



# ***APHA Health Reform Fall Advocacy Toolkit***

## ***Public Health ACTION (PHACT) Campaign***



American  
Public Health  
Association

*Protect, Prevent, Live Well*  
[www.apha.org](http://www.apha.org)

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# Introduction

Dear Advocates,

As Congress and the Obama administration work to reform our nation's health system, we must think broadly about how to improve the health of our nation. Since the early 1900s, APHA has vigorously promoted the need for universal coverage for health care. This is a first essential step to achieve that end. However, to optimize our nation's health, we must do more. We must ensure the social and economic conditions that allow individuals and communities to be healthy. Shifting from a focus on treating illness, to providing community-based health promotion and preventive health services, will measurably improve health and control costs. Unfortunately, many of our federal policymakers are unaware of the role public health must play in improving our nation's health system.

The purpose of this toolkit is to raise awareness of public health's critical role in ensuring a healthy America. It includes information and resources on different strategies for engaging in grassroots advocacy to educate members of Congress and the new administration on the most critical changes we must make to improve the public's health. These priorities are the APHA Agenda for Health Reform and are based on longstanding APHA policies and the best current evidence.

APHA members and state affiliates are especially encouraged to use and disseminate the toolkit. We also hope it serves as a resource for organizations, community-leaders and individuals. Thank you for helping us to accomplish our goals. Each voice heard, each story shared is another step in the right direction.

Georges C. Benjamin, MD, FACP, FACEP (Emeritus)  
APHA Executive Director

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*The American Public Health Association (APHA) is the oldest and most diverse organization of public health professionals in the world. Founded in 1872, the Association represents a broad array of health providers, educators, environmentalists, policymakers and health officials working at all levels both within and outside of government. APHA aims to protect all Americans and their communities from preventable, serious health threats and strives to assure community-based health promotion and disease prevention activities and preventive health services are universally accessible in the United States.*

# APHA 2009

## AGENDA FOR HEALTH REFORM

All of the forms of advocacy discussed in this toolkit are effective ways for constituents to communicate to policymakers the needs and concerns of their communities. No matter the strategy, incorporate the following key recommendations from the APHA Agenda for Health Reform into your communications to promote the inclusion of public health in health reform legislation.

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### Support Population-Based Services That Improve Health

POPULATION BASED PROGRAMS deliver resources to the whole community and are proven to realize a more positive health impact than do individual interventions alone. These programs can target root causes of disease, disability and health disparities and can help achieve increased value for our health dollar.

- ◆ **Invest in population-based and community-based prevention, education and outreach programs that have** been proven to prevent disease and injury and improve the social determinants of health. Population-based programs deliver resources to the whole community and are proven to realize a more positive health impact than do individual interventions alone. These programs can target root causes of disease, disability and health disparities and can help achieve increased value for our health dollar.
- ◆ **Address the chronic underfunding of the nation's public health system.** Health reform must provide adequate and sustainable funding to address the growing demand placed on the federal, state and local public health agencies that protect and promote the nation's health. These include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and other federal public health agencies along with state and local health departments.
- ◆ **Account for the real cost savings and cost avoidance of preventive and early intervention services at the individual and community levels through more accurate fiscal scoring methods.** The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) should be directed to develop and implement methods to more accurately score the costs savings associated with community-based and other prevention programs.
- ◆ **Develop, expand and monitor programs to reduce disparities in health.** Persistent health inequities and disparities mean that millions of Americans suffer from a disproportionately high burden of disease, disability and premature death. These disparities also impose an unacceptable fiscal cost. Supporting programs and system changes that have potential to address and eliminate these disparities during health reform offers an opportunity to significantly reduce costs and improve the health of these populations.

