issue, you will get calls for interviews.

1. Call them back promptly. Ask when their deadline is.
2. It is best if you already know what kind of story the reporter tends to do, what kind of questions they ask. If you have time, look up some of their work.
3. Prepare as much as you can. If you know what they are calling about, get some background information. I recently got a call on a new program for the uninsured in New Haven. Before I called back, I had looked up the number of uninsured in CT and similar successful programs in other states.
4. Be helpful. Ask what kind of story they are doing, how much information they need, if they would like to speak to a person directly affected by the story (unless that is you).
5. If you are setting up another interview, e.g. with another consumer or a provider, get all the details straight. When will they call or visit? Do they need a translator available? You can role-play with the consumer first, if that will make them more comfortable. Be sure any confidentiality issues are settled before the call or visit.
6. Relax. If you are nervous or this is your first time talking to a reporter, it is OK to say so (off camera or off the air). A good reporter wants to get it right, not to embarrass you.
7. Listen carefully to the question. Take a few seconds to frame your answer.
8. Speak slowly and avoid jargon. Speak with confidence and enthusiasm.
9. Smile when you speak. Even if they can't see you, it comes through.
10. Don't be thrown off but you may hear them typing while you talk. There may also be pauses after you answer a question - it doesn't necessarily mean they are looking for more, they may just still be writing what you said.
11. Be brief. Keep to major points and broader issues. Don't spend ten seconds on the point and two minutes on the exceptions.
12. If you don't know an answer, say so. Ask if they would like you to look into it and get back to them. Ask how much time you have.
13. If it seems that you have been misunderstood, fix it immediately. Be gentle, but fix it.
14. Be clear about your position and/or that of the organization you represent. Provide materials if possible.
15. Nothing is ever off the record. Assume that anything you say or give them could end up in the story. Be careful making jokes.
16. If you are quoted in an article, clip and save it.
17. If you aren't quoted, don't take it personally. If you were helpful, they may call again.

## **For television and radio appearances:**

1. Learn as much as you can about the show - Will it be live or taped? Will there be call-in questions? Will there be an audience? Will there be other guests, if so who? How long is the show, and how long will you be on?
2. Check the style of the show beforehand. Is it confrontational or conversational? Are personal stories or statistics more common? Is there a specific audience or issue targeted?
3. Dress conservatively for television. Avoid bright white, loud colors or oversize prints. Avoid flashy jewelry. Consider a place for a microphone to be clipped, e.g. jacket lapel.
4. Be on time.

5. Get a tape if you can. Other outlets may replay it.

# Tips for Public Speaking

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**So, you've been asked to give a talk. Fear of speaking to a group is very common and natural. Preparation and practice are the keys.**

*Once a particular senator read a speech to a lunch group and succeeded in boring everyone. Afterwards a feisty old lady came up to him and said, "How do you expect us to remember your speech when you can't remember it yourself?" -- From All Politics is Local by Tip O'Neill*

## **First, get the details.**

1. Time and date - when you should arrive, the time of your talk and how long they want you to stay
2. Place -- Get directions
3. Contact person - who you call with any last minute details (snow storms, illness, etc.)
4. How should you dress?
5. How many people are likely to attend?
6. Who are they? - demographics, parents?, seniors?, members of a group?
7. Can you bring materials to hand out?
8. What is the purpose of the talk - a lecture for students who will be tested on the content or a light speech for a senior group meant to entertain?
9. What is your topic? Can you re-work a prior talk?
10. Will you be part of a panel of speakers with only 5 to 10 minutes to fill or are you the only speaker for an hour?
11. Are you the first speaker or last? What are the topics of the other talks?
12. What equipment will be available? PowerPoint, wipe board, flip chart, microphone, etc.
13. Preparation separates great talks from the others.
14. Is your topic one you are comfortable with or do you need some more research?
15. Can you re-work a prior talk?
16. Do you have materials to hand out or do you need to develop some? See How to Create Fact Sheets and Action Alerts. Can you update something you already have? Handouts are nice because you don't have to say everything and they don't have to remember anything specific.
17. Prepare your introduction or bio - usually someone else will need to describe you to the audience before you begin, write something for them to say

