Welcome

As an oral health advocate, the Michigan Oral Health Coalition’s “Grassroots Advocacy Toolkit” is your primer on how to effectively communicate and engage in the political process. Legislators depend on the people and organizations in their district to communicate with them when making policy decisions. Although they receive a great deal of information from their staff, state agencies, and lobbyists, much of what legislators actually decide depends on the views, interests, and preferences of the citizens who elect them. Let them know you are a resource for information on oral health and access to care.

You should make every effort to establish a genuine, personal rapport with legislators and their staffs—a relationship based on trust and a common understanding that you and organizations across the state are vital to the health, economy, and workforce of our state. Legislators are interested in your organization and the role you play in their district and the state. Remember that your legislator is interested in his or her community and constituents—regardless of his or her political party.

Legislators may have ideas or knowledge of resources that could benefit your clinic or organization. Meeting with your legislator provides an opportunity to gather information as well as voice your point of view. Legislators need to have diverse contacts in order to be successful in representing their districts and getting elected. They may also be aware of projects or resources that could benefit your community, such as redevelopment projects or major business expansions. Good relations with your legislators benefit and help strengthen the oral health safety net statewide.

Building a strong connection between your organization, the benefits of oral health care and services in your community, and your legislator is the thrust of the Michigan Oral Health Coalition’s grassroots advocacy activities. Michigan Oral Health Coalition can benefit from what you learned in your meeting. So let us know how the meeting went and what you learned. Thank you to the Policy Committee for developing this toolkit. For additional information, contact the Michigan Oral Health Coalition at 517.827.0466 or visit www.mohc.org.

Michigan Oral Health Coalition Policy Committee
Thank you to our Policy Committee for developing the Grassroots Advocacy Toolkit for the 2017-18 Legislative Session.

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Kim Singh, Co-Chair, My Community Dental Centers;
Amanda Delandsheer, Altarum Institute;
Amy Zaagman, Michigan Council for Maternal Child Health;
Barb MacGregor, Saginaw Health Plan;
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Bill Sullivan, Michigan Dental Association;
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Karen Trompeter, JVS Tri-County Dental;
Kathy Mielke, Michigan Dental Hygienists’ Association;
Rick Lantz, Delta Dental;
Ryan Grinnell, Michigan Primary Care Association;
Tara Kimball, Holland Free Health Clinic;
Teri Battaglieri, Delta Dental
Grassroots Advocacy

Grassroots advocacy programs can be informational, reactive, proactive, or a mix. The Michigan Oral Health Coalition is prepared to put forth legislation, respond to legislation that has already been introduced, mobilize grassroots volunteers when a bill is approaching final action, or commenting on published regulations. We are prepared to provide input to lawmakers, especially those on the committees or subcommittees that work on fine-tuning bills. We are also prepared to be proactive government relations partners with other groups by initiating legislation and providing input for laws and regulations as they are written. The Coalition monitors these key legislative committees: Appropriations on the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services budget, Health Policy and the full Appropriations in both the Senate and House.

Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Health and Human Services

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Coleman Young II (D-Detroit)
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Meeting With Legislators And Policymakers

When you develop a relationship with your policymaker, you will have begun to expand your potential for affecting policy. Your elected official will know who you are and what issues your organization stands for. Meeting with your Policymaker will help to solidify this relationship: a face-to-face meeting makes you “a real person” and not simply another signature on the bottom of a letter. And regular meetings with, and availability to, a Policymaker can help you and your organization be seen as a valuable resource on your issues.

Strategy

• When trying to schedule a visit, be flexible. Policymakers face huge demands on their time, especially when they are in session.

• If you are a community-based organization operating out of a Legislator’s district, you may be more likely to find time in their schedule while they are “home” on Monday and Friday, rather than when they are in session at the Capitol Tuesday through Thursday.

• Prepare and organize! Even when you can arrange a visit, your time will be limited, and you want to make the most of it. Bring materials to hand out if you need to present detailed information.

• Be courteous, not combative. Listen, as well as talk. Try to understand their concerns on your issue and present them with a win-win strategy.

Eleven Tips For A Successful Legislative Or Administrative Visit

1. **Arrange a Visit.** You should call or send an email of introduction. Include information on your subject area and background of your organization. Request an appointment to discuss your ideas or explain why their support on this issue is so important. Legislators are in their districts on a schedule, so call their office to make an appointment.

   Many legislators have websites and 1-800 phone numbers to request meetings. See www.michiganlegislature.org to find legislative listings.

