

# Advocacy – what to do and what not to do

Below are some helpful “dos and don’ts” you can use when meeting with your elected official and/or their staff members.

### What to do:

- **Open the meeting** by telling your legislator about your professional education/training, practice, and areas of expertise. This can help establish you as credible expert on the subject matter you want to discuss.
- **Take time to be informed** about the issue(s) that you want to discuss with your legislator. For example, outside of knowing what a bill does, you could do homework on who supports/opposes the bill, if similar bills have been introduced or passed in other states, and whether the bill has a fiscal impact to the state or affected parties.
- **Spend time explaining** how a bill or issue would personally impact you, your pharmacy, and your customers. Personal connections like this are impactful, important, and illustrate the human side of an issue.
- **Leave your legislator with a handout** or leave behind piece on the bill/issue you discussed. This could be a handout you developed like a position paper, a handout from an interested party, news articles on the bill/issue, etc.
- **Be specific about what you want** your legislator to do (aka “the ask”). For example, you could ask him/her to support a bill you are discussing, oppose a piece of legislation, look into an issue for you, try to persuade an organization or company to do something, etc. If possible, see if you can get a commitment from him/her before the meeting ends.
- **Treat legislative staff with the same level of respect** that you use for the legislator. Staff have a great deal of responsibility, are very knowledgeable on the issues, and control who has meetings with the elected official.
- **Try to meet with legislators who are in a position to influence** bills or issues that you are interested in. For example, find out what committee your bill was sent to and then set-up meetings with as many committee members as you can. While they are often difficult to get meetings with, you should also try to meet with legislative leadership.

## What not to do:

- **Get too technical or detailed** on the issues you want to discuss. Even though you may be an expert on a subject, keep any technical explanations to a minimal. This is especially true for complex pharmacy issues like reimbursement or science-based topics.
- **Discuss too many topics at once.** It is best to discuss no more than one or two priority issues with your legislator during your meeting or phone call. Anything more than that and you run the risk of confusing your audience and having your position or concerns get lost in the mix.
- **Forget to try and find out if the legislator has a personal connection** or interest in the topic or bill you are discussing. For example, if the legislator is the bill sponsor, find out why he/she decided to introduce the bill.
- **Provide your legislator with too many handouts,** lengthy handouts, or handouts that are too technical. Legislators are extremely busy and often deal with dozens of issues on any given day. To increase the chances of your piece being read, your position paper or talking points need to be succinct, concise, and on topic.
- **Forget to thank the legislator** for their time and state that you will be following up with him/her in the near future. You should also position yourself as a resource for them by letting them know that you are available if they have any follow-up questions or want more information.
- **Exaggerate to make a point or answer a question.** This is especially true if you are not sure of the facts. There is nothing wrong with telling the legislator or staff member that you don't have an answer for that question, and you will get back to them on that. Also, every issue has two or more viewpoints, so don't shy away from admitting the con side of your issue (especially if you have suggestions for remedying it).
- **Turn down a meeting or express disappointment** if you have to meet with a staff person instead of a legislator. Due to their schedules, legislators often ask their staff people to cover meetings for them.
- **Shy away from meeting with legislators who are on the opposite side** of your issue. Not only do you get an opportunity to try to persuade him or her to support your position, but you might also get information on the arguments that your opponents are using.