



National Association of County & City Health Officials

The National Connection for Local Public Health

Public Health Is Local: A Step-by-Step Guide to Taking In-District Educational Meetings with Your Members of Congress

With significant funding and policy changes being considered in Washington, D.C. that will impact communities around the country, it is now more important than ever for your federal elected officials to hear from you to better understand the work that local health departments do in their districts.

This toolkit will help you schedule and prepare for a meeting at a nearby district congressional office to educate federal policymakers on the ways that recent and proposed changes are impacting local public health services in the communities that they represent.

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How to Schedule a Meeting

Find your members of Congress by address on Congress.gov using this link:

[Find Your Members in the U.S. Congress | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#)

Once you find your members and their office contact information, there are two simple steps to request a meeting:

1. Call the office and ask the individual who answers the phone (likely a staff assistant or receptionist) for the full name and email address for the member's **District Scheduler**. Members of Congress usually have two schedulers—one for when they are in Washington, D.C., and one for when they are back in the State/District.
2. After you receive the staffer's contact information, send a short email to them directly requesting a meeting. You can use the following sample email as a template, but please remember to personalize your message.

Please contact NACCHO Government Affairs with any questions at govtaffairs@naccho.org.

Suggested Meeting Request Template:

To: staffer@email.gov

Subject: Meeting Request for Week of [date that corresponds with your request]

Hi [Name],

My name is [your name] and I work as [title] at [health department]. I am requesting the opportunity to meet with [Senator/Representative] [Last Name] to discuss the public health programs and services that are being provided in the district. We would like to conduct this meeting in person if schedules allow.

The meeting would be attended by me [and other relevant individuals as applicable]. Below please find a list of dates and times our group is available to meet. Does [Senator/Representative] [Last Name] have any availability during these times?

[Dates/Times]

I am also available to meet with staff if the [Senator/Representative] is not available.

Thank you for considering this request. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

Prepare Your Materials

Below you will find talking points that NACCHO has prepared to help guide your meeting. We have also put together a [one-pager](#) that you can use to prepare and leave behind with the offices you meet with to help them understand the vital role of local health departments. We encourage you to spend a few moments reviewing these talking points and printing any materials you wish to bring to the meeting.

Talking Points

Let Congress Know Public Health is Local

NACCHO encourages local health departments to reach out to their federal elected officials during District Work Periods, and we are providing support every step of the way. #PublicHealthIsLocal participants can use these talking points to guide their conversations with their elected officials during Congressional recess.

Pro Tip: Research your elected officials to learn more about their priorities. This can help inform your messaging approach and connect your health department's activities you're your official's top concerns.

Introduction

- My name is [name], and I am [title] at [health department]. Thank you for meeting with me.
- I wanted to provide an update on our work and discuss how federal programs are critical to the work my local health department does in our community.

The Role of Local Health Departments

- Local health departments like mine are on the front lines of ensuring the health security of our communities.
- Public health serves the whole community and focuses on primary prevention. This can be the difference between preventing negative outcomes from ever occurring versus catching it later when it is more costly and dangerous.
- Local health departments use federal investments to provide services to families, protect schools, and prevent costly emergencies. Our health department is uniquely positioned to address the needs of our community, leveraging close partnerships and data gathered through Community Needs Health Assessments.
- We coordinate with law enforcement, emergency management, and health care providers to protect lives and support our local economy. **[Adjust as applicable.]**

- Moreover, they work each day to make their region healthier and more resilient before a crisis, by:
 - Reducing the costly impact of chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes;
 - Preventing, preparing for, and responding to infectious disease outbreaks;
 - Protecting our children from environmental hazards such as lead in drinking water and homes;
 - Addressing the ongoing opioid epidemic and providing maternal & child health services, including administering WIC.
- Across all these activities, we utilize data to ensure public health & health care activities in our community are effective, efficient, and focused on the people that need it most.
- As local leaders, we work to address the unique challenges facing our community to improve quality of life and ensure economic productivity, while helping to achieve national health priorities.
- For example: **[Insert specific initiatives that your health department is working on that may resonate with your elected officials' priorities. How are programs and services improving the health of the community? Who are they reaching?]**
- **[Insert specific public health success or challenges to your community and how federal funding has supported addressing those challenges or achieving successes.]**

Federal Funding for Public Health

- Federal funds are an important part of our local health department budget. **[Insert information on the proportion of federal funds your department receives/received.]**
- Federal dollars help us do what we do best, protect our community through prevention and early intervention with targeted, efficient solutions.
- Approximately 80% of CDC's budget goes out the door to support local and state health departments. These funds support our nation's public health capacity and promote chronic disease prevention from the ground up. CDC also has important technical expertise, runs key data systems, and operates critical laboratory functions that help us do our work back home.
- My health department uses funding from the federal government to carry out some of our most important programs, including: **[Insert specifics to your health department the types of federal funds that are used to provide community**

services. How would your health department be impacted if those funds went away? Provide as many specific examples and details as possible.]