   Do not be discouraged if occasionally your appointment is attended by a staff member instead of the Legislator. The staff are often more informed on certain issues of concern to you, and they have influence over their boss, if the argument is compelling. Building a relationship with the staff and your elected official can be quite beneficial, opening more doors for you in the future.
2. **Plan for your visit.** Organize a short presentation before you go to the meeting. If you are going with a group, get together before the meeting to map out your strategy. Assign each member of your group a topic to discuss; this ensures that the necessary matters are raised during the meeting. Prepare brief fact sheets and other reference materials for distribution at the meeting, or send them to the Legislator before the meeting for background information. Try to include people whom the Legislator knows.

3. **Prepare your talk.** Expect only 5-10 minutes to make your case or if you go with a group 20 minutes total. Bring a fact sheet and materials. Include local personal experiences and stories that show the affect your issue has on the community.

4. **Practice.** Tape your speaking points, listen to yourself and critique your presentation and then share it with someone else who knows very little about the issue. Ask that person if they understand the points you are trying to make.

5. **Make it local!** Whenever possible bring local constituents to the meeting and find out what impact the policy or bill would have on their district.

6. **At the meeting, ask Legislators their feelings on your issues**—if they do not know the issue, have background materials available and offer to explain and follow-up with answers to their questions. Bring copies of all important materials and duplicates of any information you had sent out previously. Do not depend upon them to have kept copies of your materials.

7. **Don’t fudge on the truth.** If you don’t know an answer, offer to get back with the correct information. By making this promise, it gives you a second chance to plug your issue.

8. **Educate**—don’t preach. Everyone wants to know “What’s in it for me?” As an advocate, your job is to present factual information that educates policymakers and/or their staff about the benefits of allocating resources to your issue.

9. **Do not apply too much pressure.** This is a surefire way to make a potential friend or a definite enemy. First impressions are important. Be assertive, not aggressive or obnoxious. Listen carefully to their concerns, because ultimately they need to be addressed. If they have a point of view or a concern, note it so you can provide feedback or otherwise deal with their hesitation. The best solution is a win-win solution.

10. **Contact for more information.** Leave a business card or your name, address, email, and telephone number on the materials for the policymaker and/or their staff.

11. **Send a thank you.** A simple note of thanks goes a long way. In your letter of thanks recap what was discussed, what was planned for or promised (if anything) and your willingness to provide additional information if needed.

Other Ways to Connect with Legislators

Interactions with government officials may be through letters, telephone calls, face-to-face meetings, or formal testimony. Whatever the means, the Michigan Oral Health Coalition is prepared to provide a constructive, considerate, reliable approach from the onset through to the follow-up. Our goal is to raise the profile as a strong and effective advocate of the issues affecting the oral health of Michiganders.

**Letter Writing Campaign**
The letter (mailed, faxed, or e-mailed) is the most popular choice of communication with state and federal legislators. For a directory of state and federal legislators, visit [www.michiganlegislature.org/documents/publications/citizensguide.pdf](http://www.michiganlegislature.org/documents/publications/citizensguide.pdf)

**Letter Template**
Dear <name>:

Thanks for your support of oral health in Michigan. Oral health prevention such as << specify location>> benefit << tell your story>>. Oral health prevention is a cost effective investment because it improves health outcomes and reduces emergency room utilization. I am a voter and taxpayer, who believes that the investments today will reap financial and social benefits for our state.

Sincerely,

<name>
<address>
<city, state, zip>

Remember this is a simple model. Your email/fax/letter will be most effective if you use your own words and experiences.

*Source: Preparing for testimony © Michele Strasz, Catalyst for Action Consultants, 1999*

**Telephone Calls**
Whenever appropriate a telephone campaign is implemented in order to secure a successful lobbying effort.

**In-District Meetings**
Most legislators provide an informal opportunity to get to know constituents. These in-district meetings are great settings to discuss oral health issues that you care about with your Representative and Senator. Meetings take place close to home (“in the district”), in locations like coffee shops or libraries.

**Legislator Invited to In-District Meetings**
Although the collective voice of the Michigan Oral Health Coalition works most effectively for some government interactions, individual legislators want to hear from their own constituents. Ongoing communication between members and their respective legislators is essential to our success. The Coalition encourages its members to develop relationships with their elected representatives. An opportunity to do this is through a site visit—when a member invites government officials to their clinic, school, etc. as a means of increasing understanding of oral health and the importance of our issues.
**Testimony: Telling Your Story**

Oral testimony is an important and more formal method for communicating the Coalition’s view to government. The Coalition identifies "key contacts" to testify, educate them with all the facts on the issue at hand, and make all necessary arrangements. This may be a dental or medical professional, safety net provider, public health official or whoever best advocates our issue.

