



MINNESOTA
MEDICAL
ASSOCIATION

A PHYSICIAN'S
GUIDE TO



Legislative Advocacy

Democracy does not work in a vacuum; it needs citizen participation.

As a physician, you play a unique role because you represent both the citizenry and a highly respected profession. Lawmakers will pay particular attention to you because you can provide them with a front-line perspective on health-care issues.

Legislators must make decisions about a number of critical health-related issues — while protecting the health of the public. **You can help them make a difference.**



WHAT IS legislative advocacy?

“
When it comes to matters of health and medicine, you are the expert. Lawmakers don't need to know everything you know about a particular issue. **What's important is that they know enough to take action.**”

For the MMA, it's about protecting the best interests of Minnesota physicians and their patients through lobbying efforts, be it in person, by email, by phone or through social media.

Following are some basic elements that will help you feel more comfortable and be more successful when dealing with lawmakers.

ELEMENT 1: Know your audience

A critical part of communicating effectively involves understanding your target audience. Get to know the lawmakers you want to influence. Find out what you can about their record, history, likes, dislikes, etc. By doing your homework, you can begin building a relationship and help your legislator make good decisions. If they have no background in medicine, adjust your message for a layperson. If they are well-versed in health care issues, then adjust accordingly.

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What's important is that they know enough to take action. Keep in mind that lawmakers are often guided by these questions:

- **Is this the right thing to do?**
- **How does this affect my district** and my constituents?
- How much will it cost and **who will pay for it?**
- If you are for something, **who will be against it?**
- Does anyone in their district **know or care** about this issue?

Once you know what motivates a lawmaker, it's important to build and maintain a relationship with him or her. You can do this in several ways:

- **If you belong to the same organizations, attend the same church/mosque/synagogue or have children in the same school, you have a natural bond.** Use this to your advantage.
- **Attend your legislator's events and town-hall meetings.** Ask to be added to his or her mailing or email list to learn of upcoming events.
- **Communicate with your legislator often and offer to help.** Lawmakers often only hear from constituents right before a scheduled vote. Maintain contact throughout the year.





ELEMENT 2: Prepare your message

Before you contact your legislator, you need to be ready with your message. Make sure your messaging pertains to the lawmaker and his or her constituents. Work with the MMA staff to learn the MMA's legislative priorities. Read our Issue Briefs and become familiar and comfortable with each talking point.

When you address your legislators refer to them as:

- **Senator**, if he or she is a member of the Senate, or **Representative**, if he or she is a member of the House of Representatives. **Do not** refer to them as Congressman, Congresswoman or Congressperson.
- **Treat them with respect**, even if you disagree on an issue. Many issues come before the Legislature. You may not agree with your lawmaker on one issue today, but you may on another in the future, so keep the lines of communication open.
- **Be concise but avoid one-word answers.** Use short sentences, active verbs and simple language. Avoid jargon (for example: say “heart attack” instead of “myocardial infarction.”) Practice your talking points ahead of time so you feel comfortable discussing them.

- **Tell stories.** Use stories about your practice and how an issue affects patients to make your point. The more genuine you are, the more the lawmaker will care about what you have to say.
- **Provide concrete examples.** Back up generalizations with specifics, examples, statistics or facts.
- **Always say “thank you”** when it's over.

ELEMENT 3: Deliver your message

There are a number of ways to reach out to lawmakers. Some are more effective than others depending on the lawmaker's personal preference. Regardless of which one you use, keep in mind the messaging tips mentioned previously.

Personal Meeting

Normally, an in-person meeting with your elected official is the best way to establish and strengthen a relationship. During a pandemic, it's not prudent. Perhaps, you can suggest a Zoom call or some other format to meet remotely.



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Be sure to thank
your elected official
for their time.



MEDPAC is the MMA's political action committee. To influence the debate in St. Paul, physicians must be engaged on the campaign trail. MEDPAC works to elect candidates who support our policy positions. MEDPAC:

- Endorses pro-medicine candidates for state office
- Contributes to the campaigns of endorsed candidates
- Generates grassroots action
- Recommends candidates for national office to AM-PAC, the AMA's political action committee

Learn more about MEDPAC at www.mnmed.org/MEDPAC.



3433 Broadway Street NE
Suite 187
Minneapolis, MN 55413
PHONE: 612-378-1875
TOLL-FREE: 800-342-5662
FAX: 612-378-3875
EMAIL: mma@mnmed.org
WEB: www.mnmed.org

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Emailing

Email can be an effective way to communicate with lawmakers if you already have a relationship with them.

Calling

Making a phone call to your elected official is quick, easy and can be done at a moment's notice.

Writing

Writing a letter to your legislator allows you to give more information than a phone call, and often has a greater impact than an email. Consider following up on your letter with a phone call or a visit.

ELEMENT 4: Follow up

Report back to the MMA and let staff know how your meeting went.

Send your legislator an email to say thanks for his/her time. This provides you another opportunity to make your case.

Contribute to MEDPAC and the legislators who you support.

Thank you!

We appreciate your interest and willingness to become active in legislative advocacy. Be assured that the MMA is committed to making your involvement as easy as possible. Let us know how we can help you succeed in your efforts. Take advantage of the MMA's legislative connections — either through our annual Physicians' Day at the Capitol, Action Alerts, or District Dialogues.

MMA Legislative Staff



Dave Renner

Director of Advocacy

EMAIL: drenner@mnmed.org

CELL: 612-518-3437



Chad Fahning

Manager of State Legislative Affairs

EMAIL: cfahning@mnmed.org

CELL: 651-890-7466