

Planning an Effective Hospital Visit with a Member of Congress

A hospital visit is a great opportunity to share with members of Congress the impact they can have on patients and the broader community you serve through the policies they have the power to enact, modify, or repeal.

Your hospital is an ideal setting in which to advocate for priorities that help your organization better care for patients.

While health care and the services your hospital provides are top of mind every day for you, elected officials have demanding schedules and many competing interests. One minute they are focused on water distribution policies, or a natural disaster, and the next they are drawn into discussions regarding peace in the Middle East or a critical military intelligence briefing.

Inviting them to visit your hospital, take a tour or meet with your Board will help them connect more deeply with your issues — and how they affect the constituents you both serve. Guiding all of this should be a shared value that protecting access to health care in your community is important.

To make the most of a visit, follow these tips:

► Plan ahead

Contact the member of Congress's office well in advance and request a hospital visit or tour at your hospital. Keep in mind their time will probably be limited to 60 or 90 minutes. A visit with hospital leaders before a tour should be kept brief.

Once scheduled, confirm the date, time, and exact location. Ask in advance if the member of Congress would like you to do a press release and/or social media about their visit.

Resources

- [Link to find your representative](#)
- [Link to Scheduler contact information](#)
- [Sample meeting request letter](#)
- [Visit checklist](#)
- [Sample press release/social media posts](#)

► Prepare your message

Identify two or three key issues you want to discuss and prepare a brief and clear summary of your position and recommendations. Use facts and data to support your arguments and illustrate how they affect your community and patients. Anticipate possible questions or objections and prepare responses.

Data help tell your story so be sure to put numbers in context. Use comparisons to the previous year or as a percentage of a larger number, e.g. pharmaceutical costs are \$10 million, an increase of 30% over last year. At the start of the visit, or in advance, share a fact sheet about your hospital highlighting the number of patients you care for, FTEs, beds, specialized services, community outreach programs, and other basic facts.

CHA's Washington, DC office is always happy to help with a pre-visit briefing. Email Nicole Hoffman, federal relations manager (nhoffman@calhospital.org).

Resources

- [Rural overview and messages](#)
- [Site-neutral overview and messages](#)
- [Prior authorization overview and messages](#)
- [340B overview and messages](#)
- [Disproportionate Share Hospitals overview and messages](#)
- [Financial distress overview and messages](#)

► **Coordinate with your team**

Including a few members of your leadership team can be helpful. Be sure to assign specific messages you would like each team member to convey and keep any presentations brief (3-4 minutes). Decide who will lead, who will cover each issue, and who will follow up.

► **Be punctual and professional**

These recommendations may sound basic, but they are important reminders of the important role hospital leaders can play when serving as an *advocate* for the needs of their patients and communities:

- Arrive on time and dress appropriately.
- Introduce yourself and your colleagues and thank the member of Congress for his or her time.
- Be respectful and courteous, even if you might not agree with the member's general political views.
- Avoid jargon and acronyms and use plain language.
- Stick to your message.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, promise to follow up with more complete information.

► **During the Visit or Tour**

Focus on actionable issues — Elected officials want to be helpful, but there are bright lines between state and federal jurisdiction. For example, when talking with your member of Congress it's fair to use seismic or minimum wage as illustrations of financial pressures, but they can't address those issues in Washington so don't dwell on them. **Focus instead on federal policy like Medicare, 340B, DSH, where they can be more directly helpful.**

Always Patient Centered — As you are talking about finances and your organization, make sure it's through the lens of caring for patients. Demonstrate the excellent care you provide patients, rather than construction, art, or design features.

An expensive new piece of equipment can be a contributor to the financial pressures facing your hospital, but rather than emphasize the cost of the equipment, it would be better to frame it as a percentage of expenses and better yet, a necessary investment for the care it provides to the patients. Does it make care more efficient? Does it expedite healing? Does it minimize patient time in the hospital?

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Corporate members: Hospital Council – Northern and Central California, Hospital Association of Southern California, and Hospital Association of San Diego and Imperial Counties

Likewise, rather than noting that there are 10 patients boarding in the emergency department, explain how many emergency department beds you have, what boarding means and how it translates to wait times for others.

Hospitals exist to care for people, and *any* burden, expense, or other form of challenge should be put in the context of the impact on patients first, second, and third. In advocating for your patients, you will be able to advocate for your hospital.

Use Specific Examples — Use specific examples rather than broad descriptions. For example, “We are most proud of our efforts to provide mental health services to local schools by sending art therapists once a week” rather than a dollar figure reflecting the total investment in mental health services. Data helps tell your story so be sure to put numbers in context. Use comparisons to the previous year or as a percentage of a larger number, e.g. pharmaceutical costs are \$10 million, an increase of 30% over last year.

Make Introductions — members of Congress like to meet people, particularly staff. Short and sweet introductions while walking by the nurses’ station work well; quick handshakes and a photo (if agreed upon) are welcome and aligned with members’ sensibilities.

► Follow up

After the meeting, send a thank you note to the member or their staff and restate your main points and requests. Provide any additional information or materials that were requested or answers to questions. If agreed to in advance, send a press release or post about the visit to social media. Maintain contact and keep them updated on your issues and concerns.

Resources

- [Sample Thank you note](#)
- [Sample press release/social media posts](#)