- Recently, there's been uncertainty around current and future funding for public health programs, and this makes it difficult to conduct work on the ground, including unexpected funding claw backs of pandemic era funds that were already obligated to health departments, and the end of congressionally-appropriated funding to help people quit smoking.
- **[If you have been impacted by the OMB Federal Funding Freeze (February), Stop Work Orders related to pandemic-era supplemental funds (March), or having trouble drawing down funds due to the Defend the Spend Issue, let your elected official know how that has impacted your health department's ability to carry out work.]**
 - **Provide examples of how programs and services have been impacted (delays, layoffs, confusions, cuts to services, etc.)**
- Federal agencies including [HRSA](#), [SAMHSA](#), and [ASPR](#) also provide important funding and resources that support local health departments.
- I am concerned about the long-term impacts of cuts on our public health infrastructure, which would have a significant impact on our ability to monitor and defend against infectious disease, battle opioid and mental health epidemics, and deliver high-quality care to veterans, seniors, and other community members.
- My health department remains committed to serving our community as best we can, and federal support is key to our ability to improve quality of life and ensure economic productivity, while helping to achieve national health priorities.

Suggested Questions:

- What are your priorities for public health?
- How can we help you achieve those goals?
- If programs are shifted or cut, how can we work together to ensure that the connections with and support for local health departments are maintained?

Tips for Communicating with Policymakers

- **Be on time.** If you are running late, please call the office to let them know.
- **Be flexible.** Congressional schedules are constantly in flux, and the time, location, and who you're meeting with may change day-of.
- **Research your legislator ahead of time.** Learn if they sit on any key committees and if they share any of your priorities.

- **Practice your key points and asks.** If you're part of a group, try to coordinate who will say what.
- **Be clear, concise, and efficient.** Members of Congress and their staff have very busy schedules. Try to keep your presentation to 10-15 minutes. Focus on the information they need to help you.
- **Use examples from home.** You are the on-the-ground expert! Help your legislators understand how the policy they make impacts you and your community by offering concrete examples.
- **Speak in plain language, avoid jargon, provide background.** Legislators and their staff are policy generalists and may not have deep knowledge of public health. Avoid jargon and acronyms and include necessary background for them to understand your policy priorities.
- **Offer yourself as a resource.** Congress will consider issues that impact local public health throughout the year that you won't touch on in your first meeting. Share your contact information and encourage them to reach out to you.
- **Be respectful.** You may disagree with the legislator on some or all of the issues that matter to you, but arguing or antagonizing will not be productive. Be respectful and make your argument in an engaging and persuasive way.
- **Do not talk politics.** When meeting with a member of Congress or staff in their "official" capacity (i.e., not specifically at a campaign event), discussion should stay within the bounds of their official duties as a member of Congress. You should not bring up elections, whether or not you voted for them, or campaign contributions.
- **Have fun and be confident.** 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!

Let Us Know How It Went

How did your meeting go? Let us know so we can track your great work and follow up with offices if necessary. Please use [this survey](#) to report key takeaways back to us.

Congressional Schedule

Members of Congress work year-round, so the importance of engaging with these lawmakers never stops. Congressional recesses, also known as district work periods,

happen regularly throughout the year and provide you with an opportunity to engage directly with lawmakers without flying to Washington, D.C. These in-district meetings can go a long way toward building strong relationships with your lawmakers.

You can find the remainder of the district work periods for 2025 below:

- August 4 – September 1 (House and Senate)
- September 22 – 26 (House and Senate)
- October 1 – 3 (House only)
- October 13 – 17 (Senate only)
- November 10 – 14 (House and Senate)
- November 24 – 28 (House and Senate)
- December 22 – 31 (House and Senate)

The full congressional calendar can be viewed [here](#).

Outside of scheduled recesses, your Representative may be available to meet via video conference, on weekends, or will designate district staff to attend the meeting in their stead.

For support or guidance, please reach out to NACCHO's Government Affairs team at govtaffairs@naccho.org.