The NACCHO Advocacy Toolkit

January 2019

NACCHO
National Association of County & City Health Officials

January 2019 will usher in the start of the 116th Congress, bringing divided government to Washington. Democrats gained control of the House of Representatives, while Republicans continue to hold a majority in the Senate. The party split in Congress could lead to more gridlock as bipartisanship will be needed to pass either party's agenda.

Members of Congress need to hear from constituents about the needs of their community. Lawmakers look to public health officials as trusted messengers to educate and engage them on public health priorities and the health of their communities at-large. We encourage NACCHO members to reach out to their Members of Congress to educate them about the importance of local public health and advocate for policies that promote public health using the tools provided in this toolkit. NACCHO's Government Relation's team is here to help. Please contact NACCHO Government Affairs Senior Specialist Ian Goldstein at igoldstein@naccho.org with any questions or comments.

Why Engage?

As a local public health professional, it can be difficult to navigate the current political climate. Some of the rhetoric out of Washington can send a local health official into a frenzy: Are my budgets going to get slashed? Does Washington understand what our needs are at the local level? Does my Representative understand the challenges local health departments face? And finally, can I get involved without portraying bias or partisanship?

The answer to the last question is YES, you can get involved to educate and engage with Members of Congress about your local health department and the health challenges in your community without advocating or lobbying for a particular bill or policy outcome.

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. You are a

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trusted messenger to your representatives. This toolkit will allow you to understand the importance of engaging elected representatives at any level to inform them of the critical work of local public health and what you need to help keep your community healthy and safe.

What is Education?

Members of Congress rely on YOU, the local health department professional, to educate them about what is happening in the community. When you educate an elected official, you are simply providing information about your community, your department, or a public health issue. Educating lawmakers on public health issues is vitally important so that they are informed when making decisions that can impact your local health department, and there are many different ways for everyone to be active.

What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is the "promotion of an idea that is directed at changing a policy, position, or program at an institution." (IRS, 2016) Advocacy is a strategy that aims to draw attention to or educate a policymaker on a particular issue. Health advocacy includes educating policymakers and the public about evidence-based policy. Advocacy can often be non-partisan and based in research and analysis. Effective advocacy can do the following:

- Build relationships with policymakers;
- Educate and influence a policymaker or lawmaker's decision;
- Alter existing policies, laws, and budgets; and
- Encourage the creation of new programs.

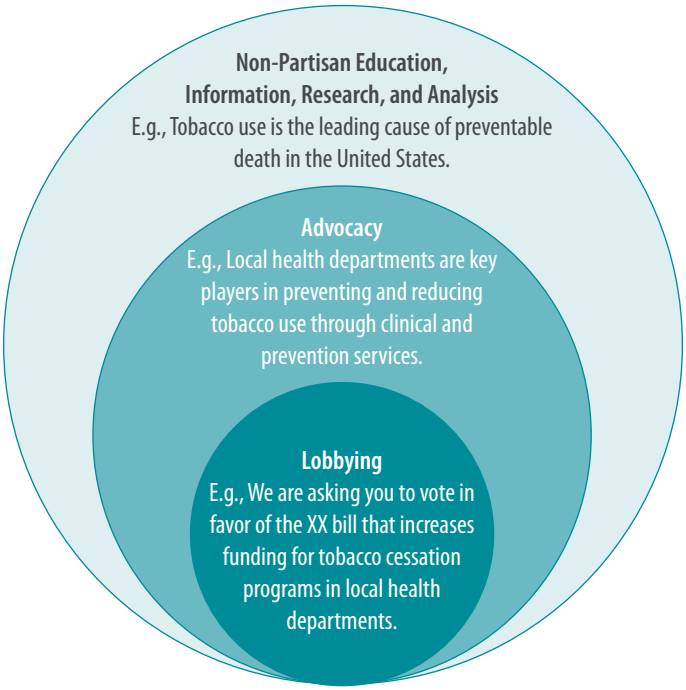
What is Lobbying?

Lobbying is the attempt to influence a legislative body through communication with a member or employee of the legislative body or with a government official who participates in constructing legislation. Lobbying can include written or oral communication for or against specific legislation. Rules about lobbying vary according to local jurisdictions. Check the rules in your local health department before engaging in lobbying.

EXAMPLES OF EDUCATION, ADVOCACY, AND LOBBYING ACTIVITIES

Education	Advocacy	Lobbying
Meeting with a Member of Congress to educate them on the Zika virus and how local health departments are actively involved in preventing and responding to Zika outbreaks.	Meeting with a Member of Congress to advocate for the importance of Zika funding for your community.	Meeting with a member of Congress to urge them to vote for a bill to provide emergency Zika funding for your health department.
Preparing educational materials that emphasize success stories from your local health department programs.	Preparing materials that depict success stories from your local health department programs and what can be done with more resources.	Preparing materials that include information on health programs at your local health department and contain messaging for or against specific legislation.
Tweeting statistics about your diabetes programs and how local health departments are helping reduce diabetes rates.	Tweeting to urge support for additional funding for diabetes programs and descriptions of 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 health issue.	E-mailing a "call to action" to others to encourage them to contact their legislators in favor of increased opioid resources for your community.	E-mailing a "call to action" to members of your organization to encourage them to contact their legislator in favor of opioid prevention legislation.