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## AGENDA FOR HEALTH REFORM

- ◆ **Require methods to assess the impact federal policies and programs have on public health.** Health is intricately tied to community design and directly affected by policies and programs across various sectors, including housing, transportation, environment, land use, agriculture, labor, education, trade and the economy. Therefore, health reform legislation should require a health impact assessment for all new federal policies and programs.
- ◆ **Establish health goals and outcomes and require an annual “State of the Nation’s Health” report to hold ourselves accountable.** Require an annual report to the nation that holds the system accountable for achieving agreed upon health

goals and outcomes. The federal government should develop appropriate standardized measures and health status indicators, along with methods for collecting, reporting and analyzing such data. Key federal agencies like the National Center for Health Statistics and state entities such as vital statistics departments should be adequately supported to do this work. Additionally, the report should include data by patient demographic factors such as race and ethnicity, age, gender, primary language, socio-economic position, geographic location and health literacy.

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## Reform Health Care Coverage and Delivery

WE MUST ENSURE coverage for quality, affordable health care for all. This means covering the over 46 million uninsured, and improving the quality and safety of the health care system, including building a modern health information infrastructure.

- ◆ **Comprehensive health care coverage for all.** All people living in this country should have comprehensive benefits, including evidence-based clinical preventive services, management of chronic diseases and conditions, behavioral health, dental and vision care, and reproductive health services, without restrictions in coverage due to pre-existing conditions.
- ◆ **Strong public programs.** Public programs serve vital functions in our health system. Safety net programs such as public health clinics and Veterans Administration health services provide direct services for particular populations that cannot be replaced by private providers. As people move from the rolls of the underinsured and uninsured, we must strengthen funding for these public programs to assure that patients do not fall

through the cracks. In addition, strengthening and expanding public insurance programs such as Medicare, Medicaid and CHIP builds on what works best in our system. As a starting point, Medicare, which is consistently scored as the most efficient insurance program for health coverage, should be expanded as a coverage option for all.

- ◆ **Access to affordable and high-quality health care for all.** Health reform must strengthen the health service delivery system to ensure access to timely, appropriate, culturally competent and affordable high quality health care services, and create an equitable distribution of resources nationwide. A fundamental shift in reimbursement and other policies that promote primary care is also required to ensure individuals are given

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the best opportunity for disease prevention or treatment at the earliest opportunity. A continued investment in health information technology that promotes achieving care of the highest quality, safety and efficiency is required.

- ◆ **First dollar support for evidence-based clinical preventive services.** Clinical preventive services are critical for long-term health and wellness. There are clear data indicating which clinical preventive services are most effective, but barriers still exist to providing and accessing these services. High priority, age appropriate, evidence-based clinical preventive services must be provided with no co-pays or co-insurance in all public and private health insurance programs.
- ◆ **Expand the public health and primary care workforce.** Health reform legislation must significantly increase support and funding for programs that provide loan repayments, scholarships and other grants for the training of public health personnel, primary care physicians, nurses and other health providers. It must also improve the distribution and diversity of health professionals in medically underserved communities, as well as ensure there is a capable health work force able to provide care for all Americans and respond to the growing demands of our aging and increasingly diverse population.

## *The Public Plan*

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**1. All individuals and families should be eligible for the public plan, regardless of income.**

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**2. The public plan must be affordable to consumers.** Affordability means the costs to consumers including any premium, copayments, or out of pocket costs are reasonable.

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**3. The public plan should serve as a model that shifts the emphasis of health systems from acute medical care toward prevention and wellness by:**

- ◆ Enhanced provider payments for prevention and early intervention
  - ◆ First dollar coverage of clinical preventive health services
  - ◆ Moving to outcome based reimbursement payments
  - ◆ Requiring the use of health information technology (IT)
  - ◆ Requiring linkage to the nation's public health system
  - ◆ Using proven population based strategies at the provider, health plan and community level
- 

**4. Coverage should at a minimum use the actuarial equivalent of the Federal Employees Health Benefit Plan standard option benefit package and should include the following public health services:**

- ◆ Evidence-based clinical preventive services
  - ◆ Behavioral health services
  - ◆ Dental & vision care
  - ◆ Reproductive health services
  - ◆ Disease management
- 

**5. The public plan should ensure the inclusion of the current network of safety net providers.**

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**6. The public plan's practices and policies should serve as a model for affordability for other health plans within the existing health system.** This should be reflected in setting provider payments, which should also be adequate enough to ensure patient access to providers. The plan must be organized and governed to be administratively efficient, keeping administrative costs low consistent with other public programs.



