



# NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHRONIC DISEASE DIRECTORS

Promoting Health. Preventing Disease.



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## GEAR Group#4 – Communicating the Value of Public Health

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**Audience:** Legislators

**Product:** Resources for working with elected officials:

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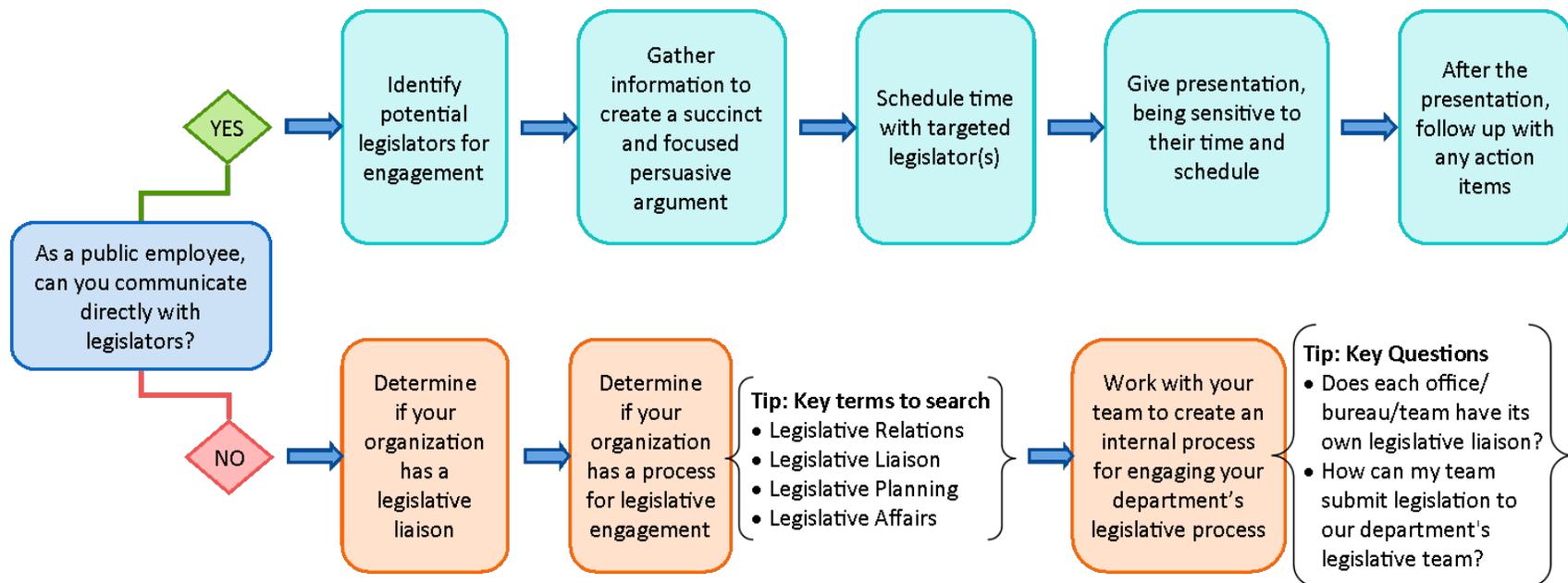
**Note:** This product is intended to aid you in communicating with legislators about the value of public health. It is recognized, that as a public employee, there are policies and restrictions around such activity. Some of the recommendations may fit within the scope of what is allowable, and some may not. Before engaging in legislative communication or activity, you are encouraged to check in with your Government Affairs Officer. You are also encouraged to focus on state and local issues; the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors will continue to foster and maintain relationships with federal authorities and members of Congress centrally in order to ensure consistent messaging at the national level.

# Advocacy or Education? Determining Your Role and Communicating with Legislators

Policy and legislative action are often the way that great public health strides are made. Consider the effect of legislation on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Ten Great Public Health Achievements in the 20th Century. From laws around driving while intoxicated to water fluoridation to food safety, legislation has been a tool to achieve widespread public health impact.