## **Write the talk**

18. Have a beginning, a middle and a conclusion
19. Try to make only a few points, most people listening will only remember one or two messages from your talk so choose them carefully
20. It is helpful if you give them an action step at the end - you have them convinced of your message by your impeccable logic, then what? Be constructive about the action step - not "Work for world peace" but "Call your Senator about tomorrow's vote. His number is \_\_\_\_\_"
21. You can refer to your handouts for a fuller explanation if time is an issue, you don't have to give every detail in your talk
22. Build toward your conclusion
23. Use language and concepts that are appropriate to the audience - obviously a talk on tobacco will be different for third graders than for a group of doctors

24. Speak from your heart - your own experiences and analysis are extremely compelling, no one else can tell your story
25. If appropriate, look for quotes, stories, jokes, etc. that add to your point.
26. Leave time for questions and/or discussion
27. Consider using visuals
28. Writing your main points on an overhead or wipe board adds emphasis and provides natural breaks in the talk
29. Having your main points in a visual means you won't miss anything
30. Visuals help make complex or technical information understandable
31. PowerPoint or other presentation software programs can be useful tools, but are hardly a necessity
32. Print the final notes for your speech large enough to read at a glance

**Remember to bring with you:**

1. At least two copies of your notes
2. Your introduction/bio
3. Any visuals you will need
4. Handouts - bring more than you think you'll need
5. If you are using PowerPoint, bring overheads as well - just in case
6. Your glasses, if you need them
7. Directions
8. Your contact information - business cards or brochures or just paper and a pen to write it down if someone asks
9. Water - not bubbly soda (I won't go into why)

**To help relax:**

1. Remember that everyone there has been in your situation and can identify
2. Practice your talk - as often as you need to so you feel comfortable with it
3. Practice in front of a gentle critic, then listen to their feedback
4. Check out the setting ahead of time
5. Arrive early, introduce yourself to the audience and other speakers as they come in
6. Practice using microphones or other equipment, fix problems before the talk
7. Check yourself in the restroom mirror before starting - you'll feel better knowing that you don't have salad stuck in your teeth
8. Take a breath - those empty moments seem much longer to you than to them
9. Speak slowly, don't race through to get it over with
10. Smile - why should they have a good time if you aren't?
11. Use as casual a style as you can - both you and they will relax
12. Stand behind something (a podium, a table, etc.) or wear your glasses
13. Refer to your notes
14. Don't mention your nervousness - maybe they didn't notice
15. Know that an hour from now you will be relaxing after a job well done

**After the talk:**

1. Evaluate - Did you get your major points across? Were there questions? What was the feedback from the audience and the organizers? How did you feel?

2. Save the information from the talk and the thank you letter you should get (if you ever invite a speaker, but sure to write a thank you letter). You may want to follow up with the group with any action steps from your talk and/or later for coalition building, etc.
3. Remember that the next time will be easier.

# Sample Letter – Raising a Concern

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The Honorable John Jones  
Legislative Office Building  
Hartford CT 06106

Dear Senator Jones:

I am writing to alert you to a serious health issue in Connecticut. Alarming numbers of young people in Connecticut are infected with chlamydia. This silent disease is the most common bacterial sexually transmitted disease and the number one cause of preventable infertility in the United States. From 1996 to 1999, the incidence in Connecticut grew by 18% and New Haven's rate grew by 41% in the early 1990's. Chlamydia is silent because 75% of women and 50% of men infected with the disease have no symptoms. Without testing, they would have no idea that they are infected and potentially spreading the disease. Both testing and treatment are effective, inexpensive and convenient.

Unfortunately, testing rates are far too low, especially among at-risk young adults. Connecticut must increase educational outreach and testing resources to improve those numbers.

