



# The NACCHO Advocacy Toolkit

February 2026



**Public Health**<sup>®</sup>  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

**NACCHO**<sup>SM</sup>  
National Association of County & City Health Officials



**N**ACCHO's mission is to improve the health of communities by strengthening and advocating for local health departments. With a stronger public health infrastructure, local health departments can expand essential prevention and health promotion efforts at the community level, tackle communicable disease threats, address substance use disorder, respond to natural disasters, and improve the overall health of communities. NACCHO advocates for policies and funding to support all local health departments in line with our [Federal Legislative and Policy Agenda](#), which is updated annually. NACCHO's top priorities are 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. The work of local health departments is greatly impacted by the funding and policy decisions made by officials at the local, state, and federal levels and local health department leaders are needed to engage with and educate on the vital role of local public health and how policy and funding play critical roles in creating healthy, thriving communities.

NACCHO hopes you will join us in these efforts. Engaging with policy makers and elected officials can seem daunting, but this toolkit is designed to 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. NACCHO Government Affairs is here to help, too. Please reach out to the team at any time:

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## Why Engage?

Every year, Congress considers legislation that affects local health departments. For example, Congress needs to act to reauthorize the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act. The law, which expired in 2023, outlines authority for federal



## 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.

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 also work on legislation about immunizations, substance use disorders, environmental health, maternal health, injury and violence prevention, and many other public health concerns. In addition, every year Congress must set funding levels for all federal programs, including critical activities at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), and ASPR.

Over the next year, lawmakers will be voting on issues that affect you and your community. Your voice and expertise are 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? (Non-Lobbying)

Members of Congress and their staff rely on 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 your department and community 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?

Similarly, you can tell them about your successes and the value your health department has provided to the community, helping to make the important work of local public health more visible and appreciated. In building a relationship with a policymaker, you can also invite them to a site visit or community event to see the health department in action.

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 further or hinder your work. For example, you could describe how a loan repayment program could improve recruitment and retention of experts to your department, 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 engaged in education and advocacy, not lobbying.** All persons and organizations may conduct educational meetings, prepare and distribute educational materials, or otherwise consider public policy issues in an educational manner without jeopardizing their tax-exempt status.

These are just some examples of the information your members of Congress may not know unless you tell them, and through the non-lobbying

activities of education and advocacy, you will provide important insight for them to consider during upcoming legislative debates.

## What is Lobbying?

Lobbying is a specific activity that involves attempting to directly influence an elected or public official on a particular piece of legislation. An 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 activities. However, as described above, there is a lot of important information you can and should share with elected officials to educate them about public health in their community that does not qualify as lobbying.

## Examples of Education, Advocacy, and Lobbying Activities

Education and Advocacy (Non-Lobbying)	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.
Sharing statistics about your diabetes programs on social media, how local health departments are helping reduce diabetes rates, and how additional resources can assist your local health department to reduce diabetes rates.	Sharing a message on social media 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 of Representative 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 to 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 or a community event
- 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 their office (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 to fund the activities of those programs or agencies.



If your member of Congress does not sit on a key committee for public health, your voice still matters. All members of Congress vote on the final approval of public health legislation or funding bills. In addition, many other committees address the non-medical drivers of health (e.g., transportation,

housing, education, etc.). It is important to engage with your elected officials, no matter their committee assignments.

The below committees are particularly important for public health:

Type of Committee	Committee Name	Purpose
<b>Appropriations Committee</b>	<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 (FDA) Subcommittee – includes funding that supports tobacco, food safety, and other FDA-led efforts.</li> </ul> <p><b>Senate Appropriations Committee</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Labor/Health and Human Services/ Education Subcommittee – almost all public health funding</u></li> <li>• <u>Agriculture/Food and Drug Administration Subcommittee</u> – includes funding that supports tobacco, food safety, and other FDA-led efforts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write and pass annual spending bills that fund government programs</li> </ul>

<p><b>Authorizing Committee</b></p>	<p><b>House</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Energy and Commerce Committee</u></a> (Medicaid, Medicare Part B and D, health workforce, and discretionary public health programs)</li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Health Subcommittee</u></a></li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Ways and Means Committee</u></a> (Medicare and healthcare financing)</li> </ul> <p><b>Senate</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee</u></a> (discretionary public health issues)</li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Finance Committee</u></a> (Medicare/Medicaid)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write authorization legislation to establish, continue, or modify an agency or program</li> <li>• Do not provide (only <i>authorize</i>) funding</li> </ul>
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## 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 (7) shows when the House and Senate are scheduled to be in session at the Capitol, 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.



**CONSIDER US YOUR PORT IN A STORM**

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

**EVERY FRIDAY.  
NEWS FROM WASHINGTON.**

**NACCHO**  
National Association of County & City Health Officials

*Every Friday, NACCHO shares the latest news from Washington, DC with all of its members.*

# 2026 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	17
18	19 MLK Jr. Day	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 President's Day	17	18	19	20	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	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

## April

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

## 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 Memorial Day	26	27	28	29	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	29	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	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

## 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	5
6	7 Labor Day	8	9	10	11 Rosh Hashana (begins)	12
13 Rosh Hashana (ends)	14	15	16	17	18	19
20 Yom Kippur (begins)	21 Yom Kippur (ends)	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

## October

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

## December

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

Sources: Offices of House Majority Leader Steve Scalise and Senate Majority Leader John Thune  
Chris Hale/CQ Roll Call

Updated 11/19/25

## 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](#), a weekly e-newsletter with relevant news and resources.

NACCHO engages in each step of the following process and often engages its Congressional Action Network at critical decision points. You can sign up for those alerts on [naccho.org](#).

Date	Process	What You Can Do
First Monday in February (this deadline has been rarely met in recent years)	President submits the Administration’s Budget Request to Congress for new fiscal year beginning on October 1. The Budget Request is non-binding and represents the administration’s priorities for the upcoming fiscal year.	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.”  For example, CDC budget documents are available at <a href="https://www.cdc.gov/budget/congressional-justification/index.html">https://www.cdc.gov/budget/congressional-justification/index.html</a>
January–March/April	Congressional offices develop their appropriations priorities. Members will submit their individual request letters to each of the <a href="#">12 Appropriations Subcommittees</a> ; 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.

May–July	House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees and full Committees debate, amend (or “mark up”), and vote on spending bills.	Contact members of the Subcommittees and the full Committees prior to markups and votes 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 until a new deadline in order to complete negotiations.	Urge Congress to pass funding bills with strong public health funding levels as soon as possible.
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.	Urge Congress to pass funding bills with strong public health funding levels 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)
- Your 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 and ask for the scheduler. 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 identify which of these priorities impact you the most and connect the federal request back to the work being done locally. NACCHO Government Affairs can also help you develop other talking points and policy 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 or join a community event 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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