

## **EDPMA'S ADVOCACY PRIMER**

We recommend that you **start your journey as an advocate by annually meeting with your U.S. Congressional delegation** – 1 representative and 2 senators – or their healthcare staff. These annual meetings will help establish a positive relationship so staff can call you with questions and you can call and ask for help when an important bill is under consideration.

**You do not need to travel to Washington, D.C to be an advocate on federal issues.**

You can schedule a meeting with federal legislators in the district or state. U.S. Senators and Congresspeople are usually home much of the month of August and for a week or more around each holiday. As a general rule, if school children are on holiday, your representatives are likely back in their home state. However, because district staff rarely handle policy, it's best to meet with your representative – and not staff – if you are meeting in the district. You may also want to reach out to legislators who represent the district or state where you work. Although you don't vote for these representatives, your work directly impacts their constituents.

If you are traveling to Washington, D.C., meeting with healthcare staff can often be as effective as meeting with the representative. In addition to your delegation's offices, you may want to meet with committee staff for the committees with jurisdiction over your issue. Committee staff are considered the experts on healthcare policy and have a great deal of influence over bill and amendment language and committee activities. Don't forget to meet with both the Republican and Democratic committee staff.

There are a large number of U.S. Congressional committees with jurisdiction over some aspect of healthcare. Often more than one committee oversees an issue. In the House, bills may be referred to more than one committee, while, in the Senate, legislation is referred to only one committee. A bill referral can be manipulated by drafting the language a certain way. In general, the following committees have primary jurisdiction over our top-tier issues:

**Medicare:** House Ways & Means (W&M), House Energy & Commerce (E&C) and Senate Finance committees

**Medicaid:** House Energy & Commerce (E&C) and Senate Finance committees

**ERISA Plans:** House Education & Labor and Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) committees,

**Other Commercial Insurance and Public Health:** House Energy and Commerce (E&C) and Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) committees, and

**Funding for Federal Health Programs:** House and Senate Appropriations committees.

Also, you can lobby members of the Administration, such as representatives of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). While members of Congress pass bills, the Administration proposes and finalizes rules that implement those laws and draft guidance to help the public comply with their rules. Note that many key decision makers for CMS are located in Baltimore, Maryland, instead of Washington, D.C.

## **How To Schedule a Meeting with Your Congressional Delegation**

1. **Identify Your Delegation:** Your Congressional delegation consists of one member of the House of Representatives and 2 senators. If you go to [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov), you will find, in the upper right corner, a place to type in your zip code. If you live in an urban area, you will likely need your 9 digit zip code. When you press “go,” you will be brought to your representative’s website. On [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov), you can search for senators by state.
2. **Request a Meeting in Writing:**

It is best to request a meeting in writing. Look for a place on the representative’s website where you can email a meeting request. You may want to title the email: **Constituent Meeting Request for [DATE]**. In your written meeting request:

  - A. **provide your address** so they know you are a constituent (otherwise they may not schedule the meeting!) and your phone number for scheduling convenience;
  - B. **describe your group’s or company’s importance** to the district or state, such as the number of patients you serve in the district/state, the number of jobs you represent, or the names of hospitals you serve;
  - C. **list all of the issues you want to discuss** so the correct staff attend the meeting; and
  - D. **specify whether you want the representative at the meeting.** If you ask to meet with your representative, it will take longer to schedule the meeting. It is often difficult to meet with your senators, so you may want to schedule a meeting with staff and explain that you hope the senator can stop by.
3. **Schedule a Meeting:** If you are scheduling a number of meetings in Washington, D.C. for the same day, keep in mind that **it takes about half an hour to walk (or taxi) from the “Senate side” of the Capitol to the “House side” (with the Capitol located in between the two)**. Meetings typically take 15 to 30 minutes. If you don’t want to feel rushed, meetings should be scheduled an hour apart. To avoid long treks back and forth, you should try to schedule your Senate meetings together and then walk over to the House side (or vice versa). Room numbers on the House side can be confusing. If there are only 3 numerals, the room is located in the Cannon House Office Building (HOB) and the first number identifies the floor. If there are 4 numerals, the first number identifies the building (Longworth HOB is building one, while Rayburn HOB is building two) and the second numeral identifies the floor.
4. **Follow-Up by Phone:** If you don’t hear from the office within 3 days of the written request for a meeting, you should follow up by phone. You can reach the Congressional switchboard at **202-224-3121** and they will transfer you to any Senate or House office you request. Then ask for the “health staffer” who you can talk to about the meeting request.
5. **Be Flexible:** Congressional staff are busy and unsure of when hearings or other commitments might be scheduled. Please do not be offended if they change the meeting time or have to pass the meeting off to a lower-level staffer.

