

The Power of Advocacy

The American Public Health Association's mission is to create the healthiest nation in one generation. We need your voice to build strong public support and influence Congress to help us meet this challenge.

Why Advocate? The time to be an advocate for public health is *now*. Public health is discussed in various capacities *every day* on Capitol Hill, in the White House and federal agencies and by state and local decision-makers. Without the voice of those who possess both expertise and experience in public health, legislation, regulations and other policy decisions may not reflect what is best for the public's health.

The beauty of our democratic system is that *all* citizens have the right to advocate. As a constituent, you are an indispensable part of our democratic system, and your advocacy is an important mechanism to influence Congress and its actions. Being an advocate can have far-reaching positive impacts on the public's health by providing policymakers with the information they need to make decisions and, in turn, influence legislation.

While the legislative process can be long and complex, effective advocacy does not have to be. Advocates with public health expertise are vital to the process and can help shape and improve legislative proposals. Through meeting with your members of Congress, writing letters and sending emails, you have the ability to educate your elected officials about the importance of public health and encourage elected officials to incorporate health considerations into their decisions across all policy areas. Also, for members of Congress who already are supportive of public health, your advocacy presents an opportunity to transform supporters into even more vocal public health champions.

Citizens are more powerful than they realize when it comes to influencing members of Congress. A study conducted by the Congressional Management Foundation discovered constituent visits to the Washington, D.C., office (97%) and to the district/state office (94%) have "some" or "a lot" of influence on an undecided member of Congress.

Policymakers themselves express the same reverence to constituent advocacy:

"Every policy issue goes through three stages: education, activation and implementation. Congress is a stimulus response institution. And there is nothing more stimulating than having hundreds of public health professionals, families and caregivers meeting with you about an important issue. Advocates have played an integral role in getting politicians to understand public health issues and getting lawmakers motivated to act. It is these grassroots efforts that have helped us achieve increased funding for health research and surveillance, increased healthcare coverage and quick responses to the most important public health threats of our time."

—Sen. Edward Markey, Massachusetts

Educating your members of Congress about the latest information in the world of public health is critical to ensuring that health-related legislation is based on the most rigorous and current scientific evidence. Additionally, your persistence in continually educating members of Congress on the importance of public health programs can help to ensure the continuation and growth of public health programs.

Advocacy efforts extend beyond interacting with your members of Congress. To amplify your message and build greater public support, you can help by educating the public about the important role public health plays in improving their lives. This education can take place in the form of conversations with family, friends and colleagues about public health issues and the importance of advocacy. You also can use your social media platforms or submit op-eds and letters to the editor to your local newspapers to highlight key public health issues and priorities.