

Mental Health Policy & Advocacy Issues

June 7, 2014

Assemblywoman Nancy Pinkin, MPA, CHE

RETRENCHMENTS

- Major federal and state budget deficits
- Economy remains weak
- Assoc of Governors taking action to reduce Medicaid spending – allowing states to set own policies
- Attempt to reduce Medicaid levels
- F-F-S to mandatory managed care
- Low Medicaid rates – access an issue
- rate of uninsured, increasing public health needs under weak economy

FEDERAL REFORM

- Leg –
 - Healthcare reform implementation council
 - Healthcare exchange
- Insurance coverage expansion for young adults – state age 31, family pays, fed- age 26, co. pays
- Budget – mandatory across the board cuts if no agreement. Healthcare groups must advocate for to preserve programs and services, unite on this issue
- Payment changes – ACO...
- HIE's and EMR – effort to reduce cost, duplication
- Efforts to reduce cost and improve health outcomes - Coverage of pre-existing conditions; disease management
 - Medical compliance rates
 - MH reform – OLMSTEAD; Outpatient Commitment
- Political –
 - Fed – D pres; split legislature w R bias
 - state R gov / D leg:

ACCOUNTABLE CARE ORGANIZATIONS

- Regulations fluid – new regulations released
- Hospitals and doctors realigning
- Need to include Mental health and other services
- Funds available will determine quality and quantity of services
- Role of Mental Health?

MEDICAL HOME

- Eliminate silos
- Decrease cost of high users
- Increase primary care
- Access issues – Low Medicaid rates

Affordable Care Act in New Jersey

Signed into law by President Obama on March 23, 2010

- Citizens no longer have to fear of double-digit premium increases from their insurance companies.
- The law reduces health care costs for families and businesses
- Already made it illegal for insurance companies to deny care because of a pre-existing condition.
- The Affordable Care Act is being implemented with partners across the country.

Bringing Insurance Reforms to New Jersey Residents

- People across New Jersey are benefiting from key insurance reforms:
- 5.4 million residents with private insurance are free from worrying about lifetime limits on coverage.
- The 378,000 residents of New Jersey who bought coverage on the individual market cannot have coverage rescinded due to an application mistake.
- Young adults can stay on their parents' plan until their 26th birthday - An estimated 34,100 young adults
- Insurance companies are prohibited from denying coverage to the 485,000 children in New Jersey with pre-existing conditions.

What is Advocacy?

- Advocacy is a **critical competency of the health education specialist** and an essential strategy in profession-wide efforts to foster improvements in individual and population health in all settings.
- The World Health Organization defines advocacy for health as:
 - A combination of individual and social actions designed to gain political commitment, policy support, social acceptance, and systems for a particular health goal or program.
- Building effective political alliances with Congressional representatives and other policymakers is critical to strengthen and expand the resource base for behavioral/social sciences research, health education programs and practice, professional preparation in health education, and workforce employment.

Why It's Important

1. To achieve the highest level of wellness and recovery possible
2. Reduce Stigma
3. Improve delivery system –reduce silos
4. Assist families & friends
5. Limited resources – major budget deficit
6. Many competing interested

CATEGORIES OF MENTAL HEALTH BILLS IN NEW JERSEY LEGISLATION

- Scope of practice
- Educating public
- Education issues- elementary, HS, Higher ed
- Federal Health Reform
- Budget Issues – health care
- Health Insurance mandates
- Public health problems – mental health, drug and alcohol abuse, gangs, domestic violence...


Advocacy Priorities

1. State Budget Issues
2. Olmstead and institutional changes
3. IOC
4. Health Disparities and stigma
5. Health Insurance issues
6. Increase Mental Health Research

POSSIBLE NETWORKING AND COALITION BUILDING

- Quality of life – wellness & recovery
- Economic issues – supported employment and supported housing
- Union issues and staff salaries / benefits
- School groups
- Pharma
- Higher education – research and education,
- Public Health Institutes
- Hospitals
- Federally qualified health centers
- Advocacy Groups
- Employers, business industry
- HMOs
- Parent and other support type groups
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and similar groups

SUGGESTIONS FOR ADVOCACY ISSUES

- Protect funding and programs— local/ county/ state
 - Expand participation of mental health educators in key appointments – commissioner of human services, children, seniors, D. Labor; D. Community Affairs
 - Expand visibility as role of advocate for patients, public
 - Prioritize and Create Strategy for Mental Health Issues
- 

Public Health Advocacy Training

Working in Partnerships

A stylized illustration of two hands shaking in partnership, rendered in shades of teal and blue, positioned behind the text.

