



# The NACCHO Advocacy Toolkit

## February 2023



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

# NACCHO

National Association of County & City Health Officials





**2**022 was an exciting year of progress for local public health. Congress created and allocated \$550 million to a new Public Health Infrastructure and Capacity program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for flexible, disease-agnostic core public health activities. Congress also continued to make steady investments in overall capacity at the CDC and bolster important programs like the Data Modernization Initiative, to help advance public health data capabilities. Federal partners looked for new ways to ensure local health departments are well-resourced and supported. Congress urged the CDC to track how federal funding is passed from states to local health departments, and when the CDC awarded \$3.2 billion in first-of-its kind public health workforce and infrastructure funding, the agency greatly increased the number of directly funded jurisdictions and included an expectation that states should distribute at least 40 percent of their funds to local health departments. Last but not least, Congress passed and President Joe Biden signed legislation reauthorizing the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program, which once operationalized will offer up to \$150,000 in loan repayment to

public health professionals who agree to serve three years in a local, state, or tribal health department.

None of this success could have been possible without the advocacy of local public health leaders. In 2022, NACCHO members met with over 125 congressional offices and sent nearly 200 messages to policymakers urging support for local public health. Local public health continues to face challenges and NACCHO hopes more of our members will join us to educate lawmakers on the importance of local public health and how federal policy can best support your vital work. Your voice is especially important in 2023, which marks the first year of the 118th Congress, and a new era of divided government with Republicans holding a slim majority in the House of Representatives and Democrats a 51-49 advantage in the Senate. Now is the time to introduce or reintroduce yourself to your members of Congress as they set their agendas for the upcoming term and prepare to debate policies and funding levels that will impact local health departments nationwide.

In 2023, NACCHO will continue to advocate for policies and funding to support all local health



**Without local health officials, Members of Congress would not know how your community is equipped to deal with a public health disaster, chronic disease, environmental health, or the next pandemic.**

departments in line with our Federal Legislative and Policy Agenda. Our top priorities will be to 1) strengthen and support the public health workforce; 2) bolster public health funding including for public health infrastructure and data modernization; 3) ensure federal funding flows to the local level quickly and equitably; and 4) address public health concerns in coalition with national partners.

We hope you will join us in these efforts! We recognize this can be daunting, but this toolkit can serve as a starting point to help you understand the ins and outs of communicating with members of Congress and help you serve as the trusted messenger that you are. And NACCHO Government Affairs is also here to help. Please reach out to the team at any time:

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## Why Engage?

Every year, Congress votes on legislation that will affect your local health department. For example, in 2023, Congress is expected to consider legislation to reauthorize the Pandemic and

All-Hazards Preparedness Act, which sets the direction and outlines authority for federal preparedness programs and activities including the Medical Reserve Corps, Strategic National Stockpile, Public Health Emergency Preparedness Program, Public Health Emergency Medical Countermeasure Enterprise, and Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR). Members of Congress may also introduce and debate legislation related to immunizations, substance use disorders, environmental health, maternal health, injury and violence prevention, and many other public health concerns. Finally, Congress will set the annual funding levels for all federal programs, including at the CDC, Food and Drug Administration, Health Resources and Services Administration, and ASPR.

**IN WASHINGTON,  
IF YOU'RE NOT AT THE TABLE,  
YOU'RE ON THE MENU.**

**EVERY FRIDAY, WE SERVE UP  
NEWS FROM WASHINGTON.**

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**[www.naccho.org/advocacy/news](http://www.naccho.org/advocacy/news)**

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Whether you engage or not, lawmakers will be voting on issues that affect you and your community, and your voice is important to the policy debate. As a local voice with expertise in public health in your community, you can serve as a trusted messenger to your members of Congress, helping them understand how the policy they set in Washington affects their constituents back home. Furthermore, members of Congress have lots of competing priorities and rely on their constituents to bring issues to their attention – without hearing from you, they may not even realize how they can help! And in today's political environment, where public health policy is too often politicized or muddled by misinformation, if lawmakers don't hear from public health representatives, they may not appreciate the work you do, resulting in policy that is not rooted in sound public health practice.

## What is Education and Advocacy?

Members of Congress and their staff work on a vast array of policy issues and rely on their constituents, organizations, and other external stakeholders to educate them on issues affecting their districts and states. You can be a valuable voice in educating your lawmakers about the work that you do, challenges that you are facing, and how federal policy affects your local health department.

