

Advocacy at home is a powerful way for constituents to influence public policy by engaging directly with their elected officials in their local communities. This often happens during congressional recesses, when lawmakers return to their local offices.

What is a congressional recess?



A congressional recess is a period when the United States Congress (either the House of Representatives, the Senate, or both) temporarily suspends its formal legislative business. During a recess:



Members return to their home districts or states to meet with constituents, attend events, or take personal time.

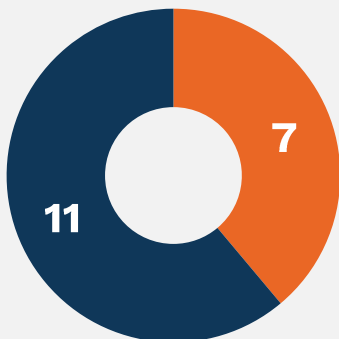


Committees may still meet, and staff often continue working on legislative matters behind the scenes.

When lawmakers return to their districts during congressional recesses, they are more accessible, making it easier for individuals to meet them face-to-face at town halls, local events, or district offices. Sharing personal stories and local concerns can leave a strong impression, helping lawmakers understand the real-world impact of their decisions.



The number of congressional recesses has almost doubled since 2010.



■ 2010 ■ 2024



Members of Congress spend over 30 percent of their time on constituent services during recess.

According to a survey of legislators, where legislative ideas come from:



In-District Meetings



In-district meetings are a powerful way for family physicians to engage with their local representatives. These meetings provide an opportunity to discuss key issues, share personal stories, and advocate for policies that impact patient care and the medical profession.

Steps for a Successful Meeting



STEP 1 – Know Your Audience

Before your meeting, take time to research the representative's background, including their voting record, public statements, and any legislation they've sponsored or co-sponsored related to your policy priorities.



STEP 2 – Find Common Ground

Start each meeting by briefly building rapport. Look for a personal connection with the legislator or their staff, such as shared interests in sports, hobbies, or alma maters. A quick, genuine exchange can set a positive tone, but be sure to keep the small talk concise and transition smoothly into your policy discussion.



STEP 3 – State the Reason for Your Visit

At the start of the meeting, clearly state the purpose of your visit and provide a concise overview of the key policy priorities you'd like to discuss. This helps set expectations and ensures a focused, productive conversation.



STEP 4 – Provide Personal Stories & Patient Examples

Legislators are especially moved by personal stories that illustrate how policies directly affect your patients. Sharing real-life experiences makes the issues tangible and helps lawmakers connect emotionally and intellectually with the impact of their decisions.



STEP 5 – Invite Comments and Questions

Approach the conversation as an opportunity to educate the legislator and their staff about your policy priorities in a respectful, engaging way. Focus on creating a two-way dialogue that invites questions and encourages mutual understanding, rather than delivering a one-sided presentation.



STEP 6 – Ask for a Commitment

Clearly ask the legislator to support or oppose your bill. If they're not ready to commit, respectfully ask for feedback on their concerns or hesitations. Encourage them to consider your perspective further and let them know you'll follow up to continue the conversation.



STEP 7 – Follow Up

Send a follow-up email within 24 hours of your meeting to thank the legislator and their staff for their time. Include any additional materials or resources they requested and offer to be a continued resource as the conversation moves forward.

Tips for In-District Meetings:



Stick to your policy priorities and talking points.



Speak to all staffers as equals.



Have a dedicated spokesperson & separate notetaker.



Always focus the conversation on the impact on patients.



Refrain from using jargon or acronyms.



Avoid discussing political contributions.



Ask to take a group photo at the end of the meeting.



Report back your meeting results to AAFP government relations staff.



District Director Pet Peeves

01. No last-minute requests

02. Avoid the 'check the box' meeting just so you can say you met with your elected official

03. Avoid invited the media without first gaining approval



“Don’t get ugly if the Member does not have time and wants to put the event off for a month.”



Town Halls

Town halls are a vital tool for family physicians to advocate for their patients, their practices, and the future of primary care. These events are an excellent platform for family physicians to speak directly to lawmakers about how policies impact patient care, access to services, and the sustainability of family medicine.