Introduction

- Sometimes it's easy to assume that just because we're on the "right" side of an issue we will win.
- Unfortunately, being right in and of itself will not yield victory.
- Working in partnerships will help multiply the power of your advocacy efforts and build strength in numbers.
- Working in partnerships includes getting other individuals, organizations, alliances, and coalitions involved to accomplish your advocacy goal.

Building Strength in Numbers

- As a public health professional, you are both a credible and natural advocate for the public and your profession.
- However, even with compelling issues, a powerful story and ongoing advocacy, there is a greater chance of winning when you build strength in numbers.
- There are two ways to build strength in numbers:
 - 1.) Getting more people involved.
 - 2.) Getting more organizations involved.

Why Get More People Involved

- Generates hope and excitement for your issue. The more others see they are not alone, the more they will be willing to advocate and believe that a broader solution is possible.
- More people bring a broader set of skills, knowledge, and contacts.
- More people means increased pressure on decision-makers to act.
- Opposition to our issues frequently emerges. Strength in numbers is one of the best ways to counter it.

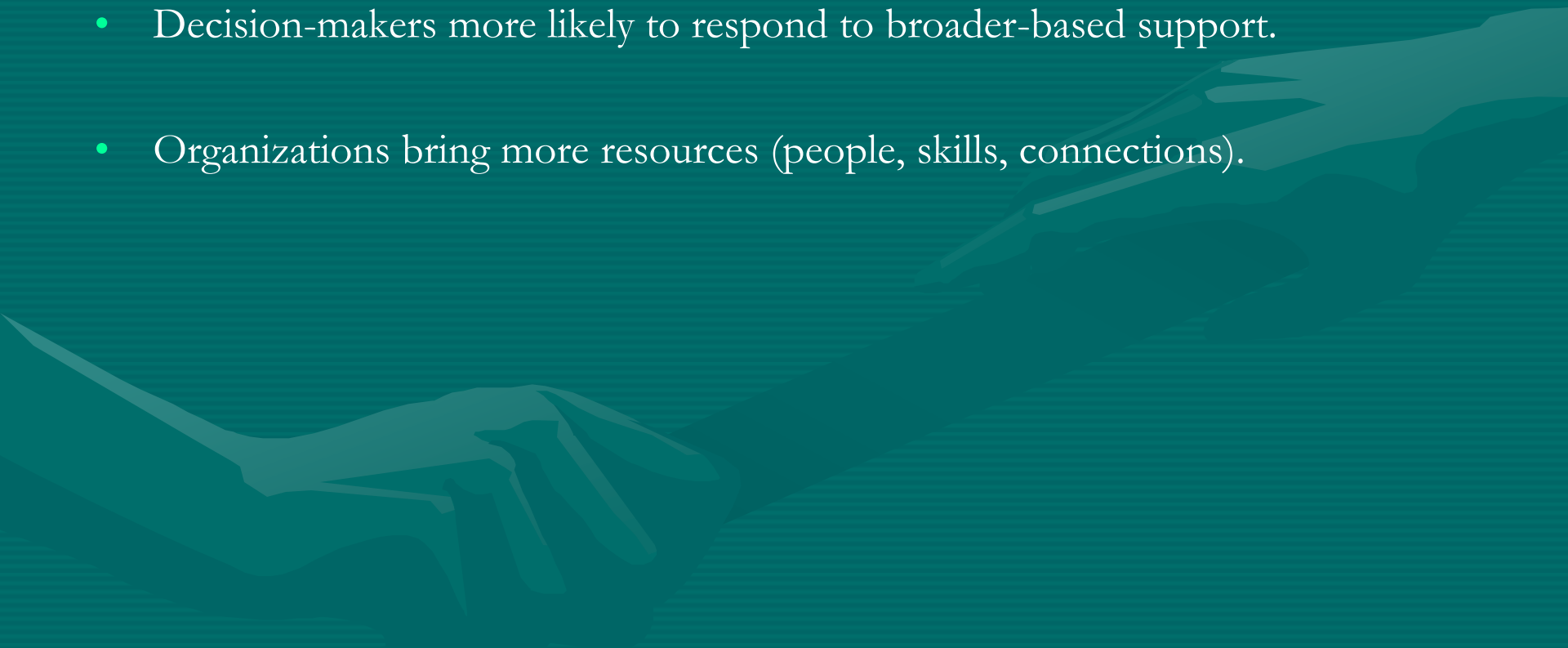
A Note on Opposition

- When working on issues as important as public health, it can be hard to imagine why others wouldn't support your issue, much less oppose it.
- However, your issue will almost always be competing with other issues for resources or may reflect a different view of the best way to address the issue. Understanding the differences may help you find common ground.
- Building strength in numbers helps demonstrate to decision-makers that public health and well-being are a priority and support for your issue is larger and more powerful than any potential opposition's interests.

How to Get More People Involved

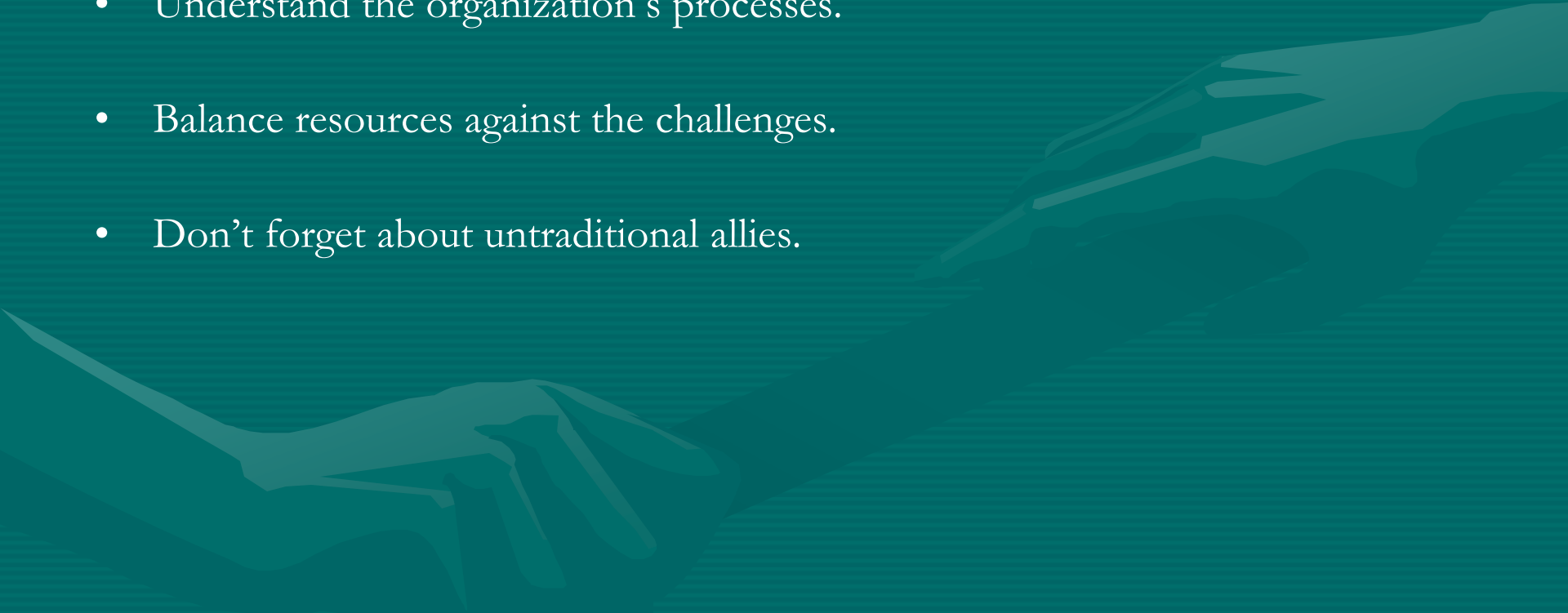
- Recognize that some people may be hesitant to get involved because they are unfamiliar with advocacy.
- Start with people you already know who care about public health.
- Ask people—a natural and acceptable thing to do:
 - Connect your issue to other's self-interests.
 - Convey why your issue is important and why their help is needed.
 - Have a concrete request and be clear about the time commitment.