## Outline and Tips for Congressional Meetings

1. **Arrive Early:** We recommend that you arrive at their offices 10 minutes early, especially if you are meeting with the Senator or Congressman in person. Try to call ahead if you are running late. In order to get past security for some meeting rooms, **you may need your driver's license**. Congressional meetings typically last about 15-30 minutes. Remember, the legislator may need to cancel last minute due to changing schedules or staff may need to meet with you standing up in a hallway due to limited meeting space. This is not unusual.
2. **Introductions:** When you arrive at the office, you will typically be asked for your business card which will be given to the health policy staffer. When you introduce yourself, make sure they know you are a constituent. When introducing your group or company, you should describe your importance to the district and state, such as the number of patients your group serves in the state, the number of jobs you represent, or the names of hospitals you serve. Next, if you are confident you are lobbying for a position EDPMA supports, you can say you also represent **EDPMA – a national organization serving about half of the 146 million people who visit the emergency department each year**.
3. **Set a Positive Tone:** One of the main reasons to meet with your delegation is to establish a positive relationship so you can pick up the phone and call them when you need help in the future. If possible, set the tone by thanking the Congressperson or Senator for a recent action or vote. **This is not the time to mention whether you voted for them or contributed to their reelection campaign**. Keep in mind that you are asking them for a favor, so you also don't want to be rude or focus on problematic votes that are not likely to be brought up again for a vote.
4. **Provide Them with One-Page Issue Briefs** that summarize the issue and your request for help. **EDPMA has numerous one-pagers on a wide variety of issues** in the toolboxes on the EDPMA website. Feel free to reach out to EDPMA staff for assistance identifying the best written materials to leave behind with your legislator. Avoid using terminology that they may not understand. Healthcare reimbursement is a very complicated topic and members and staff often need help understanding the meaning of certain words and politically-loaded terms.
5. **Ask for Specific Help:** The majority of the meeting may be spent educating them on the issues. But, **don't forget to clearly ask them to do something for you**, such as opposing, sponsoring or amending a bill or weighing in with Congressional leadership, committee leadership, or the Administration on an issue.
6. **It's OK if You Can't Answer a Question.** If you are asked a question and you are not sure of the answer, it is best to tell them that you are not sure and will get back to them with an answer after the meeting. When you email the staff a thank you note, you can provide your answer – and any other helpful information that supports your position. **Answering questions after the meeting is a great excuse to reach back out** to staff and continue the relationship. It can work to your advantage to delay providing an answer.
7. **Gain Intelligence:** The meeting is a great way to learn from them whether Congress is likely to be active on the issue and who is taking the lead on certain positions.
8. **Follow Up:** Schedule a time when you can follow up with the staffer to find out if the Congressperson will follow through on your request. This will ensure that the staffer takes the time to discuss the meeting with the member of Congress and has a formal answer to your request in a reasonable amount of time. For example, you can ask, "Can I call you in two weeks to find out the Congressman's position." **And don't forget to send a thank you note via email along with helpful documents like issue briefs, charts, studies, and the like.**

## How Does State Advocacy Differ from Federal Advocacy?

**What are the Main Differences?** Although each state legislature has different rules and schedules, the tips for federal advocacy typically work in the state arena. However, many states take pride in being the antithesis of “the D.C. process.” Where the federal process is slow and moves at a glacial pace, state governments can move like wildfires that burn quickly and get extinguished just as quickly. It’s important to remember that state governments are often more local than political. Many state legislators vote their “area of the state” as opposed to along partisan lines (i.e. rural vs urban, suburban vs metro, north vs south, east vs west, etc).

**Identifying Your Legislator:** Every state has a website where you can find your state House/Assembly member or Senator using your home address. Here is a [link](#) to a document with website addresses for each state legislature. Additionally, these websites are very useful in finding legislation, committee assignments, meeting notices, important legislative deadlines, etc. Some state transparency laws require legislators to list their private phone and email addresses along with work addresses, so, if available, use them.

**When to Schedule a Meeting:** Schedule a meeting with your legislator during the Summer or early Fall (September, October and November). Most state legislatures start in January and meet for a set period of time (i.e. 40, 60, 120 days), but there are a few state legislatures that begin in February, March, and April. It’s important to note that a few legislatures meet year round while others meet every two years. Having an introductory meeting with a state legislator during a busy legislative session can lead to rushed meetings where members have to balance voting, committee hearings and other meeting requests. Be sure to meet with them before session begins and use meetings during the legislative session to advocate on specific legislative changes. If you have problems reaching state legislators at their Capitol office, try contacting them at their district office.

**Staff for State Legislators:** Members of the U.S. Congress have more staff than state legislators. Staffers often handle a wide variety of issues. State staff are usually familiar with the issues, but are not experts. The number of staff assigned to a legislator varies by state and depends on seniority, committee assignments, and whether they are in a leadership position.

**Committees:** While committee titles and jurisdiction differ by state, here are common titles of the committees with primary jurisdiction over our issues:

**Medicaid** and other **provider scope of practice** issues will usually go through healthcare committees assigned to cover health, human, or social service issues.

**Funding for Medicaid** usually goes through the appropriations, finance or budget committees.

**Healthcare insurance** will likely go through insurance, business and commerce, consumer affairs, or banking and financial institution committees.

**Tort reform** will usually go through judiciary, legal, consumer or public safety committees.

In some states where the sponsor of the bill has seniority and is a chair of a committee, the chair may request that the Speaker or Senate President assign the legislation to their committee.