

Grassroots

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Overview



An effective grassroots program is a vital component of advocacy. The program takes time to build, but with consistent and well-maintained effort, can grow each year. Part of the time needed to build an effective program is (1) the time it takes to educate and build trusting relationships with legislators, and (2) the time it takes to develop a broad and diverse (Masters, Fellow, residents and students; representation of each from every district; experienced and new volunteers) pool of Key Contacts.

The following topics are the main components for developing an effective grassroots program. Further information is provided on:

1. What is a Key Contact?
2. Writing Alerts
3. E-mailing and calling Legislators
4. Lobby Day
5. Lobby Day Checklist
6. Additional Grassroots Actions

If you have any questions or need further information, feel free to contact Jolynne M. Flores, Supervisor Grassroots Advocacy and PAC, at jflores@acponline.org or 202-261-4532.

1. What is a Key Contact?



A chapter's success with its state legislature greatly depends upon year-round grassroots support from chapter members who volunteer as Key Contacts. Key Contacts communicate with their legislative representative, as constituents, on issues of importance to medical students, and internists and their patients.

A chapter will ideally have active Key Contacts from every district within the state. A Key Contact program is an excellent means for getting more chapter members involved. Because health care legislation has a direct impact on your members' professional lives, there can be a sizeable segment of your membership that can be motivated to become involved in health care advocacy.

Constituents are the people the legislator has been elected to represent. A constituent can be the powerful voice to communicate to an individual legislator. A constituent can speak directly to the legislator on how the legislation will impact him/her—and the patients within the district—directly. Knowing how legislation will affect constituents can move a legislator to action. Key Contacts became the constituent voice for your chapter.

Key Contacts count on the chapter to keep them abreast of the issues and to inform them of the opportune time for them to communicate with their legislators.

Keep your Key Contacts informed. Make communicating to their legislators easy.

2. Writing Alerts



It is important for the chapter to send a legislative alert when it is critical for the legislative offices to hear about your issue. When you determine that a communication from your Key Contacts is needed, it is time to e-mail or fax them an “alert.” Alerts encourage Key Contacts to take action—to communicate with their legislators. Alerts are typically sent to Key Contacts via e-mail, or fax if e-mail is not available, because quick action by Key Contacts is often needed. An alert:

- Informs them of the issue;
- Explains why action by them is needed;
- Encourages them to take action;
- Explains the action needed (phone call, e-mail, meeting, etc.);
- Provides text or talking points for the Key Contact to work with; and
- Thanks them

The offices use constituent letters, faxes, phone calls and e-mails to gauge constituent opinion on specific issues. The more personalized the message, the more weight it is given. Key Contacts must remember that the offices are also hearing views opposite of theirs.

Below is a sample alert from 2007. The “Sample E-mail Sent to the Key Contact” explains the situation and provides a link for them to the information that follows below. The “Reason for the Alert” informs them of the issue. The “What You Can Do” explains why action by them is needed and tries to encourage them to take action (the alert below was sent via e-mail and allowed the Key Contact to e-mail or call their representative). The “Sample E-mail to Congress” provides the text template for their e-mail to their representative; and is followed by “Sample Talking Points” for phone calls.

Sample E-mail Sent to Key Contact

E-mail Subject

ACP Member: Please contact your Representative today to urge their support for H.R. 3162, the Children’s Health and Medicare Protection (CHAMP) Act of 2007

Dear ACP Member:

Both chambers of Congress are quickly proceeding with health care legislation: H.R. 3162, the “Children’s Health and Medicare Protection (CHAMP) Act”, a bill to

reauthorize the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and to avert Medicare physician payment cuts. In the House, the Committee on Ways & Means voted out the bill early Friday, July 27th and the bill is currently being debated in the Committee on Energy & Commerce. It is expected to be voted on before the full House later next week (August 2-3).

The CHAMP Act is the only bill moving forward in Congress that would avert a 10 percent Medicare physician payment cut on January 1, 2008. The CHAMP Act will (1) re-authorize and expand SCHIP; and (2) provide positive Medicare physician payment updates of 0.5 percent each of the next two years to avert a pending 10 percent payment cut scheduled for January 2008 and an estimated 5 percent cut in 2009.

Action Needed

If you have not done so already, we need your help to garner your Representative's support for the House bill.

1. E-mail your Representative this weekend
2. Login to the ACP Legislative Action Center

Or please call your Representative's office as soon as possible during the week. You can reach your legislator's office toll-free by using the American Medical Association's hotline, 800-833-6354. You may ask to speak to the Representative's health legislative assistant or leave a message with the receptionist. A sample script is below.

Sample alert

House Support Needed for H.R. 3162, the Children's Health and Medicare Protection (CHAMP) Act of 2007

Reason for the Alert

The CHAMP Act is the only bill in Congress that would avert a 10% Medicare physician payment cut scheduled to go into effect on 1/1/2008. The CHAMP Act will (1) re-authorize and expand SCHIP; and (2) provide positive Medicare physician payment updates of 0.5% over the next two years to avert a 15 percent payment cut scheduled for 2008 and 2009. The bill also includes many other changes supported by ACP.

Congress' budget rules require that the physician payment increases and the SCHIP expansion be paid for by revenue increases or savings in other programs. The CHAMP bill is paid for by increases in the federal tax on tobacco and redistribution of unfair and costly overpayments to Medicare Advantage plans. (Currently, Medicare Advantage private insurance plans are paid, on average, 12% more than fee-for-service physicians).

