



Missouri Prevention Advocacy Leaders

Legislative Substance Use Prevention Advocacy Tips

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TIPS FOR MEETING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS



Your physical presence is a BIG deal. It's shocking how many legislators' offices said 'they had no idea folks were upset about XXX, because no one ever came and told us.'

#1: Get to Know Your Elected Officials and Their Staff Members

- Research a few things about the officials and their political beliefs. This can help make your visit more productive.
- Legislative staff members are the gatekeepers to their elected bosses, if you treat them with respect and build rapport with them early on, you are likely to be treated with some respect in return.

#2: Establish and Objective BEFORE You Meet

- Establishing your goals before you walk into the meeting is crucial to having a productive meeting.
- Advocating for primary prevention funding can always be part of the objective.

#3: Be Organized

- Only bring guests who can speak to your cause or who have a local connection to the elected official. Having a large group of people in the meeting can be counter productive.

- Have an easy-to-follow presentation/speech prepared based on your objective.
 - If your objective is to advocate for prevention funding; first explain why primary prevention is effective, then use majority of the time discussing current LIMITED funding and compare our budget to treatment.

#4: Be Professional

- Dress appropriately. Do not mislead an official by arranging a meeting to discuss one topic and then switch to another when it's time to meet. They may not agree to additional meetings if this happens.

#5: Leave Materials that Support Your Objective and Follow Up

- Have materials that support your presentation printed and ready to leave with the legislator. These materials should concisely summarize your main points.
- Leave your contact information with the elected official. If the elected official has questions about your issues during and after the meeting that you are unable to answer at that time, follow up quickly and professionally with the information.

TIPS FOR CALLING ELECTED OFFICIALS

Making a phone call to your legislators is quick, easy, and can be done in a moment's notice, making it an attractive method for legislative contact. For these same reasons, it is critical that the phone call be effective.

#1: Plan

- Before you call, plan what you are going to say. Your call will be very brief, so keep the message simple and to the point.

#2: Message

- After identifying your request, think about a key point or personal story that supports your request.

#3: Call

- Make the call. If your legislator is in your home district on specific days or on weekends, call them when they are in your home district. There is more time and less distraction, and your position as a constituent will be enhanced if you are talking on "home turf."

#4: Leaving a Message

- You may not be able to reach your legislator if you are calling his or her office during the legislative session. Be prepared to talk to one of the legislator's staff or to leave a message instead. Make sure you get the staff person's full name, and treat them with respect.

#5: Recruit

- Recruit a like-minded friend, family member, or colleague to make a call as well. Legislators pay attention to issues when they believe that many of their constituents care about the issue.

#6: Call Back

- Call more than once. Quantity is as important, if not more important than quality in grassroots advocacy, because a higher number of calls indicates to a legislator that many people in their district care about an issue. As you monitor the issue, call back to ask for specific support or action as appropriate to the process.



TIPS FOR EMAILING/WRITING ELECTED OFFICIALS

#1: Think Before You Write

- Remember, your letter becomes a public record the moment it is received by your legislator. Don't write anything you wouldn't want any other legislative staffer, reporter, or member of the public to read. Lastly, make sure your contact information is included in the letter. Telephone numbers and e-mail are the most frequently used methods of communication.

#2: Timing is Everything

- Take into consideration when you are sending the letter, especially if you are looking to convey your opinion on a bill that may be coming up for vote. In a case like that, it's important to get your note to the legislator before that bill moves to the floor.

#3: Keep it Local

- Always make sure you send your letter to the legislator who represents you. However, you should not hesitate to write to a legislator who is taking a leadership role on an issue that affects you- for example, a committee chair, primary bill sponsor, etc.- even if they are not your elected representative.

#4: Identify Yourself

- Clearly state your name and address. If you are writing on behalf of an organization, include the name of the organization and your affiliation.

#5: Be Direct

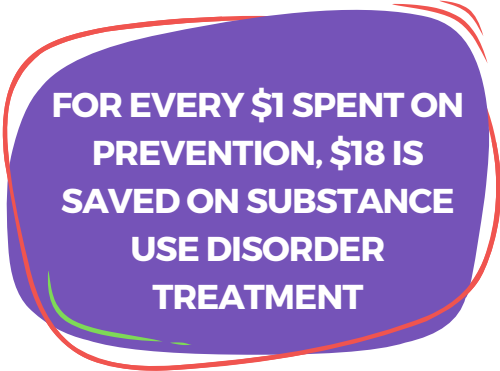
- Be brief and succinct (keep your letter 1-1 1/2 pages long) to be effective and demonstrate respect for your legislator's time. Write about only one subject. Be aware that, generally, your letter will be tallied one of three ways: "support," "oppose," or "interested party."