## Calling Your Policymaker

*A phone call to your policymakers or their staff is an effective way of influencing legislation. Legislators regularly ask their staff to report on the opinions of constituents calling the office and often keep track of the numbers of constituents weighing in on either side of a particular issue.*

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To call your Congressional Representative or Senator's Washington, DC office, call the **U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121** and ask for the office of Representative/Senator \_\_\_\_\_. You can also call his/her state or district office(s).

### Sample Phone Script

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a constituent and public health advocate in your [ **state/ congressional district** ].

I am calling today as a constituent and advocate on behalf of the American Public Health Association to urge Senator/ Representative \_\_\_\_\_ to ensure that any legislation to reform our nation's health system includes strong public health provisions, including population-based and community-based prevention, education and outreach programs as well as a public insurance option. We must change the emphasis of our health system from one that focuses on treating people after they get sick to one that helps people stay healthy in the first place and must ensure access to comprehensive, affordable and high-quality health care for all.

Thank you for your attention to my request and I look forward to hearing Senator/Representative \_\_\_\_\_'s position on public health in health reform.

[ **Leave your name, home address and phone number so the office can follow up with you at a later time.** ]



# Writing to your Policymakers

*Writing a letter to your Senators and Representative can be very effective in influencing health reform legislation and expressing the importance of including strong public health provision to you, your community and your state in more detail than a call to your policymaker's office may allow.*

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## Tips for Writing to your Policymakers

- **Emailing or faxing** your letter is the best way to ensure timely delivery as U.S. mail can often take weeks to arrive due to security.
- **Accuracy and attention to detail.** Be sure to use the proper form of address and correct spelling of the policymaker. Be sure that your facts and assertions are accurate.
- **Use organization's letterhead** whenever possible.
- **Identify yourself as a constituent.**
- **Identify yourself as a public health professional.** If applicable, provide your official title and any professional degrees following your signature.
- **State your purpose for writing in the opening statement.**
- **Keep the letter succinct.** One page letters are ideal, try to avoid acronyms, jargon, or technical terms.
- **Concentrate on a single issue.** Letters should cover only one topic or bill and be timed to arrive while the issue is alive.
- **Correctly identify the legislation.** If you are writing about a specific bill, remember to describe it by its official title and number, as well as by its popular name.
- **Tell your legislator how the issue would affect you and the rest of his/her constituents.** Your own personal experience and district-specific information are the best supporting evidence. In addition, data and research supporting your position is important.
- **Ask your policymaker for his/her position on the issue.** Indicate that you look forward to hearing from him/her on this issue.
- **Praise, Praise, Praise.** If your legislator pleases you by supporting a public health issue, write and tell him/her so.



## Sample Letter

September \_\_\_\_\_, 2009

The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_

United States Senate/ U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20510 (Senate)/ 20515 (House) **[or district office address]**

Dear Senator/ Representative \_\_\_\_\_,

As a constituent and American Public Health Association advocate, I am writing to urge you to ensure any legislation to reform our nation's health system provides universal coverage for health care such as a public insurance option and include strong public health provisions, such as population-based and community-based prevention, education and outreach programs. I believe that we must change the emphasis of our health system from one that focuses on treating people after they get sick to one that helps people stay healthy in the first place.