Why Get More Organizations Involved

- Demonstrates that the issue has visible and wide-ranging support.
 - Decision-makers more likely to respond to broader-based support.
 - Organizations bring more resources (people, skills, connections).
- 

How to Get Organizations Involved

- Choose organizations with common interests.
- Understand the organization's processes.
- Balance resources against the challenges.
- Don't forget about untraditional allies.



Making a Difference

- Getting more individuals and groups involved helps us win on the issues that are important to us.
- Working in partnerships helps us increase the number of people and groups working in improve public health and wellbeing and builds strength in numbers.
- When working with others—whether it is an individual or a group—try to understand their motivations and interests.
- Remember that partnerships can include the usual suspects as well as unlikely partners. The only way to know if someone will support your issue is by asking.

Public Health Advocacy Training

Working with Decision-Makers



Introduction

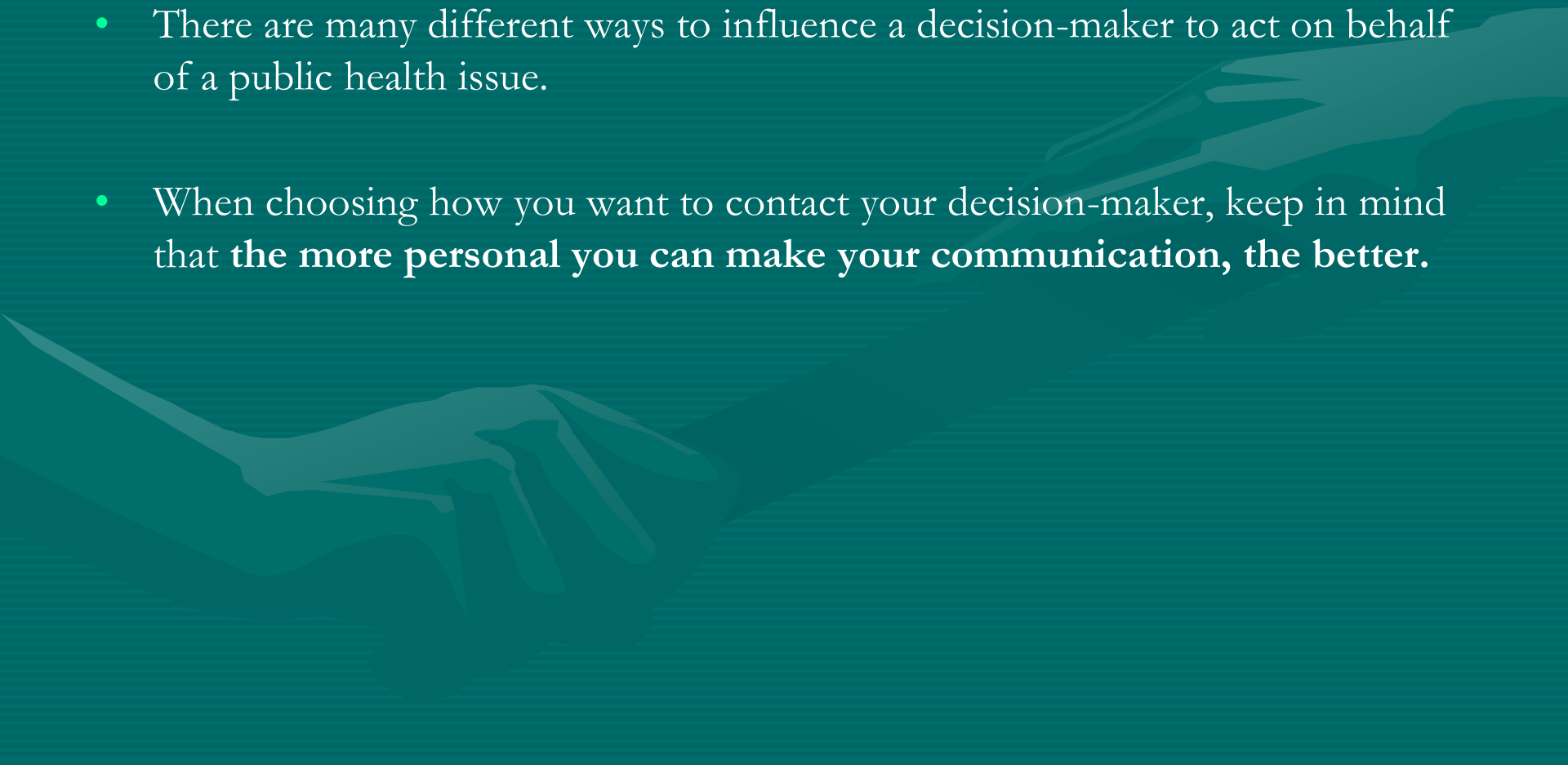
- There are many problems that affect the individuals you serve and your ability to address those problems. These individual problems are often part of a broader issue.
- Many of the broader issues that public health professionals face can be resolved through changing community norms or systemic policy change.
- For every issue you care about, there is a decision-maker who can affect or influence the outcome.