#6: Keep it Personal

- Do not send a form letter- you can use information from a sample letter as a guide but do your best to make your letter personal. Explaining how the issue impacts you makes your letter more compelling. Write your letter with the knowledge of the likely reader in mind.



SUBSTANCE USE PREVENTION TALKING POINTS



FOR EVERY \$1 SPENT ON
PREVENTION, \$18 IS
SAVED ON SUBSTANCE
USE DISORDER
TREATMENT

What is Substance Use PRIMARY Prevention?

- Substance use prevention, also known as drug use prevention, is a process that attempts to **prevent the onset of substance use**. Prevention efforts may focus on an individual, group, or their surroundings.

Why You Should Care About Substance Use Prevention:

- **Brain Development**
 - Children, young adults, and those that care about them, need to know that the developing brain is at a heightened risk for substance use disorders. While we tend to associate brain development with young children, this developmental period actually lasts into the mid-20s.
- **90% Adults with substance use disorder began smoking, drinking, or using other drugs before age 18.**
 - Substance use disorders are pediatric-onset diseases, and the risk of developing a substance use disorder is much greater for individuals that start using any substance before the age of 18.
- **All Drug Use Is Related**
 - Research shows that for teens aged 12-17, all substance use is related. This means teens that have used any one substance -- alcohol, marijuana, or nicotine -- in the last month are more likely to have used the other two, and other illicit drugs, compared to their peers that have not used any substances. In other words, when parents hear “it’s just a little weed” or “it’s just a little bit of beer” they should be concerned. This pattern holds true for alcohol, marijuana, and nicotine.
- **Youth Substance Use is **Not** Inevitable**
 - According to the 2022 Missouri Student Survey, 59.9% of Missouri Youth grades 6th-12th reported that they had **not** used any substances within the past 30 days.

ADVOCACY IN PREVENTION: WHAT WE CAN AND CANNOT DO

Advocacy is the process of stakeholders' making their voices heard on issues that affect their lives and the lives of others at the local, state, and national level. It also means helping policymakers find specific solutions to persistent problems. Most nonprofits can and do engage in as much advocacy as possible to achieve their goals. Prevention professionals advocate to support an idea or cause that affects behavioral health and health care. When done effectively, advocacy influences public policy by providing a channel for individuals and organizations to voice an opinion. These efforts can, in turn, sway public opinion, garner press coverage, and ultimately provide policymakers an opportunity to respond to constituents' needs.

Lobbying is a type of advocacy that attempts to influence specific legislation. State and federal funders in general forbid providers to lobby specifically when working under the aegis of federal funds. Limitations on lobbying are policy positions set by a funder. Educating the public and/or legislators on a specific issue is not considered lobbying.

Examples of Advocacy: Prevention professionals can and should advocate for proactive legislation that supports behavioral health. Examples include:

- Describe at a legislative hearing the outcomes of similar legislation in other states.
- Encourage coalition members from organizations that do not receive federal or state funds to express their
- position on pending legislation related to the coalition's mission without suggesting a course of action.
- Testify during work time that is clearly documented to be from non-state or federal funds.
- Distribute information packets that indicate why the content of a piece of legislation might be harmful to one's constituents.
- Organize a legislative forum to share information related to substance misuse and its impact.
- Discuss a prevention issue in public.
- Provide information to groups, constituents or legislators on a prevention issue.
- Respond to a legislative committee's written request for information or testimony.
- Explain prevention-related laws or policies to any group or person.
- Create and distribute prevention-related fact sheets or "white papers."
- Tell a member of Congress or state legislature how a grant your organization received has helped your constituents.
- Educate a member of Congress or your state legislature about the effects of an existing policy or legislation on your constituency
- Invite a member of Congress to visit your organization so that he/she may see firsthand how federal funding or a policy affects day-to-day operations and the difference it makes.
- Contact a legislator as a citizen of their district or ward to state a position for or against passage of a particular bill or ordinance.
- Provide an opinion for or against pending legislation when asked in writing by a legislative committee to testify.

Examples of Lobbying: On the other hand, it would be considered lobbying to:

- Post support for an upcoming bill on social media listing one's credentials and employment at a prevention program.
- Take a position on an existing piece of legislation at a hearing or other public event sponsored by one's organization.
- Recommend that coalition members or other citizens vote for or against pending legislation while acting in one's professional role.
- Circular a petition to support or veto a piece of legislation or policy.
- Assist in the writing of potential legislation or legislative amendments.