



American Pharmacists Association®

Improving medication use. Advancing patient care.

How to Conduct A District Visit

Establishing a relationship with your Members of Congress and/or a key member of their staff is one of the most valuable ways to effectively lobby your position. Taking time for a face-to-face meeting will not only be personable, it will also provide Members of Congress' office legislator(s) and/or their staff with solid, real life evidence of the importance of a particular issue to their constituents. Members of Congress and their staff know that the more time that you spend communicating your message to them the more important the issue is to you. Moreover, through these face-to-face discussions, you have a better opportunity to influence their position and build rapport with the Member and/or staff.

Fortunately, you do not have to travel all the way to Washington, DC to take advantage of this opportunity to meet face-to-face! Every Member of Congress has a local office(s) in the District. Year-round you can meet with staff or arrange a visit with the Member during one of the District Work Periods scheduled throughout the year.

Below is a checklist of steps to help you schedule and plan for a District visit.

Step 1: Scheduling an Appointment

- Consider if you want a colleague, a patient, or a prescriber who is affected by the issue and who can demonstrate the broad support for the issue to join you.
- Call your Member of Congress' District office to request a meeting time. For their contact information, visit [APhA's Legislative Action Center](#).
- Tell the scheduler what issue you will discuss (such as the role of pharmacists in health care reform), the date you wish to meet, and who will be present during the visit. Be prepared to offer alternative dates.
- The District office may need a written request. If you send a written request, follow up with a call a few days later to confirm the request has been received. (Polite persistent helps.) Do not be disappointed if you are unable to meet with your Member, engaging with staff can be just as valuable. Staff has the trust of the Member, so persuading them is just as effective as persuading the Member. Your dialogue with them builds key relationships.

Step 2: Preparing for Your Visit

- Notify APhA (APhA's staff, Allison Wiley, Political Action Coordinator, at awiley@aphanet.org or 202-429-7521) about your scheduled visit. APhA will provide you with materials to take with you and key talking points to direct your discussion.
- Review the Member's biography for background information, committee assignments, and also any connections that you may have with the Member.
- Review background information on current pharmacy issues and specific legislation relating to pharmacy. Visit the APhA's Legislative Action Center to review the Member's profile and position on key pharmacy-related bills. (If

supportive of a particular pharmacy bill, in the beginning of your visit, remember to thank him/her for their support of the legislation.)

- If you are going in group, develop a strategy for the visit:
 - Choose a spokesperson to kick off the discussion
 - Decide who will say what and for which talking points each person is responsible for
- Practice your talking points before the visit:
 - Incorporate your personal stories and experiences into your message
 - When available, use data to support your position
 - Remember to leave time for questions

Step 3: For Your Visit

- Be on time and be flexible if the staff is running late.
- Don't be disappointed if your visit is only 20 minutes. Members and staff have very busy schedules. Make sure to leave time for questions. Try to keep the conversation on track.
- Wear business attire.
- If available, bring business cards and remember to ask for the business card of the person with whom you meet.
- Be polite, clear, concise, compelling, and credible in explaining your position; always avoid being negative or providing any criticisms.
- Remember to use your personal examples. Members and staff value your real-life experience and can understand an issue better if you relate it to them in practical terms. Personal examples of how you impacted a patient and demonstrates that you are a frontline provider that has the "pulse" on their constituents' health care needs.
- Don't be afraid to say that you do not know the answer. If you don't know the answer to a question, tell the staff that "That is a great question. I will have to get back to you." (APhA can help in your response.)
- At the end of the meeting, ask what the Member's position is on the issue or bill.
- Make sure you leave the Member's office with the impression that you welcome any future discussion and can be used as a resource on pharmacy issues.
- Don't forget to thank the Member and/or staff before you leave for taking the time to speak with you.

Step 4: Post-Visit

- Contact APhA (APhA's staff, Allison Wiley, Political Action Coordinator, at awiley@aphanet.org or 202-429-7521) to let us know how the visit went and what was discussed. Also, let us know if you need any additional information to follow-up on a question that was asked.
- Within a week, write a thank you note to your Member and/or the staff with whom you met including a summary of your conversation/talking points. APhA has a template letter available at: <http://www.pharmacist.com/AM/TemplateRedirect.cfm?Template=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&ContentID=20117>
- Follow-up on any questions.
- Maintain communication with the Member and their staff through letters, calls, and visits.