

# Tips for Working with Legislators

How do I talk to my legislator?

**Be Direct About Your Issues.** You may only be afforded 10 or 15 minutes of a legislator's time. This does not mean they think your issues are unimportant. Remember that they may have dozens of similar appointments throughout the day. So while it's important to exchange pleasantries, don't let your time slip by trading stories about the State Fair. Be clear about why you are there and action you wish the legislator to take.

**Don't Be Disappointed.** When Meeting With Staff. It's quite common for a Congressman's schedule to become over committed. It is very common that advocacy groups will end up meeting with the legislator's staff. This should not be interpreted as a sign of disrespect. Often the staff person has more expertise in the health care arena than the actual legislator. It can be an opportunity to make your point more clearly, especially if discussing a technical issue.

**Don't Use Jargon.** Try to be as clear as possible without falling back into "health speak." No matter how knowledgeable they are on your issue, legislators and their staff still largely approach topics from a layperson's perspective. Keeping your points clear allows them to fully understand the issue and to communicate the issue to others.

**Share Real-Life Examples.** Anecdotes about specific patients who highlight your concerns go much further with legislators than dollar figures regarding your program. Lawmakers deal with budgets in the millions and billions of dollars; examples of financial problems costing thousands of dollars just don't have impact. However, an anecdote related to what budget issues mean to patient care will get their attention.

**Be Courteous.** It's likely you won't get a firm commitment from a legislator or staff. You can press your point, but don't get exasperated if they want to study the issue further.

**Follow Up.** Once you're back home, follow up your conversation with a letter to the legislator thanking him/her for their time and reiterating your talking points. This provides further proof that your issue is important and sets out your issue in writing.

**Thank Them for Support.** If legislators offer their support to you personally or if they eventually support legislation important to your hospice, be sure to thank them for their efforts. This builds rapport for further legislative dialog in the future.