An initial step in education may be as straightforward as introducing your health department: where are you located, who do you serve, how many staff do you have, and what services do you provide. Your lawmakers may also appreciate learning about the challenges you and the community you serve are facing. Are you having trouble hiring staff? Is a tight budget limiting the reach of your programs? What public health issues are prominent in



your community? For example, are you being particularly impacted by the opioid overdose crisis, or has there been a spike in vaccine-preventable diseases?

Finally, you can educate lawmakers on how federal public health policy affects your work. Do you receive funding or support through a CDC program? Was the Medical Reserve Corps integral to a recent emergency response? Is a provision of federal law preventing you from implementing an evidence-based opioid overdose prevention strategy?

You can also explain how a bill under consideration by Congress would affect your community or describe how possible actions Congress could take would help or harm your health department. For example, you could describe how a loan repayment program could improve recruitment and retention, or how increased funding at the CDC could help increase the reach of a chronic disease prevention program. As long as you do not express your position on the legislation or urge specific action on it by the member of Congress, you are squarely in the realm of education and advocacy, not lobbying.

These are just some examples of the information your members of Congress may not know unless you tell them, and through education and advocacy, you will provide important insight for them to consider during upcoming legislative debates.

## What is Lobbying?

Lobbying is a specific type of advocacy that involves attempting to directly influence an elected or public official on a particular piece of legislation. An advocacy action is lobbying if it 1) refers to specific legislation and 2) reflects a view or urges an action on that legislation. Examples of lobbying include asking a member of Congress (or their staff) to vote for or against

a bill, or to cosponsor, introduce, or amend specific legislation.

Rules about lobbying vary according to local jurisdictions, so check the rules in your local health department before engaging in lobbying. However, as described above, there is a lot of important information you can share with elected officials that does not qualify as lobbying.

## Examples of Education, Advocacy, and Lobbying Activities

Education and Advocacy	Lobbying
Explaining workforce challenges your health department is facing and discussing how higher salaries, loan repayment, or additional funding could help.	Asking a member of Congress or their staff to cosponsor legislation that would create new funding for the public health workforce.
Describing to a member of Congress how local health departments administer flu vaccinations and why vaccinations are important for preventing the spread of flu.	Urging a member of Congress to vote for legislation that expands insurance coverage of flu vaccines.
Providing legislators educational materials that emphasize success stories from your local health department programs. The materials include information about what federal funding supports programs at your health department and examples of what you could do with more funding.	Providing legislators materials that ask them to support a specific amount of funding for specific programs in the upcoming annual appropriations bill.
Tweeting statistics about your diabetes programs, how local health departments are helping reduce diabetes rates, and how additional resources can assist your local health department to reduce diabetes rates.	Tweeting a message urging Congress to vote for or against legislation for diabetes prevention programs in local health departments.
Sending a weekly e-newsletter discussing factual information on opioid abuse in your community and outlining programmatic efforts that are proven to reduce this public health issue.	E-mailing a "call to action" to members of your organization to encourage them to contact their legislator in favor of opioid prevention legislation.





## Connecting with Members of Congress

When looking to engage with federal policymakers, a great place to start is with your members of Congress: the two Senators that represent your state and one member of the U.S. House that represents your congressional district. These members represent you, and they are eager to discuss concerns about policy and community matters. You can find who your members of Congress are at <https://www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member>.

There are several ways you can engage with your members of Congress:

- Request a meeting in DC, in their district office, or virtually
- Invite your member or their staff to visit your health department
- Email them to educate, advocate, or lobby about a legislative or policy issue
- Sign up for their newsletter to receive updates on their legislative priorities, events, and other news

The best place to get started is to visit your representatives' websites, which will have information about how to get in touch with them (often via webform) and other information about their work in Congress.

## Which Congressional Committees are Important for Public Health?

When engaging with members of Congress, it is useful to have some understanding of congressional committees, including if your members serve on a committee with jurisdiction over public health issues. Congressional committees consider bills, monitor issues, and oversee governmental operations within their jurisdiction. Committees allow members of Congress to divide their work among smaller groups and specialize in certain issue areas. Congressional committees select proposed legislation for further consideration and hold public hearings to investigate issues and oversee federal programs. Authorizing committees propose bills to establish, continue, or modify programs or agencies. The House and Senate Appropriations Committees are responsible for crafting annual spending bills. The below committees are important for public health investment:


Type of Committee	Committee Name	Purpose
Appropriations Committee	<p><b>House Appropriations Committee</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Labor, Health and Human Services, Education Subcommittee – almost all public health funding</li> <li>Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration Subcommittee</li> </ul> <p><b>Senate Appropriations Committee</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Labor/Health and Human Services/Education Subcommittee - almost all public health funding</li> <li>Agriculture/Food and Drug Administration Subcommittee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Write and pass annual spending bills that fund government programs</li> </ul>
Authorizing Committee	<p><b>House</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Energy and Commerce Committee (Medicaid, Medicare Part B and D and discretionary public health programs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Health Subcommittee</li> </ul> </li> <li>Ways and Means Committee (Medicare and health care financing)</li> </ul> <p><b>Senate</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (discretionary public health issues)</li> <li>Finance Committee (Medicare/Medicaid)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Write authorization legislation to establish, continue or modify and agency or program</li> <li>Do not provide (only <i>authorize</i>) funding</li> </ul>


## Planning Your Engagement


There are multiple opportunities to meet with lawmakers and their staff, both in Washington, DC and back home. Additionally, many offices will now accommodate virtual visits via video conferencing. Members of Congress are usually in their districts during “recess” periods, which is a great time to meet with them in-district or plan a site visit to your health department. If you sign up for their newsletter, you will hear about

local events and opportunities to discuss district issues with members and staff. The congressional calendar on the following page shows when the House and Senate are in session, which can help you plan not only visits to DC, but also encounters at home. This schedule is subject to change, but serves as a helpful guide. You can also reach out to NACCHO Government Affairs for guidance.

# 2023 CONGRESSIONAL CALENDAR

 Both chambers in session

 Senate only in session

 House only in session

## January

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
1 New Year's Day	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16 MLK Day	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

## February

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20 Presidents Day	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28				

## March

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22 Ramadan (begins)	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

## April

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
						1
2	3	4	5 Passover (begins)	6	7 Good Friday	8
9 Easter Sunday	10	11	12	13 Passover (ends)	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21 Ramadan (ends) Eid al-Fitr (begins)	22 Eid al-Fitr (ends)
23 30	24	25	26	27	28	29

## May

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29 Memorial Day	30	31			

## June

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19 Juneteenth	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28 Eid al-Adha (begins)	29 Eid al-Adha (ends)	30	

## July

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
						1
2	3	4 Independence Day	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23 30	24 31	25	26	27	28	29

## August

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

## September

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
					1	2
3	4 Labor Day	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15 Rosh Hashana (begins)	16
17 Rosh Hashana (ends)	18	19	20	21	22	23
24 Yom Kippur (begins)	25 Yom Kippur (ends)	26	27	28	29	30

## October

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9 Columbus Day	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

## November

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10 Veterans Day (observed)	11 Veterans Day
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23 Thanksgiving Day	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

## December

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7 Hanukkah (begins)	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15 Hanukkah (ends)	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24 31	25 Christmas Day	26	27	28	29	30

Sources: Offices of Senate Majority Whip Richard J. Durbin and House Minority Whip Steve Scalise  
Chris Hale/CQ Roll Call

Updated 12/13/22



## Timeline for Federal Budget and Appropriations

Key Opportunities to Influence Decision-Making  
Congress holds the “power of the purse” meaning they decide how much money each department, agency, and program throughout the federal government receives each year. As Congress develops each year’s spending bills, you may want to engage to encourage strong funding for programs important to your health department.

The following is a general timeline of the annual budget and appropriations process to serve as a guide of when you may want to contact Congress about funding. One important caveat: in recent years, Congress rarely follows this schedule. Contact NACCHO Government Affairs or stay up on the latest developments by subscribing to News from Washington.

Date	Process	What You Can Do
First Monday in February (this deadline is rarely met in recent years)	<p>President submits his Budget Request to Congress for new fiscal year beginning on October 1. The Budget is non-binding and represents the administration’s requests for the upcoming fiscal year.</p> <p>*The Biden Administration announced the FY24 Budget will be released on March 9</p>	<p>Review the relevant sections of the Budget to see what the administration proposed for programs that are important to you. Many of the details are in the individual agency budget documents, oftentimes called “Congressional Justification.”</p> <p>For example, CDC budget documents are available at <a href="https://www.cdc.gov/budget/congressional-justifications/index.html">https://www.cdc.gov/budget/congressional-justifications/index.html</a></p>
January–March/April	Congressional offices develop their appropriations priorities. Members will submit their individual request letters to each of the 12 Appropriations Subcommittees; the Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee handles most public health funding.	Contact your members of Congress to ask them to support funding for programs that are important to your health department. Be specific in your asks, including a dollar amount if you can and explaining how that funding supports your work. Check members of Congress’s website for deadlines to submit appropriations requests.
February–April	The House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees hold hearings to examine the President’s budget proposal.	Submit questions to Congressional offices on the Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee to ask the HHS Secretary and CDC Director on key funding levels. NACCHO submits testimony for the record advocating for local health department funding priorities.