### **Specifically, health reform legislation should:**

- Invest in population-based and community-based prevention, education and outreach programs,
- Maintain support for existing public programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, SCHIP, Veterans Health Administration,
- Assure consumer choice and competition by providing a strong public plan option for insurance coverage,
- Develop, expand and monitor programs to reduce disparities in health,
- Expand the public health and primary care workforce.
- Require methods to assess the impact federal policies and programs have on public health,
- Establish health goals and outcomes and require an annual "State of the Nation's Health" report to hold ourselves accountable, and
- Ensure access to comprehensive, affordable and high-quality health care for all,

We urge you to work to ensure that these key provisions are considered as Congress moves forward this fall with efforts to reform our nation's health system. Thank you for your attention to my request and I look forward to hearing your position on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

**[ Name ]**

**[ Home address ]**

**[ Telephone number ]**

**[ Email address ]**

You can also send specific health reform request letters to your Members of Congress electronically through APHA's website at <http://action.apha.org/site/PageNavigator/Advocacy>.



# Meeting with Your Policymaker

One of the most effective ways to influence the policymaking process and make a lasting connection is to visit with your Senators and Representative, or their staff, in person.

## Tips for Arranging a Meeting

- **Call or fax to request an appointment.** If you want to meet with your legislator in the district, send the request to the district office. If you will be visiting the Capitol, send the letter to the Washington, DC office. Congressional member websites often have online submission appointment requests available.
- **Follow up by phone.** Do not hesitate to call the office if you do not receive a response to your initial request.
- **Be sure to identify yourself as a constituent** Include information about who you are, the nature of your visit (identify what you want to discuss), when you would like to meet, and the names of any friends or colleagues who may accompany you.
- **Call or email to confirm the appointment.**

## Sample Request for an Appointment

September \_\_\_\_\_, 2009

The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_

Attention: Scheduler

Dear Senator/ Representative \_\_\_\_\_,

As a constituent and public health professional, I am writing to request an appointment with **[Senator/ Representative]** \_\_\_\_\_ in **[ name of town where nearest district office is ]** on **[ insert date and times available ]** to discuss public health in health reform legislation.

As a member of the American Public Health Association, I am concerned that legislation to reform our nation's health system might fail to include strong public health provisions. I believe that we must change the emphasis of our health system from one that focuses on treating people after they get sick to one that helps people stay healthy in the first place.

Please contact me to let me know when you might be available to meet. I will follow up with you in the next week by phone. Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

**[Name]**

**[Home address]**

**[Telephone number]**

**[Email address]**



## ***Tips for Conducting a Meeting with Your Policymaker***

- **Arrive on time.** If meeting with a staff member, be sure you have the correct contact name. Do not underestimate the power of the staff person in helping to shape the policymaker's opinions and positions on issues or a particular piece of legislation.
- **Bring two or three colleagues with you.** Prior to the meeting, you should agree on what points will be made and which one each of you will discuss.
- **Try to deliver your message in three minutes.** Be sure to introduce yourself and your colleagues and explain why you are concerned about the issue and why you have expertise regarding the issue. Be concise, polite, and professional.
- **Be prepared** to answer questions. When asked what you want, clearly explain.
- **Be a resource for the policymaker and his/her staff.** Offer your time and assistance if he/she wants to talk about your areas of interest and expertise in the future.
- **Provide material to support your position.** Leave behind a business card and a one-page fact sheet summarizing your position.
- **Follow up with a thank you letter.** Be sure to include any additional information you may have promised or that may be relevant to the issue.



## ***Do's and Don'ts for Meeting with your Members of Congress:***

### **Do**

- Learn the committee assignments of your members of Congress.
- Present the need for what you're asking the member of Congress to do using data or cases.
- Relate situations in his/her home state or district.
- Ask the Policymaker's position and why.
- Show openness to the knowledge of counterarguments and respond to them.
- Admit you don't know. Offer to find the answer and send information back to the office.
- Spend time with members whose position is against yours.
- Spend time in developing relationships with Congressional staff.
- Thank them for stands the member has taken which you support.

### **DON'T**

- Overload the meeting with too many issues.
- Confront, threaten, pressure or beg.
- Be argumentative.
- Overstate the case.
- Expect members of Congress to be specialists.
- Be put off by smokescreens or long-winded answers.
- Make promises you can't deliver.
- Be afraid to take a stand on the issues.
- Shy away from meetings with legislators with known views opposite your own.
- Be offended if a legislator is unable to meet and requests that you meet with his/her staff.