Motivating Decision-Makers to Act

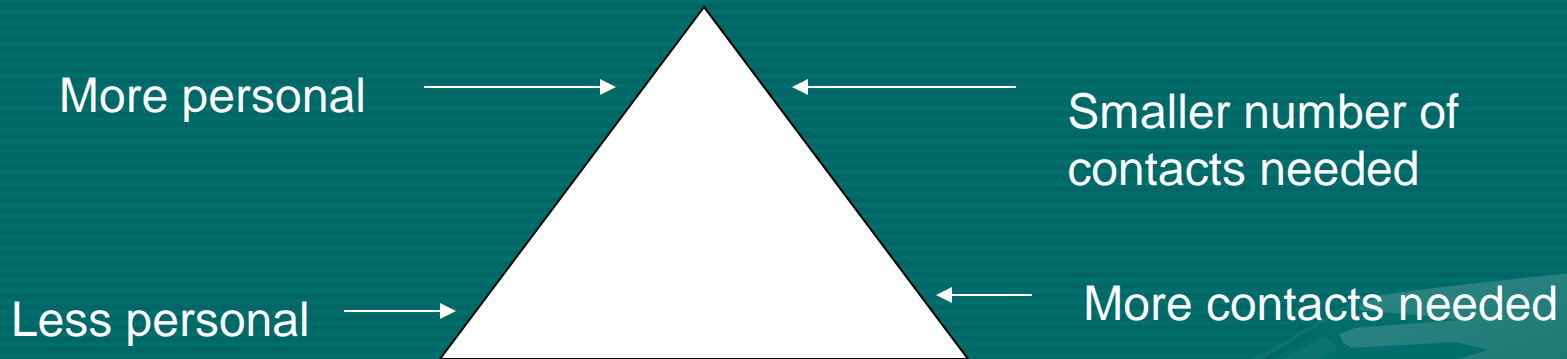
- Effective advocacy involves identifying and persuading these decision-makers to act on behalf of your issue.
- It is important to understand what motivates decision-makers:
 - Elected or appointed officials: Influenced by what their constituents think and value.
 - Community leaders: Are usually not elected, but their position and scope of influence depends on them being viewed as credible, well-liked, or fair. They are influenced by public opinion, but in a less direct way than an elected official.

Influencing Decision-Makers

- Decision-makers are influenced by personal contact and communications.
- There are many different ways to influence a decision-maker to act on behalf of a public health issue.
- When choosing how you want to contact your decision-maker, keep in mind that **the more personal you can make your communication, the better.**



The Contact Pyramid



- When choosing how you will contact your decision-maker consider:
 - The degree to which the activity is personal
 - The number of people you have to engage in the activity.

Key Communication

What is important to keep in mind when calling a decision-maker?



When Calling Decision-Makers

- **Plan:** Before you make the call, plan what you are going to say. Your phone call will be very brief, so keep your message simple and to the point.
- **Message:** Be sure to tell your story, why you care about public health, and why you need their support. Think about the key point and how your story underscores your point of view.
- **Call:** Make the call. No matter who the decision-maker is, remember to tell them that you are a public health professional and a constituent of their legislative district.
- **Staff or Message:** If you are calling decision-maker, you may not be able to reach them directly. Be prepared to talk to staff or to leave a message instead.