While many public employees are able to advocate and lobby their state legislators for changes in policy, many are bound by rules and guidelines that limit their involvement in those activities. For example, state employees are unable to lobby or advocate for legislative action; rather, their role is to educate key stakeholders using data and the evidence for proven and promising interventions. In some cases, public employees may find it to be useful to engage partners in legislative communication and activities, as they are often not bound by the same restrictions. It’s also important to note that while public employees may have professional restrictions, they are not precluded from using their relationships outside of work and in their capacity as citizens and constituents to communicate freely with legislators, as long as the two roles and modes of communication are kept separate. In smaller states, many elected officials are well known to public employees in their personal lives, and social occasions can offer a great opportunity for meaningful conversations.

When determining how to communicate the value of public health to legislators, it is key to first determine your role and the limitations your employment may place on advocacy. The figure below provides an overview of how to remain engaged with legislators no matter your role.



# Communicating the Value of Public Health: Keys to Successful Engagement of Legislators

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The first step to successful engagement of legislators is to understand the advocacy processes and rules within your organization (See flowchart on Page 1).

## **Gather background information**

- Identify level of the issue- national, state, or local; identify the legislator accordingly.
- What issues are important to the legislators? What have they supported that might be helped by supporting your cause?
- Examine their campaign material, biography, voting history and informal networks
- Understand your role in your organization's advocacy/legislative process
- Align your plans with coalitions relevant to the issue/topic you are addressing

## **Build and maintain a relationship**

- Make the initial connection - Explain who you are, and why you are a topic expert
- After any in-person meetings, send a written thank you note – not texts or emails
- Continue to share newsletters and e-news with pertinent data and stories
- Include your contact information on communication documents
- Advocacy is a year around activity. Don't wait until the legislative session to build strong relationships and educate on public health issues. Schedule a visit before the legislative session begins.
- Outside of legislative session, invite legislators to events you sponsor.
- Scan the headlines and send media alerts when public health is involved. For example, **if there is an emergency (flood, disease outbreak, fire) let legislators know how public health is responding.**<sup>1</sup>

## **Communicate Your Message**

- Develop a one-page leave behind that includes your contact information. **DO NOT** use jargon, acronyms, or technical language. Keep the message concise. Write in a way that the legislator can use to communicate your information to constituents.
- **Describe how essential public health functions (assessment, assurance, and policy development) contribute to overall population health.**
- **Use resources like the RWJF "A New Way to Talk about Social Determinants of Health" to elevate public health work in addressing health disparities.**
- Describe your issue clearly and simply, the action you are taking and what action you want the legislator to take. Highlight mutually beneficial goals.
- Local data rules! Remember to put a relevant face to your story. Show local impact.
- **Distinguish between public health and medical care. For example, as a result of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) legislators may expect that people will be healthy through access to health care alone.**

### **If you only remember 4 things, make it these 4:**

- 1. Get to know your audience.**
- 2. Spend time researching the issue.**
- 3. Make sure that your message is concise & relevant.**
- 4. Advocacy is a yearlong activity.**



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<sup>1</sup> Bolded items reference public health specific recommendations.

