

Building effective relationships with your elected officials

The effectiveness of your work often depends on the quality of your relationships with co-workers, staff, patients, and others. The same is true for advocacy and grassroots work. If you decide to engage in pharmacy advocacy, your efforts will be more effective if you have relationships with elected officials in place prior to asking them to do something or asking them to understand your point of view on an issue. Simply put, strong, personal relationships are the best way to influence legislative decision-making.

To help you get started in this process, here are some suggestions for building relationships with your elected officials and getting your voice heard.

Who represents you?

The first step is simply finding out who your legislators are. Wherever you live, you and your district are represented by a U.S. Senator, U.S. House Representative, State Senator, and State Representative. (Note that you are also represented by local officials like aldermen and city council members, but the focus here is on Members of Congress and state legislators.)

Introducer letter or email

Consider sending a brief introductory letter to your elected officials that introduces you and your practice to them. Let them know that you are interested in health care and pharmacy issues, and that you would appreciate him/her making you aware of any bills or issues that affect pharmacy. Be sure to highlight any unique medication therapy management (MTM) services that you offer your patients. Remember that legislators are there to represent you, your interests, and your district, and a big part of their job is responding to their constituents.

Face-to-face meetings

You should look for or create opportunities to meet with your legislators in person. In person meetings are always best and are more memorable. You can try to meet with legislators in their capitol office or district office (if they have one), or you could invite them to meet for coffee when they are back in the district. Another option is introducing yourself at public events that the legislator is attending.



Tour of your practice site

Consider inviting your legislator to tour your pharmacy or practice site. Visits like this are great opportunities to introduce yourself to the legislator and educate them on how an independent pharmacy works, who your customers are, and the issues you are facing. It is also a unique opportunity for you to show how pharmacists are an integrated member of the healthcare team and evidence how pharmacy is much more than just dispensing medications.

State and national pharmacy associations

If you are a member of your state pharmacy association and/or a member of a national pharmacy organization like NCPA, they can be helpful with things like setting up meetings with legislators and (for discussion purposes with your legislators) providing you with a list of key issues or bills that they are working on in your state. Be sure to make these pharmacy associations aware of your interactions with legislators and pass along any noteworthy comments or viewpoints that your legislator shared with you.

Day at the capitol

Most state pharmacy associations host legislative events every year like Pharmacy Day at the Capitol. These events are great opportunities for you to build relationships with elected officials and discuss issues/bills affecting pharmacy. Events like this also reinforce that you, the state pharmacy association, and pharmacists in the state are active on legislative issues and a voting block that legislators need to pay attention to.

Position yourself as resource

Legislators and their staff literally deal with hundreds of bills and issues every legislative session. Given the sheer number of issues that they work on, it is next to impossible for them to be experts on more than a small number of those bills. You can help by positioning yourself as a resource for them on pharmacy, medication, and reimbursement issues. Nobody knows pharmacy better than the providers who practice it, so that puts you in a unique position to offer insight, explanations, and technical information on pharmacy and many healthcare issues.

Campaign support

If you want to support your elected officials, you could also consider supporting them through campaign contributions and/or volunteering to help his/her campaign.