



AAPD Advocacy Guide

What does it mean to advocate?

Advocacy simply means promoting the best interests and needs of a person or a group, including yourself. Advocates identify a problem and voice their opinion about potential solutions.

Why should you advocate?

An advocate is anyone who presses for change and improvement to the status quo to better their own lives and the lives of their communities. Advocacy helps people become more involved in important decisions that affect their daily lives, enables the voices of the masses to be heard, and, if done effectively, can sway policies and laws for the better.

How do you advocate?

You can advocate in multiple ways, and you should engage in as many levels and ways as possible. Advocacy can happen at the local, state, and federal levels. You can

- Participate in town hall and city council meetings
- Join organizations that support causes important to you
- Spread awareness and knowledge on social media
- Produce data and research that highlights your community's pressing needs
- Host educational conferences and trainings

Who should you be talking to?

Aside from raising awareness among your community and working in coalition with like-minded people and organizations, you should be talking to local, state, and federal-level decision-makers and politicians. Meet with your local and state officials as often as possible and send them emails, letters, petitions, and phone calls. You can do the same with your members of Congress as well. Try to meet with your member of Congress in person while they are at their in-district offices during [congressional recess](#). You can also meet with them virtually if it is more accessible and if the offices can set it up.

Find your elected officials [here](#).



Where do you advocate?

Face-to-face meetings with elected officials are the best way to communicate your message. You can meet with them or their staff in their offices in Washington, D.C, or their districts. While it is always great to advocate directly in front of your members of Congress in their DC offices, it is not always accessible to travel that far. Members are often in recess, so they hold meetings within their state and district. Below are the steps to schedule either a Capitol Hill meeting or an in-district meeting with your elected officials.

1. Find the contact information for your elected officials and their staffers [here](#).
2. Send an invitation to the office and request a meeting to discuss your concerns - you are more likely to meet with a staffer than the official themselves, but these meetings with staffers are just as important.
3. Don't be afraid to follow up if you don't hear back within a reasonable time (they are busy people, but so are you!)
4. Once you hear back, respond with an email confirming your attendance and thanking the office.
5. Research the representative or senator and the issues that are important to them or what they are known for, and find ways to connect your problems and concerns to their areas of interest.
6. Create a state/district-specific one-pager to leave behind
 - a. For example, AAPD has a [Medicaid leave-behind on our website](#) that is free for everyone to use
7. **Make it personal and tell your story!** The whole point of this meeting is for elected officials and their staffers to hear from the people they are directly representing
8. Send a follow-up email after the meeting - thank them for their time, reiterate your message, and include any materials that were referenced or promised during the discussion

What should you be talking about?

One of the mottos of the disability community is “**every issue is a disability issue**”. However, you have limited time when speaking with a member of Congress and/or their staff, so you must pick the most urgent issue to discuss with them. This is often an issue that is a top priority for your area/state and relevant to the current political atmosphere. For example, since the start of President Trump's second term, the top issues AAPD has been working on are cuts to Medicaid and the dismantling of the Department of Education. You can find talking points for those issues on our website.