What You Can Do

We need you to take action and encourage your Representative to tell him/her about how cuts will impact your practice and patients, and the impact positive updates can have instead; your support for leveling Medicare payments between FFS and private Medicare Advantage plans; and your support for action that is targeted to reduce tobacco use. You can e-mail him/her by clicking on the 'Take Action' tab below. **Please** personalize your e-mail; it will be stronger if you can talk from personal experience.

Sample E-mail to Congress

Subject: House Support Needed for H.R. 3162, the Children's Health and Medicare Protection (CHAMP) Act of 2007.

As a physician, I am writing to urge you to please support H.R. 3162, the "Children's Health and Medicare Protection Act of 2007" and to ensure that it is enacted into law. Many of my non-Medicare patients have children who are enrolled in the Children's Health Insurance Program and depend on that program for their health care insurance needs. I strongly support this bill because it would re-authorize the successful SCHIP and expand eligibility to more children in lower-income families.

I also strongly support the bill's Medicare provisions to replace a scheduled 10 percent Medicare physician payment cut in 2008 (and an expected cut of 5 percent in 2009) with positive updates in both of those years. Medicare patients depend on me and my colleagues to take care of them when they are sick. Unfortunately, the proposed Medicare cuts would be devastating to my practice and my patients. The provisions contained in H.R. 3162 will provide physicians with the stability and predictability to allow them to continue to accept new Medicare patients.

I understand that Congress' budget rules require that the costs of these essential provisions must be paid for by revenue increases or cost-savings from other programs. I strongly support increasing tobacco taxes to help pay for improved access to care for children and seniors. It is only right that that which harms health, tobacco, should be used to pay for health care. I also support eliminating the unfair and costly policy of paying Medicare Advantage plans more than fee-for-service physicians, and using these savings to expand SCHIP and halt the Medicare cuts.

Please vote for our children and seniors by supporting H.R. 3162, the "Children's Health and Medicare Protection Act of 2007."

Sample Talking Points for Phone Calls

- Hi, my name is Dr. [NAME] from [CITY]. I specialize in internal medicine.
- I am calling to ask Rep. [NAME] to vote for H.R. 3162, the "Children's Health and Medicare Protection Act of 2007".
- I take care of a [NUMBER] of Medicare patients in [HIS/HER] district.

- Many of my non-Medicare patients have children who are enrolled in the Children's Health Insurance Program.
- I support this bill because it would re-authorize SCHIP and expand eligibility to more children in lower-income families and the bill's Medicare provisions.
- I strongly support increasing tobacco taxes to help pay for improved access to care for children and seniors. This not only makes good budget policy, but good health policy.
- I also support eliminating the unfair and costly policy of paying Medicare Advantage plans more than fee-for-service physicians.

3. E-mailing and Calling Legislators



Key Contacts rely on their chapter's advocacy leaders to (1) stay abreast of the issues and (2) inform them, the Key Contacts, about the status of legislation as it develops, when they are needed to communicate to their legislators and what the chapter recommends the communication should contain.

The Alert provides a template communication for the Key Contact to use. However, it is important to ask Key Contacts to personalize their communication, whether via e-mail, fax, letter or phone, as much as possible. Studies have shown that communications that include unique or individualized information have significantly more impact on a legislator's decision-making process than identical form messages. Personalized communications are more effective than form messages because the recipient knows that the author was indeed motivated by the issue or if it was indeed even sent with the constituent's knowledge and consent.

One hundred form letters have less direct value than a single thoughtful letter generated by a constituent.

-- U.S. House of Representatives, staff member
Communicating with Congress
Congressional Management Foundation

Encourage Key Contacts to personalize their communication with personal stories on how the issue will impact the legislator's district directly. Polling of U.S. congressional offices has shown that personal interactions with constituents, either in person or in writing, have greater influence on legislators when they have not reached a decision than do form communications or visits from lobbyists.

Finally, in the template communication piece the chapter drafts for Key Contacts, include the name of the chapter (*e.g.*, that the author is a member of your chapter). Legislators like to know which group is generating the message.

4. Lobby Day



A visit to your state Capitol, each legislative session, to discuss issues concerning internal medicine in your state is an important element of a grassroots program and is an excellent way to get chapter members involved who are, or want to be, active political citizens. Lobby day keeps your state chapter visible before the legislators and provides a means for you to gather your advocacy team for training and educating them on issues that need to be communicated to your legislature each session. Lobby day should be designed with a number of key elements.

Recruit the motivated

Lobby day is an excellent way to get those members involved who are, or want to be, active political citizens. When recruiting attendees, it is important to convey that they are qualified to speak on the issues, due to their professional experience, and that they will be briefed on the issues prior to the meetings.

What can be expected?

It is important to communicate realistic benefits to attendees. Meeting with legislators is just one step in communicating and building long-term legislative relationships. Just like most people, it takes time to trust someone as a source of information. Also, legislation often takes a long time to develop and is based on input from numerous stakeholders. Lobby day is one important part of a multi-step, year-long, continuous advocacy program.

Constituents

When setting up meetings it is important to ensure that attendees are the constituents of the legislator. Legislators want to hear from those they represent and who are in the position to vote for them.

Training

Lobby day attendees benefit from a session that informs them what to expect when visiting a legislators office (how to convey information; a perspective on a legislator's day; how much time is typically allowed; questions to anticipate; etc.). Training can be conducted by an experienced member of your chapter or a professional grassroots consultant.