As the legislature's premier champion of public health, I know that you will see that this issue is addressed in our state's public policy. If I can be of any assistance, please call me. Thank you for your time and your commitment to the health of all Connecticut citizens.

Sincerely,

*Susan Voter*

Susan Voter  
123 Morning Glory Lane  
Small Town, CT 06000  
(203) 555-5555  
svoter@yahoo.com

# Community Benefits Reporting

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## **What is community benefits reporting?**

HMOs and/or hospitals file an annual report on the public health benefits they provide to the broader community they serve. They assess the health care needs of the communities they serve, identify targets for assistance, and develop programs to address those needs. Reports include program descriptions, levels of spending, and an evaluation of the program's impact. HMOs and hospitals are asked to substantively involve the community in the needs assessment, choice of target, program development and evaluation.

## **What kinds of programs are included in the reports?**

Typical programs include AIDS prevention programs, free immunizations, health screenings, early childhood intervention efforts, domestic violence awareness initiatives, reduced premiums for the uninsured, teen counseling, and substance abuse prevention programs. Report summaries identify best practices in public health programs as well as data collection, community health assessment, program evaluation and effective mechanisms to elicit community involvement in health planning.

## **Which other states have community benefits reporting?**

Massachusetts is the most advanced in community benefit reporting. Last year, HMOs and hospitals reported spending \$6.8 and \$286.6 million, respectively, on benefits to Massachusetts communities. Reporting is voluntary but all institutions comply. Reporting has led some HMOs without programs to establish community benefits programs and helped others to tailor their assistance to maximize effectiveness with limited dollars. Reporting has also improved the relationship between the institutions and their communities. Nine other states also have community benefit reporting by either HMOs and/or hospitals.

## **Which CT HMOs report in Massachusetts?**

Aetna, CIGNA, ConnectiCare, Healthsource and Kaiser/CHP all file community benefit reports in Massachusetts and operate in Connecticut.

## **What are the benefits to CT of reporting?**

Prevention programs designed to address identified health care needs will improve the health of all CT residents. This will improve the quality of life in CT and reduce costs of health care for all payers, including the state. Community involvement in health care policy planning will lead to better integration with existing programs, reducing duplication and ensuring community commitment to the success of the program. Best practices will be identified to improve service delivery into the future.

For questions, call Rep. Vickie Nardello 240-8661





## **Governor Rowland's Small Employer Health Insurance Subsidy Program: *Complicated and Premature***

### ***What is it?***

Eligible low-income individuals and families (under \$16,391 for individuals, \$27,787 for a family of three) would get state subsidies to help pay the cost of health insurance from their employers. The costs of the program will be paid for by benefit cuts and copayments and premiums on other low-income HUSKY parents. Other states have not been successful with similar programs.

### ***Will it work?***

#### **Maybe**

- Could reduce the number of uninsured in CT
- 
- All family members are in the same plan for up to 5000 families in new program
- Reduces the stigma of public coverage for participants
- Leverages private employer dollars
- 

#### **Maybe Not**

- Could increase the number of uninsured in CT
- 
- Separates parents from children's plan for up to 20,000 current HUSKY families
- Could strengthen current HUSKY stigma
- 
- Very complex, difficult to administer
- Unfair eligibility based on employer offer of benefits through a state-approved purchasing pool, e.g. CBIA
- Unfair- low-income HUSKY parents pay the costs of the program
- Other states have not been successful
- Offers less comprehensive benefit packages

### ***What should we do?***

**Study the idea further. Move planning from the small workgroup to a public process emphasizing consumer input.**

**Tie HUSKY parents' benefit cuts and costs to enrollment targets in new program so low-income parents don't pay for a program that may not work.**

- Ensure a fair system
- Evaluate the program, collect data
- Provide wrap around services not included in employer package
- Provide consumer and employer supports/education
- Protect consumer rights and privacy
- Minimize HUSKY stigma

**Consider other options to help CT's uninsured.**