Date	Process	What You Can Do
May–July	House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees and full Committees debate and vote on (or “mark up”) spending bills.	Contact members of the Subcommittees and the full Committees prior to markups to highlight funding needs.
May–September	House and Senate pass their spending bills. Differences between the two bills will be worked out in a Conference Committee and re-sent to the floor of each chamber for passage.	Weigh in with conferees on preferred House and Senate funding levels.
By October 1	New fiscal year begins. On rare occasion, all 12 spending bills are passed and signed by President. Otherwise, Congress passes a short-term continuing resolution (CR) to fund programs at their current level and complete negotiations.	Urge Congress to pass funding bills as soon as possible.
Completed of Process	Congress passes final versions of appropriations bills, either as stand-alone bills or packaged together in an omnibus. Failing agreement on a final package, Congress may pass a year-long CR to continue funding until the end of the fiscal year.	Urge Congress to pass funding bills as soon as possible.



## How to Schedule a Meeting

Generally, the best place to submit a meeting is via a request form on your member of Congress's website. The website may offer specific guidance but key information to include is:

- Your name
- Your organization (if applicable)
- Address (to confirm you are a constituent)
- Dates of meeting
- Location (DC, in the district, or virtual)
- Subject of meeting – be specific. For example, say you want to talk about “workforce challenges facing local health departments and the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program” as opposed to “local public health”

Many offices schedule meeting requests 2-3 weeks in advance. If you haven't heard back by then, you may want to follow up politely via phone. Although we always suggest requesting a meeting with the member of Congress, their schedules are very busy, and oftentimes meetings will be delegated to their legislative staff. These are still highly valuable meetings as legislative staff are responsible for explaining issues and making recommendations on legislation to their bosses.

## Tips for Meeting with Congress

**1. Research your member of Congress.** While you can use your meeting to learn more about your member of Congress and their priorities, you should do some research ahead of time. Use their website to learn what committees they sit on, their top legislative issues, and how they have voted on recent bills.

**2. Know your message and your ask(s).** NACCHO annually develops talking points and a list of funding requests that reflect the foundational, cross-cutting needs of our members and have been approved by the Board of Directors. You should feel free to use those and identify which of these priorities impact you the most. NACCHO Government Affairs can also help you develop other talking points and asks at your request. Your asks should be direct, clear, and achievable.

**3. Provide a brief introduction and background.** Members of Congress and their staff work on many issues and may not be familiar with the work of a local health department. Provide background information about your health department and the importance of your everyday work.

**4. Personalize your comments and provide details about your community.** Connect your asks directly to the work in your communities. Telling stories about public health issues and real people is most compelling and may help the member of Congress and their staff understand what you do on a day-to-day basis. You will have a better chance of success if you can connect the issues to constituent experiences and concerns.

**5. Be succinct and allow time for the staffer to ask questions.** Try to keep your intro and asks to ten minutes. Don't feel you need to cover everything in one meeting. You are building a relationship with the member of Congress and their staff, so you want to allow room to explore additional topics in the future.

**6. Think about how you can help them.** Position yourself as a resource for the future. After you present your key issues, ask where your priorities and those of the member of Congress may align. Offer to answer any questions they have and invite them to visit the health department the next time they are visiting your area. An in-person tour is invaluable to demonstrating to members of



Congress and staff how local health departments keep people in your community healthy and safe.

**7. Answer questions as best you can.** If you do not know an answer, say that you will find out the answer and follow up with them. Always reach out to NACCHO Government Affairs if we can help!

**8. Never argue, even if you encounter resistance or disagreement.** It doesn't pay to try to sway an entrenched position. Stay positive and keep lines of communication open for the future. Staffers move around frequently and you never know where you might encounter them in the future.

**9. Send a prompt thank you e-mail to the staffer(s) you met with and attach some information that you discussed about your health department.** NACCHO can help provide a template for a thank you e-mail and electronic documents you can attach with your thank you note.

**10. Have fun!** YOU are the voice of local health departments. Be confident in your ability to speak for people in your community. Engaging with Congress is a unique and valuable opportunity and you can be proud of yourself for making a difference!

### For more information, please contact:

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The mission of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) is to improve the health of communities by strengthening and advocating for local health departments.

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