



Immigrant Rights and Health Access: **ADVOCACY TIPS AND TOOLS**

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I. MEETING WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR

One of the most effective ways to influence the policymaking process is to visit with your Senators and Representative, or their staff, in person. Most legislators have regular office hours, in district offices and in the Capitol, during which they are available to their constituents. Meeting with legislators when Congress is not in session, or during the August Congressional recess, is a good opportunity to meet with your Senators and Representative closer to home.

Tips on Scheduling a Meeting

- Call to request an appointment. If you want to meet with your legislator in the district, call the district office. If you will be visiting the Capitol, contact the Washington, DC office.
- Be sure to identify yourself as a constituent and give your organizational affiliation. Explain who you are, the nature of your visit (identify what you want to discuss), when you would like to meet, and the names of any colleagues accompanying you.
- If the legislator is unavailable during the date and time you requested, the appointment scheduler may offer you another date/time or provide you the opportunity to meet with the legislative staff person who handles immigration or health policy.
- Don't be offended if a legislator is unable to meet and requests that you meet with his/her immigration staff. Legislative staff is often responsible for helping the legislator develop his/her position on the topic.
- The day before the meeting, call to confirm the appointment.

Tips on Conducting a Legislative Meeting

- Dress appropriately – generally in business professional attire. Remember! You want to make a positive first impression!
- Arrive on time and know whom you are meeting with!
 - If meeting with the legislator, make sure to use the correct title [Representative or Senator].
 - If meeting with a staff member, be sure you have the correct contact name. Do not underestimate the power of the staff person in helping to shape the policymaker's opinions and positions on issues or a particular piece of legislation.
- Bring two or three colleagues with you. Prior to the meeting, you should agree on who will lead the meeting, what points will be made and which one each of you will discuss. Remember, the meeting will likely last about 30 minutes.
- Be sure to introduce yourself and your colleagues, clearly stating your affiliation and explain why you are concerned about immigrant health access and why you have expertise on the issue.
- Try to deliver your message in three minutes. Be concise, polite, and professional.
- Be a resource for the policymaker and his/her staff. Offer your time and assistance if he/she wants to talk about your areas of interest and expertise in the future.
- Provide material to support your position. Leave behind a business card and a one-page factsheet summarizing your position. You can share [AAPCHO's factsheet](#).
- Follow up with a thank you letter. Be sure to include any additional information you may have promised or that may be relevant to your conversation.

Dos and Don'ts for Meeting with Members of Congress:

- Do your research! Learn the committee assignments of your members of Congress and where their specialties lie. But don't expect members of Congress to be experts. Their schedules and workloads tend to make them generalists.
- Don't overload the meeting with too many issues. It is better to focus on a single issue that falls within the area of interest or specialty of the Congressman.
- Do maintain control of the meeting. Don't be put off by smokescreens or long-winded answers. Stay on message and bring the member back to the point.
- Do present the action that you're asking the member of Congress to take early in the meeting. Keep your message concise. Members of Congress are very busy and you are apt to lose their attention if you are too wordy.

- Do demonstrate familiarity with the issue. Use data or cases you know. Also, try to give examples or tell compelling stories that relate to situations in his/her home state or district.
- Do ask the Representative's or Senator's position and why. Show openness to the knowledge of counterarguments and respond to them.
- Do be prepared to answer their questions. It is okay to admit you don't know. Offer to try to find out the answer and send information back to the office. And don't make promises you can't deliver!
- Do meet with members whose position is against yours. You can lessen the intensity of the opposition and perhaps change it. However, don't be argumentative. Speak with calmness and commitment so as not to put him/her on the defensive.
- Do spend time in developing relationships with Congressional staff.
- Do leave with them with a simple one-page factsheet. Remember to thank them for taking positions, which you support and for taking the time to meet with you!

