



ASSOCIATION OF STATE AND TERRITORIAL HEALTH OFFICIALS

# Meeting with Your Congressional Delegation at Home

2019 TOOLKIT

[www.astho.org](http://www.astho.org)



## Acknowledgements

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Dear State and Territorial Health Officials, ASTHO Alumni, and ASTHO Affiliates:

Developing solid, long-standing relationships with your federal congressional delegation is important to ensure that our nation's public health enterprise remains strong and secure. Members of your federal delegation don't often get the chance to learn what public health means for their constituents, so it can be particularly valuable to hear from state and territorial public health officials, former health officials, or other dedicated public health staff. Without the input of public health professionals, members of Congress would have limited knowledge about public health emergencies, chronic disease prevention, environmental health risks, and many other issues that impact your state.

This toolkit provides ASTHO's members, alumni, and affiliates with information to engage with congressional officials in their states.

We hope you will use this toolkit to interact with policymakers in your jurisdictions and to emphasize the vital role of public health in keeping all Americans healthy and safe. Please contact Carolyn Mullen ([cmullen@astho.org](mailto:cmullen@astho.org)), ASTHO's chief of government affairs and public relations, or Carolyn McCoy ([cmccoy@astho.org](mailto:cmccoy@astho.org)), ASTHO's senior director of government affairs, if you have questions or require additional information.

Sincerely,

Michael Fraser, PhD, MS, CAE, FCPP

Chief Executive Officer

Association of State and Territorial Health Officials

# Why educate elected officials?

*“If not us, then who? If not now, then when?” – Rep. John E. Lewis (GA-5)*

State and territorial public health agencies face considerable challenges in the current fiscal environment. These challenges are made even more difficult by the federal funding reductions proposed in the FY20 President’s budget request and impending sequestration cuts. Federal resources account for nearly half of all state and territorial health department funding. ASTHO and its affiliates strongly urge Congress to prioritize funding for public health programs in FY20 so that this important work can continue.

There is a saying in Washington: “If you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu.” Competition for increasingly scarce resources is intense. State and territorial public health officials, health department staff, and ASTHO alumni must continually educate elected officials about the importance of their work to let Congress know that investing taxpayer dollars in public health yields enormous benefits now and for future generations.

Public health professionals need to be more transparent with and accountable to both elected officials and the public about what they do every day—largely behind the scenes—to protect and promote the health, safety, and well-being of all Americans. As stewards of taxpayer dollars, public health officials should communicate to policymakers how health departments are working 24/7 on their behalf. Part of effective policy communication is helping elected officials and the public understand how states use taxpayer dollars to improve public health.



# Policy Communication

Education about what state and territorial public health does and who it helps is related to but distinct from “advocacy” and “lobbying.” According to the IRS, advocacy involves “promotion of an idea that is directed at changing a policy position or program at an institution.” Lobbying is an attempt to influence a legislative body through communication with a member or employee of the legislative body or with a government official who participates in constructing legislation. Lobbying can include written or oral communication for or against specific legislation.<sup>2</sup> Many state personnel are expressly prohibited from engaging in lobbying activities as part of their official duties. The example below is designed to illustrate the distinct, but related pillars of policy communication.



## EDUCATION



Providing information, education, research, and analysis. Does not include value judgements or legislative action.

**Example:** “In our state, the opioid epidemic is causing thousands of deaths per week.”



## ADVOCACY



Communicating with policymakers and the general public about specific issues without taking a position. This conveys a value without taking a position.

**Example:** “State health departments are helping address the opioid epidemic through [XX] interventions.”



## LOBBYING



Conducting activities in support or opposition of legislation or regulations.

**Example:** “We are asking you to support [XX] bill that would increase funding for public health programs.”

Rules about lobbying vary by state, so public health officials may not be able to cross over from “education” to “advocacy” to “lobbying.” Please check your agency or organization’s policies and grant requirements regarding educational, advocacy, or lobbying activities and follow these rules. At a minimum, however, every public health professional can and should educate elected officials in the interest of improved transparency and accountability.

