



AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

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## TIPS FOR MAKING A VISIT TO YOUR POLICYMAKER

One of the most effective ways to influence the policymaking process and make a lasting connection is to visit with your legislators in person. Most legislators have regular office hours, in their district offices and in the Capitol, during which they and their staff are available to their constituents.

To arrange a meeting with your policymaker:

- **Send a letter, a fax, or call requesting 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 that office.
- **Be sure to identify yourself as a constituent** and address the letter to the legislator and to the attention of the appointment scheduler. 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.
- **Follow up by calling the policymaker's office** to which you sent the letter and ask to speak with the scheduler or the staffer who handles appointments. Explain who you are and why you are calling, referring to the letter you sent. If the legislator is unavailable at that time or will not be in the area on the date you would like to meet, the appointment scheduler may offer you another date/time or provide you the opportunity to meet with the legislative staff who handles the issue.
- **Send a letter or make a phone call confirming the appointment.**

During the 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.