When Writing to Decision-Makers

- **State that you are a public health professional and a constituent:** This matters because leaders are most interested in the opinions of people who live and work in their area.
- **Personalize your letter:** Research shows that personalized letters have the most impact on decision-makers. If you are basing your letter on a form letter, rewrite it and consider using your personal stationary. This also gives you the chance to include your story, which is what will have the most impact.
- **Local, local, local:** Make a strong connection between public health and what you and the decision-maker see in your home community.
- **Show restraint:** Keep your letter brief—one page and if needed, a fact sheet.

What to Include in a Advocacy Letter

- Dear Senator/Representative _____.
- **Opening Paragraph:**
 - States the subject of the letter.
 - Gives the bill number or name, if available.
 - Identifies the writer and their connection to children's health.
- **Body of Letter:**
 - Explains the issue simply and factually.
 - Gives a local example of potential effects.
 - Clearly states support for or opposition to the bill.
 - Is polite and non-threatening.
 - Thanks the elected official for their attention to the issue.
 - Offers to provide more information on request.
 - Asks for a reply.

When E-mailing Decision-Makers

- **In the subject line of the message, state that you are a public health professional and member of their community:** This strategy will increase the likelihood that your message is read. (For example—Subject: Message from a constituent and public health professional.)
- **If the e-mail is mass-produced, modify it:** It doesn't take much time to insert your personal story and perspective, and it makes a big difference in making your e-mail credible rather than “canned.”
- **Follow up:** Because e-mail is a more casual and often a mass-produced mode of communication, be sure that you are using other methods to persuade decision-makers. Follow your e-mail with a phone call, handwritten letter or visit.

When Meeting with Decision-Makers

- Meeting with your elected official gives you the chance to interact with him or her in a way that is not possible through a letter or e-mail.
 - **Before the meeting:** Plan out what you are going to share, including why you care about the issue and how it affects other people they represent. Be sure to include a direct ask.
 - **During the meeting:** Allow time for dialogue and invite questions.
 - **After the meeting:** Thank the decision-maker for their time and let them know how they can reach you should they have questions. Send a thank you note, e-mail, or fax.

Additional Tips to Keep in Mind

- You don't need to be an expert in all of the technicalities of the issue that you are advocating for.
- You only need to be an expert in your story—how the problem affects your patients and/or your profession and how the solution can bring about meaningful and direct change.
- Communicating with a decision-maker is not much different from the communication you use every day.
- Follow-up and repeated contact makes a difference. Send your decision-maker supporting information or work with your chapter to get them what they need.

In Summary

- Effective advocacy—or getting decision-makers to support your issue—is about letting decision-makers know what you think about the issues you care about.
- Through personal and ongoing contact, not only can you gain their attention, but you can ultimately build a relationship with your decision-maker that will make them more likely to support public health and well-being in the future.

Making a Difference

- Regardless of whether you are reaching out to your elected official through an e-mail, letter, phone call, or meeting, keep in mind the following:
 - State you are a constituent.
 - Make your contact personal.
 - Tell your story.
 - Include a concrete or “direct” ask in your communication.
 - Thank them. Follow up and make repeated contact.

Additional Resources and Information

- **What is Advocacy?** <http://www.njsophe.org/>
- Making Your Advocacy Efforts Count: (2-page brochure from the Coalition of National Health Education Organizations) <http://healtheducationadvocate.org/Advocacy%20brochure.pdf>
- Making Your Voice Heard Understanding the Public's Role in the Legislative Committee Process (2-page brochure): <http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/legislativepub/voice.pdf>
- What is Public Health? (Fact sheet to help explain public health and health education to lawmakers) http://www.apha.org/NR/rdonlyres/C57478B8-8682-4347-8DDF-A1E24E82B919/0/what_is_PH_May1_Final.pdf
- <http://www.sophe.org>
- **New Jersey Legislature:** <http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/>
- **Find Your State Legislator:** <http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/members/legsearch.asp>
- **National Legislature:**
- Find Your Senator: http://senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm
- Find Your Representative: <http://www.house.gov/>
- **Health Education Advocate:**
- <http://www.healtheducationadvocate.org>
- **APHA A-Z Health Topics:** <http://www.apha.org/advocacy/health/>
- <http://healthyamericans.org/assets/files/Investing%20in%20America's%20Health.pdf>