## Making the Case for Public Health: We Need You<sup>3</sup>

Policymakers spend time outside of Washington, D.C. for “recess” or “district work periods.” These times provide a unique opportunity to meet face-to-face with representatives and tell them more about the valuable work state and territorial public health does and how it benefits their constituents.

### Upcoming Recess or District Work Periods

Members of Congress will be in their states during the month of August. ASTHO urges state health officials to take advantage of this time to meet with their congressional delegations. August is the best time to get a member of Congress to visit state/territorial health departments.

ASTHO strongly encourages state and territorial health officials, alumni, and affiliates to partner with their county and local health departments and conduct these meetings together so elected officials get the full picture about the role of federal funding for state, county, and local health departments. Please contact Ian Goldstein ([igoldstein@naccho.org](mailto:igoldstein@naccho.org)), government affairs specialist at the National Association of County and City Health Officials, for assistance connecting with county or local health officials.

# How to Schedule a District Office Meeting<sup>4</sup>

Below are instructions for requesting a meeting, as well as a sample request meeting email. ASTHO suggests sending a scheduling meeting request approximately three weeks in advance of the desired meeting date.

- 1.** Visit <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members> and use your address and zip code to identify who represents you in the U.S. Congress. The website will provide you with the names of both Senators and Representatives, as well as the contact numbers for their district offices.
- 2.** Call the district office closest to the state health department or your home and ask the staff to provide you with the name and contact information for the scheduler who handles the Representative's or Senator's district schedule. Also inform the staff that you are a constituent.
- 3.** Send an email (see examples on the next page) with several options for meeting times. Remember to request meetings when Congress is out of session because members are more likely to be in their districts at that time.
- 4.** If you do not receive a response immediately, that is normal. However, if you have not received a response within one week, follow up with the scheduler to ensure receipt of your request.
- 5.** On the day of the meeting, be prepared to discuss how the health department is strengthening public health in the state and the challenges you face due to the current federal budget climate.

## Sample Email Invitation for a District Office Meeting

Dear Senator/Representative (INSERT NAME),

I would like to request a meeting with you during the upcoming August district work period at your district office. I am available during the following (INSERT DATES and TIMES). The purpose of this visit is to discuss with you our community's unique public health challenges, including (INSERT SOME OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGES IN YOUR STATE), and how our agency uses federal and state resources to improve the public's health.

Please let me know by (DATE) if you will be able to attend. To follow up, please contact me at (INSERT YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS AND CELL PHONE NUMBER) as soon as possible.

Sincerely,  
(INSERT YOUR NAME)

## Sample Email Invitation for a Meeting at the State Health Department

Dear Senator/Representative (INSERT NAME),

I would like to invite you to visit the (INSERT HEALTH DEPARTMENT NAME) during the upcoming August district work period. I am available during the following (INSERT DATES AND TIMES). The purpose of this visit is to discuss with you our unique public health challenges and how our agency uses federal and state resources to improve the public's health.

During the visit, you will meet key members of my staff to gain a better understanding of what we are doing to strengthen public health in (STATE). We invite you to tour our facilities so you can see public health programs in action.

Please let me know by (DATE) if you will be able to join us. To follow up, please contact (INSERT STAFF NAME) by (INSERT EMAIL) or (INSERT PHONE NUMBER) as soon as possible so we can begin planning this meeting and a tour of our facilities.

Sincerely,  
(INSERT YOUR NAME)



## Sample Health Department Visit Agenda

Provided below are sample agendas for a meeting with a member of Congress at the state health department. Please remember to take a lot of pictures so ASTHO can promote this interaction in communications and through social media.