ARE YOU EDUCATING, ADVOCATING, OR LOBBYING?



Five Tips for Engagement

At the basic level, engagement with elected officials is all about building relationships. The goal is to become a valuable resource for policymakers. No matter who the audience is, you should keep in mind the following:

1. Be confident.
2. Frame your message to answer the question, "So what?"
3. Plan and practice your message.
4. Present a clear and compelling message; less is more.
5. Offer yourself as an expert resource and provide examples from your community; stories are more compelling than statistics.

Congressional Calendar

There are multiple opportunities to meet with lawmakers and their staff, both in Washington, DC, and back home. Members of Congress are back home in their districts during "recess" periods, at which time you should reach out to meet with Members or invite them to your local health department. Your Members of Congress want to hear from you.

Month of 2019	Washington, DC	Home District
January	January 3–4 January 14–18 January 28–31	January 1–2 January 21–25
February	February 1–15 February 25–28	February 18–22
March	March 1–15 March 25–29	March 18–22
April	April 1–12 April 29–30	April 15–26
May	May 1–24	May 27–31
June	June 3–28	
July	July 8–31	July 1–5
August	August 1–2	August 3–31
September	September 9–27	September 2–6
October	October 15–31	October 1–14
November	November 1–22	November 25–29
December	December 2–13	December 16–31

Timeline for Federal Budget and Appropriations: Key Opportunities to Influence Decision-Making

The following is a general timeline of the federal funding process to maximize the impact of your contact with your Members of Congress. For details of the federal budget process, NACCHO has produced a video for your use.

Date	Process	What You Can Do
January–March	Congressional Appropriators begin considering funding priorities for new fiscal year (beginning on October 1.) Individual Members of Congress have deadlines for funding priorities to include in their individual request letters.	Weigh in with your Members of Congress, especially if they are an Appropriator. All Members can send funding request letters to each of the 12 Appropriations Subcommittees; the Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee handles most public health funding.
First Monday in February or later if incoming Administration	President submits proposed budget to Congress for new fiscal year beginning on October 1.	Weigh in with White House and Members of Congress on the increases and cuts to public health programs included in President's budget proposal.
February–April	The House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees hold hearings to examine the President's budget proposal.	Submit questions to Congressional offices on Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee to ask the HHS Secretary and CDC Director on key funding levels. NACCHO submits testimony for the record including local health department funding priorities.
March–April	Members of Congress submit their priority funding request letters to the Appropriations Subcommittees.	Weigh in with Members of Congress with priority funding and report language requests.
May	The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) begins developing the next President's budget request.	NACCHO staff brings NACCHO leader(s) to meet with OMB to weigh in on budget priorities.
May–July	House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees and full committee debate and vote on (or "mark up") spending bills.	Weigh in with members of the subcommittees and the full committee prior to markups.
May–September	House and Senate pass their spending bills. Differences between the two bills will be worked out in a Conference Committee and resent 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.	Weigh in with Congress to support short-term CR and finish spending bills.
Completion 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.	Weigh in with Congress to support CR and finish spending bills.

Is There a Town Hall Near You?

Many Members of Congress will host town hall meetings when they are home during Congressional recesses. Town halls are a great opportunity to ask questions and introduce yourself as a trusted member of the community. Invite your Member of Congress to your local health department so they are able to see the valuable work you do. To find a town hall near you, visit https://townhallproject.com/.

Congressional Directory

Finding your Members of Congress has never been easier. There are many online locations where you can find out your Member of Congress, Senators, and their contact information.

You can use NACCHO's Take Action page to find your Member of Congress or you can use Congress's Web page to find your Members.

We also recommend downloading the following apps to help assist your advocacy:

- NACCHO's Voter Voice App – Download the "Voter Voice" app and then within the app search "NACCHO."
- Congress App – Download the "Congress" App that will allow you to search for Members of Congress by name or state. There is a $2.99 charge.
- U.S. Congress Info App – Download the "U.S. Congress info" App to find your Members and find text of bills.

How to Schedule a Meeting

It may seem like a daunting task to contact your Members of Congress but they want to hear from you. You can meet your Members in DC or at their district offices when they are home. Take the time to reach out to their offices to schedule a meeting. You can also meet with their legislative staff, who are there to relay your message to the Member.

How to Schedule a Meeting in Washington, DC

If you are looking to schedule a meeting with your Representative or Senator in Washington, DC, you will first want to call the office and ask for the Health Legislative Assistant's name and e-mail address. Once you have identified that person, you should e-mail them. The e-mail can consist of the following:

> Subject: Meeting Request with Local Health Department Professional
>
> Body:
> Hi [insert Health Legislative Assistant's name], I am a constituent from your district, and the [insert job title] at the [insert health department]. I will be in Washington [insert reason]. Would there be an opportunity to set up a meeting with you [on date/time] to talk about the public health issues our community is facing?
>
> Thank you for your attention to this request.