By attending and asking questions, you help hold elected officials accountable for decisions that affect public health, insurance coverage, workforce shortages, and more.

Many legislators don’t fully understand the day-to-day realities of family medicine. Town halls are a chance to educate them with real-world stories and data from the front lines of care.

Consistent, respectful engagement helps build trust and credibility with lawmakers and their staff, making it more likely they’ll turn to you as a resource on health policy.

Whether it’s advocating for payment reform, reducing administrative burden, or expanding access to care, town halls are a powerful venue to amplify your voice and push for meaningful change.

Tips for In-Person Town Halls:



Do Your Homework

- Research the legislator's background, voting record, and stance on healthcare issues.
- Know what legislation they've supported or opposed that affects family medicine or patient care.



Arrive Early

- This gives you time to introduce yourself to staff, find a good seat, and possibly get your question in early.
- Staff often take note of who shows up and what issues they raise.



Take Others

- Attend with colleagues, patients, or community members who share your concerns. A group presence shows strength and unity.



Prepare a Clear, Concise Question

- Focus on one issue.
- Use a personal story or patient example to make it relatable.
- Practice your question so it's confident and respectful.



Stay Professional and Composed

- Passion is powerful but avoid being confrontational or emotional.
- Keep your tone respectful, even if you disagree with the legislator.



Engage with Staff

- Staffers are key gatekeepers. Introduce yourself, offer to be a resource, and follow up after the event.



Follow Up

- Send a thank-you email to the legislator and their staff.
- Reiterate your message and offer additional information or support.

Tips for Telephone Town Halls:



Make Sure You're Invited

- Sign up for your legislator's e-newsletter or follow them on social media to receive invitations.
- These events are often announced via robocalls, emails, or texts.



Be Ready When the Call Comes

- Calls are usually scheduled in the evening.
- When you call in, you might hear a message like, "Hi, I'm Congresswoman Jane Doe. Press 1 to join my telephone town hall."



Always Ask a Question

- You may be asked to press the (*) key when prompted to ask a question.
- Getting your question answered on the record is a powerful way to hold lawmakers accountable.



Prepare Your Question in Advance

- Keep it short, clear, and focused on one issue.
- Use a patient story or real-world example to make it memorable.



Stay on the Line

- Even if you don't get to ask your question, listening gives you insight into the legislator's priorities and positions.



Take Notes

- Jot down any key points, commitments, or follow-up items mentioned by the legislator.



Follow-Up

- Send a thank-you email to the legislator's office referencing the town hall.
- Reiterate your message and offer to provide more information or serve as a resource.

Request For Meeting



Request For Meeting

SUBJECT: Meeting Request

Dear XXXXX,

I am a constituent of **lawmaker's name** and a practicing family physician at **place of work**.

I would like to schedule a meeting with **lawmaker** while **he/she** is back in the district for August recess to discuss a few issues pending before Congress that are very important to family medicine. These issues include:

- Insert policy issue #1
- Insert policy issue #2
- Insert policy issue #3

I can make myself available between (**insert date range**) to meet with **lawmaker**. Please let me know what the next steps are for coordinating. I appreciate your assistance.

Sincerely,

Name

Contact information

Invitation To Visit Your Practice

SUBJECT: Invitation to **NAME OF PRACTICE**

Dear XXXXX,

I am a constituent of **lawmaker's name** and a practicing family physician at **place of work**. I am writing to invite **lawmaker** to visit **place of work** while **he/she** is home for August recess. This would serve as an excellent opportunity for **lawmaker** to see, first-hand, the primary care practice environment. During the visit, I would also like to discuss a few issues pending before Congress that are very important to family medicine. These issues include:

- Insert policy issue #1
- Insert policy issue #2
- Insert policy issue #3

I understand that **lawmaker's** schedule is booking fast so I can be flexible with identifying the best day and time for the site visit. Please let me know what the next steps are for coordinating. I appreciate your assistance.