The following are questions that will help you identify your points to make in writing, for a meeting and oral testimony. These tools will provide you with some of the details you need to make a solid case regarding your issues of concern.

- My name is.....
- I am a voter in your district......
- My concern is..........  
- I am concerned about this because..........  
- Give an example of why you are concerned about this issue using a story, data, and experience.......  
- The ask? What I want you to do about my concern is.....................

*Source: Preparing for testimony © Michele Strasz, Catalyst for Action Consultants, 1999*

**Budget Timeline for the State of Michigan Fiscal Year**

- **September**  
  State Departments begin planning for the next fiscal year.

- **October**  
  The new fiscal year begins on the 1st.

- **November**  
  State Departments submit their budget recommendations to the State Budget Director.

- **January**  
  First revenue estimating conference is held. Governor’s State of the State Address broadly outlines major policy changes and new policy initiatives.

- **February**  
  Governor submits recommended budget to the initiating chamber in the legislature.

- **April**  
  Bill passes in the first house then transmitted to the second house for subcommittee hearings.

- **May**  
  Bill passes in the second house.

- **June**  
  House of Origin considers amended or substituted bill. If no concurrence, a conference committee is requested. Final bill passes both the House and Senate. Governor signs or vetoes the bill. If vetoed, legislative action takes place to correct or override problems in the appropriations process.

- **September**  
  The fiscal year ends on the 30th. Work begins on budget for the next fiscal year.

*Source: Preparing for testimony © Michele Strasz, Catalyst for Action Consultants, 1999*
Social Media Addendum

Social media is an invaluable component of any successful advocacy campaign, and utilizing it is a great way to contact lawmakers and other organizations. It is a critical part of advocacy and outreach because it allows for open dialogue in a public setting, and offers you an additional way to get in touch with lawmakers.

Tips for communicating with legislators on social media:

1. **Tag, tag, tag.** Most government officials and agencies have a social media presence. By tagging them (type @TheirName to find them), you'll link your post to their page. This ensures that it will show up in their notifications, and they will be alerted to the fact that you're reaching out to them.
   a. Twitter tip: when directly tweeting at a lawmaker, put a period in front of their name. This will make your tweet show up in followers’ newsfeeds, not just your personal replies.
   Example: “.@CurtisHertelJr, thanks for your work to improve #oralhealth in Lansing!”
   b. If you have a meeting with an elected official, ask to take a selfie with him or her for social media, then post it and tag them. Lawmakers typically love the attention!

2. **Visuals are key.** Social media is the perfect platform for visuals, so take photos and videos anytime you attend a meeting, town hall or do any work for an advocacy campaign. When engaging in dialogue online, use infographics, photos, and other visual representations of data as opposed to simply typing out a list of figures.

3. **Engage with them often, not only when you have an ask.** Social media is a great resource for building a relationship with lawmakers and their staff, so don’t ignore it during down time. Don’t solely interact with them when you’d like an answer to a question or have a complaint—engage with the posts you support by liking and sharing content. This will not only familiarize your name with their staffs, but show that you see their online presence as a place to build a relationship—not just to complain and criticize.

4. **Keep messages consistent.** Staying on message is critical on social media. As with any advocacy campaign, a strong and solid call to action is often necessary. That requirement is amplified on social media, where there are more voices, opinions and people. If multiple people from your organization are contacting lawmakers via social media, it’s critical that the message is the same. The more they hear the same message, the more familiar they will be with it.

A social media component is key in 21st century advocacy campaigns. It’s a less time consuming and easier way to get in touch with Lansing’s lawmakers and, best of all, everyone can do it.
Instructions: This protocol is intended as a guide to local advocates as they develop relationships with legislators. Please make a copy of the Legislator Feedback Form after each meeting is completed and return it to Karlene Ketola, Executive Director at kketola@mohc.org. If you have any questions please contact the Coalition office at 517.827.0466.

Background Information Form

Legislator’s Name: ____________________________________________________________

If not Legislator, then Staff Member’s Name: ____________________________________________

Party _______ District _______

Experiences pertaining to oral health (personal, family member, community, volunteer)

_____________________________________________________________________________________

Meeting Date: ________________ Place: ______________________ Length of time: ________________

Advocates attending: ________________________________________________________________

Form completed by: ________________________________________________________________

Organization: _____________________________________________________________________

Email: __________________________________________________________________________

What topic(s) did you discuss with the legislator?

Feedback from the legislator:

Additional information needed by the legislator:

Did you get a commitment for action? Yes or No