

# EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MEETING WITH YOUR CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION

## VIRTUAL FLY-IN

### Why We Advocate

One of the oldest idioms in Washington remains true: “If you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu.” Nothing could be more accurate for healthcare organizations and the patients they serve.

Healthcare continues to consume a growing proportion of the nation’s economy, and healthcare costs are one of the most significant budget items for the typical American family. Lawmakers are under constant pressure to lower healthcare spending for taxpayers and consumers and increase the longevity of federal health programs. There are ramifications for patients with common or rare autoimmune or immune-mediated conditions. Unfortunately, policymakers may fail to consider the impact of third parties in healthcare – which is why members of the National Coalition of Autoimmune Patient Groups (NCAPG) do and must continue to engage in important health policy development activities and advocate for their individual and collective organizations and their patients.

In-person and virtual advocacy activities are crucial in developing your relationship with policymakers and their staff. That said, the time to make your “ask” can often be outside these events. Whether by email or phone, grassroots activity is a key tool that the NCAPG utilizes to carry out periodic and often time-sensitive outreach to lawmakers. Much of what staff works in congressional offices is focused on corresponding with constituents like you – answering emails, returning phone calls, and even responding to traditional mail.

### Your Value First

You and your neighbors are directly responsible for the most valued item for a Member of Congress: re-election. Your vote matters, and whether you supported the lawmaker in the previous election or not, you have the voice and platform to change the outcome of the next election. Second, you are a taxpayer. Your tax dollars pay the salary of the Members of Congress and their staff and provide the funds they are responsible for appropriating for public programs. Lastly, and most importantly, you are an expert in your field with valuable, real-world experience – your story – your patient journey. Because of the bandwidth issues that Members of Congress and their staff face, you can assist their work by becoming a trusted resource of information and insight on the ground in their district.

# Key Committees

## **House Appropriations Committee**

- Annual funding for federal programs

## **House Energy & Commerce Committee**

- Medicare, Medicaid, and public health policy

## **House Ways & Means Committee**

- Medicare and tax policy

## **Senate Appropriations Committee**

- Annual funding for federal programs

## **Senate Finance Committee**

- Medicare, Medicaid, and tax policy

## **Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee**

- Public health policy

# Lobbying/Advocating 101

## THE DO'S & DON'TS

### Do's

- Dress professionally in business attire.
- Arrive 5 minutes prior to your meeting.
- Learn the Member's committee assignments and professional background before your visit. Remember that lawmakers are simply people from your community – there's no need to be anxious when meeting with them.
- Take notes and report back on your meeting. Send notes to [hello@autoimmune.org](mailto:hello@autoimmune.org)
- Tell the member or staff why you are there: lead and end with "the ask."
- Personalize the issue.
- Show your openness and knowledge of counterarguments and empathize with them.
- Learn about the Member's previous positions on similar issues.
- Personalize the issue by relating it to situations in his/her home state or district. Admit when you don't know the answer. This provides an excellent opportunity to get back in touch with the answer – proving your value to the office. Thank them for their time and support on other issues that matter to you.

### Don'ts

- Overload the visit with too many discussion topics. Make rambling statements or read from lengthy fact sheets or talking points.
- Make promises you can't deliver on. Use medical jargon or acronyms.
- Expect an immediate answer to your "ask."
- Be offended if the Member is unable to meet and requests that you meet with his/her staff. Staff are key in the Member's process if deciding whether to support your issues and will serve as your key point of contact over time.
- Stay past 30 minutes, even if the staffer seems unhurried.