**If you do not hear back within a week, we recommend sending a follow-up email to the request.*

Most Hill staff are very busy, so don't be offended if you don't hear back right away. It is best to e-mail them on Monday and Friday because they are typically not as busy those days.

How to Schedule a Meeting in Your Home District

Scheduling a meeting with your Representative or Senator in your home district is ideal. It conveys the importance of your role in the community as a trusted public health leader. You will want to call the closest district office to you and again ask for the person who handles health issues.

> Subject: Meeting Request with Local Health Department Professional
>
> Body:
> Hi [insert Health Legislative Assistant's name], I am a constituent from your district, and the [insert job title] at the [insert health department]. I would like to request a time to speak to you at your office in [home district]. Would there be an opportunity to set up a meeting with you [on date/time] to talk about the public health issues our community is facing?
>
> Thank you for your attention to this request.

**During your meeting, be sure to invite your Member of Congress to visit your local health department.*

Tips for Engaging Members of Congress/Congressional Staff

1. **Know your message and your ask(s).**
   NACCHO will provide talking points and a list of funding requests that have been developed in coordination with the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials. You should identify which of these are priorities in your community/state. If there are particular issues that are "hot topics" for your community/state, be sure to bring those up.

2. **Know your target.**
   You will be meeting with Congressional staff who are the gatekeepers to their bosses, the Member of Congress. You will want to ask yourself, Are you meeting with a staffer who works for a new Member of Congress or someone more seasoned? If, your Member is new you will want to educate the staffer on all things public health. If it is a more seasoned staffer, you can always ask what they know about public health and segue to your fact sheet. Also, pay attention to the party affiliation and what committees the Member of Congress sits on to know where there may be opportunities to advance a public health agenda. It is also important to know if the Member of Congress sits on an appropriations or authorizing committee. (See following table.) Look up the Member and briefly read through their bio.

3. **Have a clear, achievable goal.**
   Your goal may be to introduce yourself and make sure the staffer knows what your health department or SACCHO does or to discuss a few issue areas in depth. You may be trying to encourage a new Member to get involved in public health or asking a longtime champion to be more vocal. Your approach will be different depending on your goal.

4. **Be sure to personalize your comments and provide a reminder of your community.**
   Stories that illustrate the consequences of public health issues for real people help to bring home to staffers why they and their boss should take action. You will have a better chance of success if you can connect with the issues and people they care about (i.e., constituents.)

5. **Be succinct and allow time for the staffer to ask questions.**
   Don't feel you need to cover everything in one meeting. We are building a relationship with the Member of Congress and their staff, so we 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. This is a good way to keep in touch and develop a relationship with the staffer.

8. **Never disagree or argue, even if you encounter resistance or disagreement.**
   It doesn't pay to try to sway an entrenched position. Stay away from particularly partisan landmines. 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 will 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. It can be fun to try out different messaging and see what phrasing has the ability to connect with the staffers you are meeting.

Type of Committee	Committee Name	Purpose
Appropriations Committee (See NACCHO video on the federal budget process.)	***House Appropriations Committee*** • Labor/Health and Human Services/Education Subcommittee • Agriculture/Food and Drug Administration Subcommittee ***Senate Appropriations Committee*** • Labor/Health and Human Services/Education Subcommittee • Agriculture/Food and Drug Administration Subcommittee	• Write and pass 12 annual spending bills that fund government programs
Authorizing Committee (Health Jurisdiction)	***House*** • Energy and Commerce Committee (Medicaid, Medicare Part B and D and discretionary public health programs) » Health Subcommittee • Ways and Means Committee (Medicare and health care financing) ***Senate*** • Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (discretionary public health issues) • Finance Committee (Medicare/Medicaid)	• Write authorization legislation to establish, continue or modify and agency or program • Do not provide (only *authorize*) funding

Fact Sheets

NACCHO has developed customizable fact sheet templates for local health departments and State Associations of County and City Health Officials (SACCHOs). Download the local health department template to customize a fact sheet based on your health department's data and information. Download the SACCHO template to customize a fact sheet based on your SACCHO's data and information to share with lawmakers.

Talking Points

When talking to your Members of Congress, it is important to have the latest information and talking points available. You can download NACCHO's talking points document, which will have the most up-to-date talking points available. Local health departments and SACCHOs can customize this Word document to add or delete talking points.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Ian Goldstein, MA
Government Affairs Senior Specialist
202-507-4273
igoldstein@naccho.org

NACCHO
National Association of County & City Health Officials
The National Connection for Local Public Health

Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

www.naccho.org

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.

1201 Eye Street, NW, Fourth Floor • Washington, DC 20005

Phone: 202-783-5550 • Fax: 202-783-1583

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