Sincerely,

Name

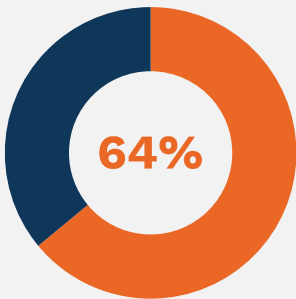
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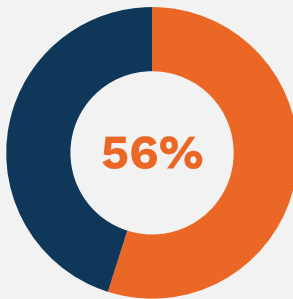
Hosting a member of Congress or their staff at your practice is an effective way to show policymakers how family medicine works. Site visits are an invaluable way to educate policymakers and build relationships, ultimately increasing the influence of the AAFP and your practice on the issues that matter most to your patients.

Top 3 factors that impact scheduling site visits:

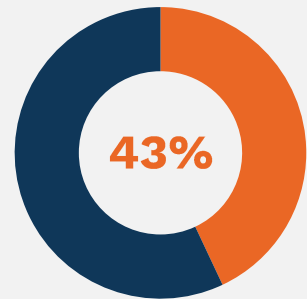
conflict with
other events



number of people
attending the event



the format of the
event (formal speech,
office meeting, etc.)



42%

OF LEGISLATORS STATE THAT 1-2 HOURS
IS THE OPTIMAL TIME FOR SITE VISITS.

How to Plan a Site Visit



STEP 1

Contact AAFP government relations staff to discuss your interest in hosting a site visit.

The AAFP government relations staff can help identify any pertinent information you may need to deliver to your health system leadership and offer solutions to potential barriers that may arise while planning your site visit.

STEP 2

Identify the member of Congress and obtain contact information of appropriate staff.

Determine which member of Congress represents the district in which your practice is located. You can find this information on the official websites of the U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senate, or by contacting AAFP government relations staff.

STEP 3

Seek buy-in from your practice or health system leadership.

Before inviting your member of Congress to visit your practice, you must seek permission from your health system leadership which is likely to include your c-suite leaders and community outreach or government relations staff. The hierarchy of approval will depend on your facility type and established relationships.

STEP 4

Develop a tentative itinerary for the site visit.

Having a basic itinerary constructed prior to contacting your Congress member's office will help them plan their schedules. Most site visits will last between 1 to 3 hours maximum. Consider the following factors when planning the day:

- Will the site visit begin the day at a corporate office, such as a meeting with the CEO, and then move to the practice location?
- Will the site visit include a tour of the entire hospital or just the practice facility?
- Will the site visit include visits with patients and their families?
- Will your health system offer to host a press event?

STEP 5

Gather key information about your practice or health system and develop talking points.

Prepare a factsheet with essential information about your practice and operations. Work with AAFP and your health system government relations staff to develop talking points regarding your policy priorities.

STEP 6

Send a formal invitation via email.

Work with AAFP government relations staff to develop an invitation and schedule the site visit. Key elements that will be included in the invitation will be the purpose and goals of the visit, target dates and times, a tentative itinerary, and names of health system or practice attendees.

STEP 7

Coordinate the site visit logistics.

Once the invitation is accepted, finalize the itinerary and work with Congressional staff to coordinate logistics such as key contacts, meeting locations, parking, meals, and any security, privacy, or access requirements. Contact the AAFP government relations staff to coordinate a preparation call.

STEP 8

Prepare your staff for the site visit.

Ensure your practice is ready to provide a tour and have knowledgeable staff available to discuss your practice's work and address any questions. If the tour consists of other units within the health system, prepare their leadership as well. Provide copies of AAFP talking points and photos of the member of Congress to your staff so they are aware of the messaging and importance of your guests.

STEP 9

Expect the unexpected.

Be prepared for late notice schedule changes or attendee changes. If the member of Congress is unable to attend, the staff attending the site visit should be treated as if they were the legislator.

STEP 10

Follow up with all site visit participants and send thank you notes.

The day after the site visit, email attendees thanking them for their time and interest in your practice. Reiterate key points discussed during the visit as well as your willingness to provide additional information and to be of resource in the future.

Conclusion

Advocacy at home is a vital part of advancing the interests of family medicine and patients. By engaging in in-district meetings, town halls, and site visits, family physicians can make a significant impact on healthcare policy and improve patient care.