II. WRITE A LETTER TO YOUR LEGISLATOR

Tips on Writing to Elected Officials

- Offices accept constituent mail via email, fax or the postal service. Many policymakers prefer to receive correspondence using an online form on their websites or fax. U.S. mail can often take weeks to arrive due to security.
- Accuracy and attention to detail. Be sure to use the proper form of address and correct spelling of the legislator's name. Whenever possible, use your organization's letterhead.
- Remember to identify yourself as a constituent and provide your organizational affiliation in the text of your letter. Whenever possible, give your official title and any professional degrees, following your signature.
- Short letters are best. Concentrate on a single issue. Keep them to one page, focused on a single topic or bill and be timed to arrive while the issue is currently being debated. Be sure not to use jargon or confusing technical terms.
- Clearly state your purpose for writing at the outset. Make sure you let the legislator know if you support or oppose a specific legislation or if you want them to take a specific action in regards to specific legislation.
- Correctly identify the legislation. If you are writing about a specific bill, remember to describe it by its official title and number, as well as by its popular name.

- Tell your legislator how the issue would affect you and the rest of his/her constituents. Your own personal experience and district-specific information are the best supporting evidence. In addition, data and research supporting your position is important.
- Be sure that your facts and assertions are accurate. Often legislators use constituent mail to make points during speeches or debates and to convince fellow legislators of their position.
- Ask your policymaker for his/her position on the issue. Indicate that you look forward to hearing from him/her on this issue.
- Praise, Praise, Praise. If your legislator supports immigration and/or health legislation that you do, thank him/her for their stance.

The legislator and/or a member of the legislative staff will read your letter. Sometime after it is received, you should receive a letter from the legislator, which will include the legislator's opinion on the issue. You may want to send a note of appreciation if your position is supported.

Sample Letter

[DATE]

The Honorable _____
 United States Senate/ U.S. House of Representatives
 Washington, DC 20510 (Senate)/ 20515 (House) [or district office address]

Dear Senator/ Representative _____,

As a constituent in your district, I am writing to urge you to support legislation that fixes our current legal immigration system and provides an opportunity for immigrants to earn US citizenship. Common-sense immigration reform should also increase access to health care without long waiting periods or restrictions for lawfully present immigrants, such as the 5-year bar.

Asian Americans & Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders (AA&NHOPIs) are predominantly immigrant; more than 60% of the community is foreign born, and they also suffer have some of the highest uninsured rates in the country. In order to keep us healthy and safe, we should foster a health care system that focuses on keeping people healthy and making it sustainable for community health centers and other safety net hospitals to provide cost-effective preventive health care, which saves billions in uncompensated emergency room care and lowers costs for everyone. Allowing immigrants to access primary and preventive health care they need ensures that everyone, including our children, stays healthy.

[SHARE STORY FROM YOUR COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER OR THE LEGISLATOR'S DISTRICT THAT DEMONSTRATES THE IMPACT OF BARRIERS TO CARE OR HOW ACCESS TO CARE WILL IMPROVE THE LIVES OF PEOPLE LIVING IN THE DISTRICT/STATE.]

I support a common-sense immigration reform agenda that fixes our legal immigration backlogs, provides an opportunity to earn citizenship, and eliminates long waiting periods or other unnecessary restrictions to health care and public benefits programs for immigrants. I urge you to

work to ensure that these key provisions are considered as Congress moves forward with efforts to reform our nation's immigration system.

Thank you for your attention and I look forward to hearing from you on this important issue.

Sincerely,

[Name]
[Home address]
[Telephone number]
[Email address]

You can also send this letter to your Members of Congress electronically.

III. CALL YOUR LEGISLATOR

To call your Congressional Representative or Senator's Washington, DC office, first find out who your Representative/Senator is. Then call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask for the office of Representative/Senator.

You can also call his/her state or district office(s).

Sample Phone Script

Hello, my name is _____ and I am both a constituent and a member of [your local community health center] in your [state/congressional district].

I am calling to urge Senator/Representative _____ to ensure that any comprehensive immigration reform legislation includes provisions to improve access to health care for immigrants. Community health centers support comprehensive immigration reform that fixes our legal immigration system and provides an opportunity to earn citizenship, but I also believe that we must ensure access to affordable health care. The Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and other Pacific Islander community is 60% foreign born and arbitrary barriers such as the 5-year bar for legal permanent residents are unfair.

I ask that the Senator/Representative support comprehensive immigration reform and work to include provisions to expand health access for immigrants.

Thank you for your attention to my request and I look forward to hearing from the Senator/Representative.