# Media Advocacy

*Writing a letter to the editor for your local newspaper or other media outlet is a great advocacy tool and helps create awareness of the importance of public health in health reform.*

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## **Tips for Getting a Letter to the Editor Published**

- **Be brief and concise.** Focus your letter on just one concept or idea. Limit yourself to 150-200 words.
- **Refer to other stories.** If possible, refer to other articles, editorials or letters the newspaper has recently published. This should be done as soon as possible after the article was published. This will increase its chances of being printed.
- **Include contact information.** Include your name, address and daytime and home phone number so the paper can contact you with any questions. Also, include any titles and degrees that are relevant to help the media know you have expertise. And make sure to refer to your organization in your letter.

## **Sample Letter to the Editor**

Dear Editor:

As Congress and the Obama administration work to reform our nation's health system, we must think broadly about how to improve the health of our nation.

Bills that have been passed by the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee and the House Energy and Commerce Committee contain important funding for community-based and clinical prevention and wellness programs, and for strengthening the public health and primary care work force.

As a public health professional and American Public Health Association advocate, I believe Congress and the president must support programs that deliver resources to the whole community that are proven to achieve more positive health outcomes than individual interventions alone. In addition, we must ensure that all Americans have access to comprehensive, quality, affordable health care. I believe that a "public option" is essential to covering the 46 million uninsured, increasing competition and thereby improving the quality and affordability of the health system.

I encourage all Americans to write their members of Congress asking them to make prevention and wellness programs and a "public option" top priorities in health reform legislation.

**[ Insert your full name here ] is [ Insert your title/affiliation or other role in the public health field ].**

Contact **[ Insert your full name here ]** at **[ Insert your contact information here ]**.



# Follow Up

Please keep us informed of your advocacy efforts and how your policymakers feel about public health and a public option in health reform by completing the following survey.

1. Please provide the following information:

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Section: \_\_\_\_\_

State Affiliate (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

2. Describe your advocacy activity, including the date and who you met with or spoke to.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting With: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Was the policymaker/staff member aware of APHA? Where they aware of the state affiliate?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. What is the policymaker's position on public health in health reform?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. What is the policymaker's position on a public insurance option in health reform?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. What are your policymaker's main concerns on this issue?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. What does your policymaker hear from constituents on this issue?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. Follow up needed from APHA staff:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. Was this a positive experience for you?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Please return to:** GOVERNMENT RELATIONS, American Public Health Association, 800 I St., N.W., Washington, DC 20001 Fax: (202) 777-2532.

You can also fill out our online survey at the bottom of our advocacy tips page at: <http://www.apha.org/advocacy/tips/>



# Additional Resources

## Public health and policy websites

Visit APHA's Better Health Now webpage for up-to-date information and links to public health and policy websites:

<http://www.apha.org/advocacy/tips>

## Relevant government websites

- Senate Committees with jurisdiction over health reform
  - Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions: <http://help.senate.gov/>
  - Senate Committee on Finance: <http://finance.senate.gov/>
- House Committees with jurisdiction over health reform
  - House Committee on Energy and Commerce: <http://energycommerce.house.gov/>
  - House Committee on Education and Labor: <http://edlabor.house.gov/>
  - House Committee on Ways and Means: <http://waysandmeans.house.gov/>
- The White House: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: <http://www.healthreform.gov/>

## Public health and policy blogs

- The Health Care Blog: <http://www.thehealthcareblog.com>
- Health Care Renewal: <http://hcrenewal.blogspot.com>
- Health Policy Watch: <http://www.healthpolicywatch.org>
- Effect Measure: <http://scienceblogs.com/effectmeasure>
- U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthmarketing/blog>
- Health Affairs Blog: <http://www.healthaffairs.org/blog>
- The Alan Katz Health Care Reform Blog: <http://alankatz.wordpress.com>
- Barack Obama's Blog: <http://www.barackobama.com/index.php>
- Wall Street Journal Health Blog: <http://blogs.wsj.com/health>