# Recommended Resources:

## More Tools for Your Toolbox for Communicating the Value of Public Health



Resource or Publication Title	Description or Summary of Value	Link for Accessing Resource or Publication
<b>APHA Legislative Advocacy Handbook: A Guide for Effective Public Health Advocacy</b>	This Legislative Advocacy Handbook has been prepared by American Public Health Association staff to assist public health practitioner in their individual and coalition advocacy efforts.	<a href="http://www.iowapha.org/resources/Documents/APHA%20Legislative%20Advocacy%20Handbook_1.pdf">http://www.iowapha.org/resources/Documents/APHA%20Legislative%20Advocacy%20Handbook_1.pdf</a>
<b>Strategies for Effectively Communicating with Legislators</b>	This document, published by the Association of Public Health Nurses, provides tips for each stage of in-person communication with legislators as well as for communication via telephone. In addition, the document defines categories of legislators in terms of level of support or opposition, along with recommendations for engaging each type of legislator (for example, “the champion” vs. “the hardcore opponent”).	<a href="http://aphn.wildapricot.org/resources/Documents/StrategiesEffCommunicating.pdf">http://aphn.wildapricot.org/resources/Documents/StrategiesEffCommunicating.pdf</a>
<b>Tips for Communicating with Legislators</b>	This guide, published by the City of Portland, OR, provides tactics and tips for successful communication with legislators. The guide is organized by mode or purpose of communication including by letter, through committee testimony, when answering questions, by telephone, and through an in-person meeting.	<a href="https://www.portlandoregon.gov/oni/article/555173">https://www.portlandoregon.gov/oni/article/555173</a>
<b>Health in All Policies: A Framework for State Health Leadership</b>	This publication of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials provides strategies and information relevant to communicating the value of public health with legislators. In addition, it discusses sustainable changes required to continually cultivate and maintain respect and understanding in cross-sector relationships, with topics including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Defining mutually beneficial goals</li> <li>▪ Cross-sector collaboration</li> <li>▪ Engaging stakeholders</li> <li>▪ Opportunity for policy change</li> <li>▪ Promotion of health and equity</li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.astho.org/HiAP/Framework/">http://www.astho.org/HiAP/Framework/</a>
<b>Building your Advocacy Toolbox: Advocacy vs. Lobbying</b>	A National Association of County & City Health Officials (NACCHO) publication that defines public health advocacy and lobbying, providing activity examples as well as tips.	<a href="http://www.naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/flyer_advocacy-na16-002.pdf">http://www.naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/flyer_advocacy-na16-002.pdf</a>
<b>Health Affairs: At the Intersection of Health, Health Care and Policy</b>	This publication provides real world examples of how a framework of quality concepts can be used to improve the public health system.	<a href="http://content.healthaffairs.org/content/30/4/737.full.html">http://content.healthaffairs.org/content/30/4/737.full.html</a>

<p><b>What's Working in Chronic Disease Prevention and Control</b> (database)</p>	<p>The National Association of Chronic Disease Directors' What's Working database houses state and local successes and initiatives to help state and territorial health departments, partners, and decision makers learn more about What's Working in Chronic Disease Prevention and Control. The success stories in the database demonstrate to policymakers programs that work, show decision-makers that funds are well spent, and serve as program examples for states.</p>	<p><a href="http://www.chronicdisease.org/?DatabasePublic">http://www.chronicdisease.org/?DatabasePublic</a></p> <p>* This link is to the publicly available database. To submit entries to the database, you must log in as a member of the NACDD online community.</p>
<p><b>A New Way to Talk About the Social Determinants of Health</b></p>	<p>This report, published by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, provides ways to create more compelling, effective, and persuasive messages that resonate across the political spectrum.</p>	<p><a href="http://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2010/01/a-new-way-to-talk-about-the-social-determinants-of-health.html">http://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2010/01/a-new-way-to-talk-about-the-social-determinants-of-health.html</a></p>
<p><b>Public Health is ROI: <i>Save Lives, Save Money</i></b> (Section 4: Advocacy)</p>	<p>The American Public Health Association provides an opportunity to become an advocate for APHA's public health priorities and for the value of public health activities in your community. Public health advocates help influence the way the public and policymakers think about and act on public health issues. Everyone can be an advocate for public health and your voice can make a difference.</p>	<p><a href="http://www.nphw.org/assets/general/uploads/Final_section_4.pdf">http://www.nphw.org/assets/general/uploads/Final_section_4.pdf</a></p>
<p><b>Unnatural Causes...is inequality making us sick?</b></p>	<p>This policy guide was prepared to assist public health practitioners in their efforts to create policies that promote and endorse health equity across the Nation. The guide provides strategies and guidance on developing a policy approach in addition to policy recommendations.</p>	<p><a href="http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/assets/uploads/file/UC_PolicyGuide.pdf">http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/assets/uploads/file/UC_PolicyGuide.pdf</a></p>