**9 - 9:30 a.m.**

### **Welcome and Overview of the State's Critical Public Health Issues**

(Facilitated by state health official and senior deputies)

**9:30 - 10 a.m.**

### **Emergency Preparedness and Response**

(Tour emergency operations center)

**10 - 10:30 a.m.**

### **Substance abuse/misuse**

**10:30 - 11 a.m.**

### **Chronic Disease, Maternal and Child Health, and Infectious Disease**

**11 a.m. - 12 p.m.**

### **Working Lunch**

**12 - 2 p.m.**

### **Public Health Laboratory**

(Travel to tour public health lab)

## Factsheets

ASTHO developed a set of federal policy priorities to promote and protect public health funding. These materials can be found on ASTHO's Advocacy Priorities website at: [www.astho.org/Advocacy-Materials](http://www.astho.org/Advocacy-Materials).

Please print some of these documents, including information about the health department, and distribute them during the meeting with a member of Congress.

## Sample Talking Points

Below are talking points that can be used to discuss the importance of federal funding for public health. While these talking points can be used during meetings with members of Congress, they are merely a guide and will need to be further refined with input and specific examples from state and territorial health officials.

**Note:** to request more detailed talking points, please contact ASTHO's government affairs staff.



Good morning/afternoon! Thank you for taking time to meet with me. I am excited to talk to you today about the important role that public health departments play in keeping our communities safe and healthy. In fact, to truly improve health, you need strong and sustained investments across the agencies and programs that are responsible for a wide range of public health issues.



In my state, over XX amount of federal funding supports various programs to improve and protect the health of the population. With the return of sequestration this year, we are gravely concerned about the impact a \$55 billion (approximately 10%) cut will have on public health programs.






I hope Congress builds upon the success of the FY19 appropriations bills and provides public health with sustained, predictable, and increased funding to address several public health priorities in our state, including *(mention some of your top public health priorities)*.



Thank you for taking time out of your schedule today to meet with us! Please feel free to contact us if you need a resource or information about public health.

## Facts About Federal Funding for Public Health

-  In FY20 sequestration returns, which would result in a \$55 billion reduction in the total funding available for non-defense discretionary programs. Congress must act to once again raise the caps or else a 10 percent funding cut for most non-defense programs would occur on Oct. 1.
-  For the first time in two decades, American life expectancy has declined due to heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and drug overdoses. CDC funds state and local public health efforts to prevent these diseases—and more, not less, is needed.
-  Federal investment in public health has not kept pace with inflation or the considerable challenges posed by infectious disease outbreaks, extreme weather events, and other emergencies, such as the Flint water crisis. According to a 2017 report by the Trust for America's Health, of the \$3.36 trillion spent annually on healthcare, only 3 percent of all health spending is directed to public health, which includes federal, state, and local resources. That equates to an average of around \$255 per person. By contrast, total healthcare spending is \$10,345 per person.

## Follow Up



As with any meeting with a high-ranking official, it is important to follow up with him or her and the staff after the meeting. If the member requested more information on a certain program, be prompt and provide this information. Hand-written thank you notes are ideal, but don't forget to use social media! Members of Congress engage electronically and enjoy sharing their work in the district. Use the photos from the visit and tag the member of Congress on social media.

Also, be sure to provide prompt feedback and debrief with ASTHO's government affairs staff. It will inform their advocacy efforts with Congress and the Administration.

### ASTHO 2019 Advocacy Materials

[www.astho.org/Advocacy-Materials](http://www.astho.org/Advocacy-Materials)



## References

1. Association of State and Territorial Health Officials. ASTHO Profile of State and Territorial Public Health, Volume Four. Arlington, VA: Association of State and Territorial Health Officials. 2017.
2. National Association of County and City Health Officials. "The NACCHO Advocacy Toolkit." Available at <http://www.naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/gov-advocacy-toolkit.pdf>. Accessed 4-15-18.
3. Coalition for Health Funding. "Public Health Recess Toolkit." Available at [https://www.apha.org/~media/files/pdf/advocacy/phact/170418\\_chf\\_recess\\_toolkit.ashx](https://www.apha.org/~media/files/pdf/advocacy/phact/170418_chf_recess_toolkit.ashx). Accessed 4-15-18.
4. Ibid.