

GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

As the administration and Congress consider major changes to federal health programs, critical programs are increasingly at risk of being eliminated or facing harmful cuts. Cuts to federal health programs threaten access to primary care services at a time when many communities are already facing workforce shortages and rising health care needs. Now, more than ever, it is essential for lawmakers to hear directly from their constituents, especially internal medicine physicians who can share the impact of proposed policies on their communities, institutions, and patients.

As internal medicine physicians, your voice is incredibly powerful in shaping health policy. Lawmakers rely on personal stories and real-world examples from their states and districts to make informed decisions. By engaging with your members of Congress back home, you can help protect the programs that support your patients and the future of health care.

This grassroots toolkit provides the resources you need to be an effective advocate, including tips on scheduling meetings to attending town hall meetings. SGIM appreciates members' willingness to participate in grassroots outreach to drive meaningful change across the federal government.

MEETING WITH YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS AT HOME

In-person meetings in your state and district are one of the most effective ways of letting a public official know about you, your priorities, and SGIM. Meeting in the district or state is a great way to build relationships at the local level with your members and become a resource for them for issues related to primary care!

Requesting a Meeting

Contact your member of Congress' district office by phone or email to schedule a meeting. Mention that you are a physician and member of SGIM, identify where in the state you practice, and outline the key issues you wish to discuss. Have several preferred dates and times in mind. It isn't always possible to meet with your members of Congress, particularly outside of Washington, so accept opportunities to meet with their staff if offered as an alternative.

Best Practices for Meetings

Before the Meeting:

- Review your talking points and practice your key messages.
- Bring printed leave-behind materials, if any.
- Bring a pen and paper to take notes.

During the Meeting:

- Introduce yourself with your name and where you live and practice.
- Provide a background of SGIM and primary care and internal medicine.
- Highlight the issues you would like to discuss.
- Share a brief patient story or your personal experience to illustrate the impact of the issues you would like to discuss.
- Ask the staffer if their boss is willing to support your requests.
- Thank the staff for their time.

After the Meeting:

- Send a thank-you email.
- Include any follow-up information you promised.

Pro Tips

- Be on time and silence your cell phone.
- Be polite and professional.
- Stay on topic and remember your “asks.”
- Give the staffer your business card and ask for theirs.
- Follow up with a brief email thanking them for their time and providing any information you may have promised.
- Share your experience with peers to encourage more advocacy meetings back home.

ATTENDING TOWN HALLS

Attending a Town Hall meeting or other event when your member is back in the state or district is a great way to meet them at home when their schedules are less hectic. Additionally, these events allow you to make a connection as a community member.

What is a Town Hall?

Town Halls are one of the most effective, but underutilized, ways to communicate with members of Congress. A Town Hall is a public meeting where constituents can interact directly with their elected officials. These events provide a platform for you to voice concerns, ask questions, and share your expert opinion on health-related issues.

How to Find a Town Hall

- Call your member of Congress' district office to ask them if they have any upcoming Town Hall dates.
- Check your member of Congress's official website or social media pages for upcoming Town Hall dates.
- You can also sign up for newsletters from your members to stay informed about local events.

Preparing for a Town Hall

- Do your research: Know your member's stance on key health issues. Be aware of any recent votes or public statements they've made. You can find this information on their websites and [congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov).
- Refine your message and questions: Focus on one or two specific issues. Personal stories and data can be compelling. Make sure your questions are clear, concise, and directly related to the policy issues.
- Be prepared: If you have any questions before the town hall event, reach out to your member of Congress' district office for clarification.

During the Town Hall

- Arrive early: This ensures you get a seat and may provide an opportunity to speak with the representative or their staff before the event starts.
- Be respectful and professional: Even if you disagree with the member's positions on specific policies, maintain a respectful tone.

- Ask your question: Introduce yourself as a physician and SGIM member and briefly share your talking points and questions. Be concise and stick to the main points.

Town Hall Follow-Up

Send a thank you email to your member of Congress and/or their staff. Reiterate your talking points, offer to be a resource in the future, and say thank you.

Town Hall Tips

- Be prepared
- Introduce yourself to the member of Congress and their staff
- Clearly articulate your asks/questions
- Say thank you

WRITING AN OP-ED OR LETTER TO THE EDITOR

One way to amplify your voice is to write an op-ed column or letter to the editor and submitting it for placement in your local newspaper or online news source.

Some publications accept **op-ed columns** from outside contributors on issues of public interest. These columns are typically 600-800 words and express an opinion or call on policymakers for a specific action based on facts that are locally and nationally relevant.

Here are some tips for writing a persuasive op-ed that could get published:

- Research your local publication's specific guidelines for word count, focus, and how to submit your piece. There is often a specific email address or fax number for submission.
- Catch attention with an interesting opening, or 'lede.'
- Draw on your own experience as a physician to show why a reader should trust you
- Use an illustrative anecdote that demonstrates your point
- Back up your opinion and personal experience with facts
- Tie the column together with a call to action in your conclusion

A **letter to the editor** is another format that is typically shorter than an op-ed (150-200 words) and responds directly to a news or opinion piece that has already appeared in the publication.

Here are some tips for an effective letter to the editor:

- Research your local publication's specific guidelines for word count, focus, and how to submit your piece. There is often a specific email address or fax number for submission.
- Explain immediately the issue or piece to which your letter responds
- Use concise, declarative sentences and short paragraphs
- Explain why you agree or disagree with the original piece
- Use an effective analogy or example to make your point
- Conclude with clear statement of your case
- Include your contact information – many newspapers will only publish after verifying an author's identity