



# TAKE ACTION



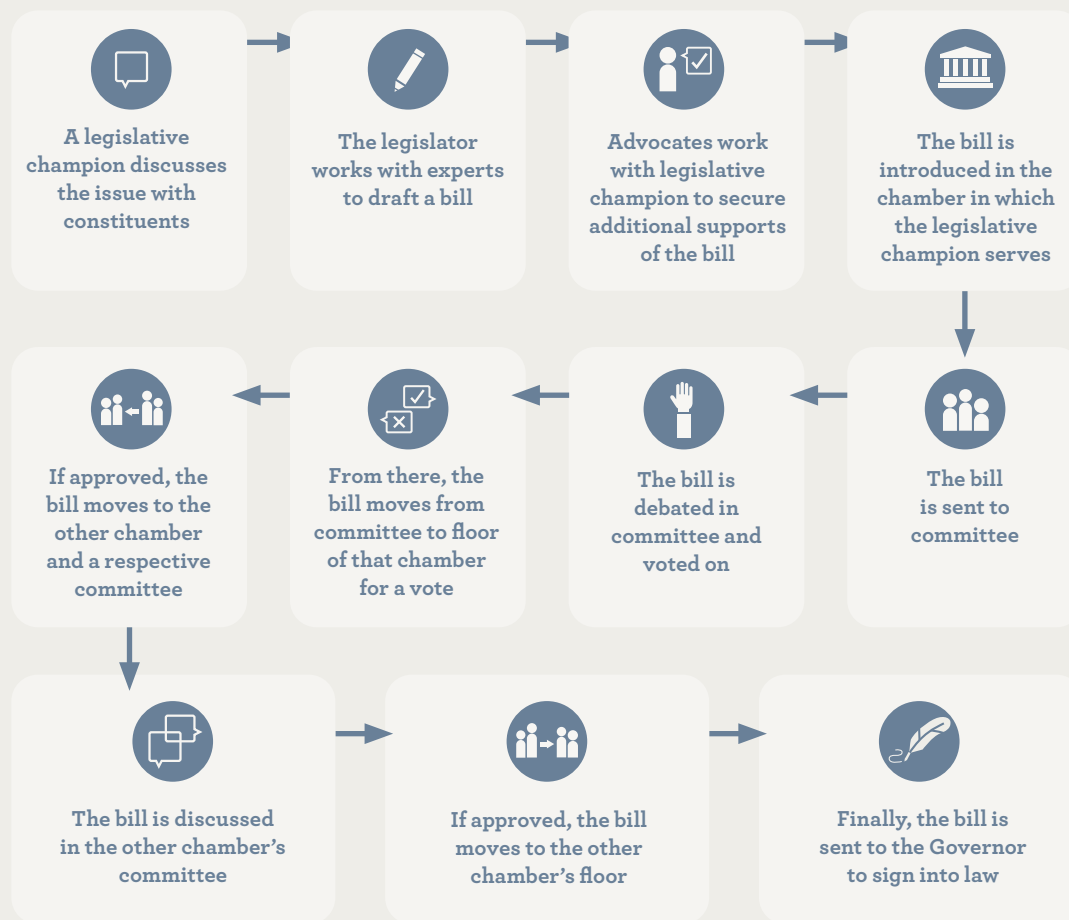
## POLICY ADVOCACY

If you are able, advocating in the Capitol and working with legislators in person is a powerful way to promote your issue and make change. In this section, we will break down the legislative process and discuss ways you can advocate for your chronic condition with elected officials.

## Understanding the Legislative Process

The legislative process can seem intimidating at first, but it's essential that advocates understand how policies and law are created at the state and national level. Lawmaking governs the activities of insurance companies, physicians and many other areas of focus for advocates. Taking the time to learn how laws are made will make you a much more effective advocate. Lawmaking can vary from state to state and at the national level, but there is a common process for how ideas become a written bill which can become a law.

### HOW A BILL BECOMES LAW





## KNOW HOW TO TRACK A BILL

It's helpful for advocates to keep an eye on legislation as it moves through the process.

Legislation may move from one committee to the next or the house floor with little warning. Amendments to bills can be changed at the last minute without explanation. Bills can be packaged together around a larger issue. This can affect a bill's success or failure.

Make sure you are aware of what's happening so you can better advocate with legislators and their support staff.

## SUSTAINED, CONSISTENT ADVOCACY IS KEY TO MAKING PROGRESS

Keep this in mind: if your issue isn't an issue for the leaders of the House and Senate, then your issue isn't going anywhere.

Whether at the state or federal level, the leaders of the House and Senate bodies control every bill that moves through their chambers. The Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate will typically not bring any bill to the floor for a vote unless they know it is going to pass.

It is challenging to elevate issues above the fray of typical legislative battles, making it important that advocates remain engaged in a sustained and unified manner.

### Follow these tips:

- » **Know your goal.** Try to do enough research that you are clear on the solution you wish to see.
- » **Message your goal clearly.** Be clear in your call to action. Make sure you can articulate your ask of legislators.
- » **Don't give up.** Sometimes it can take many years to elevate an issue to the point that a bill can be passed. Don't get discouraged! It's a marathon, not a sprint.

*Tip*

Once a federal bill gets a number, you can keep track of it at [www.congress.gov](http://www.congress.gov).



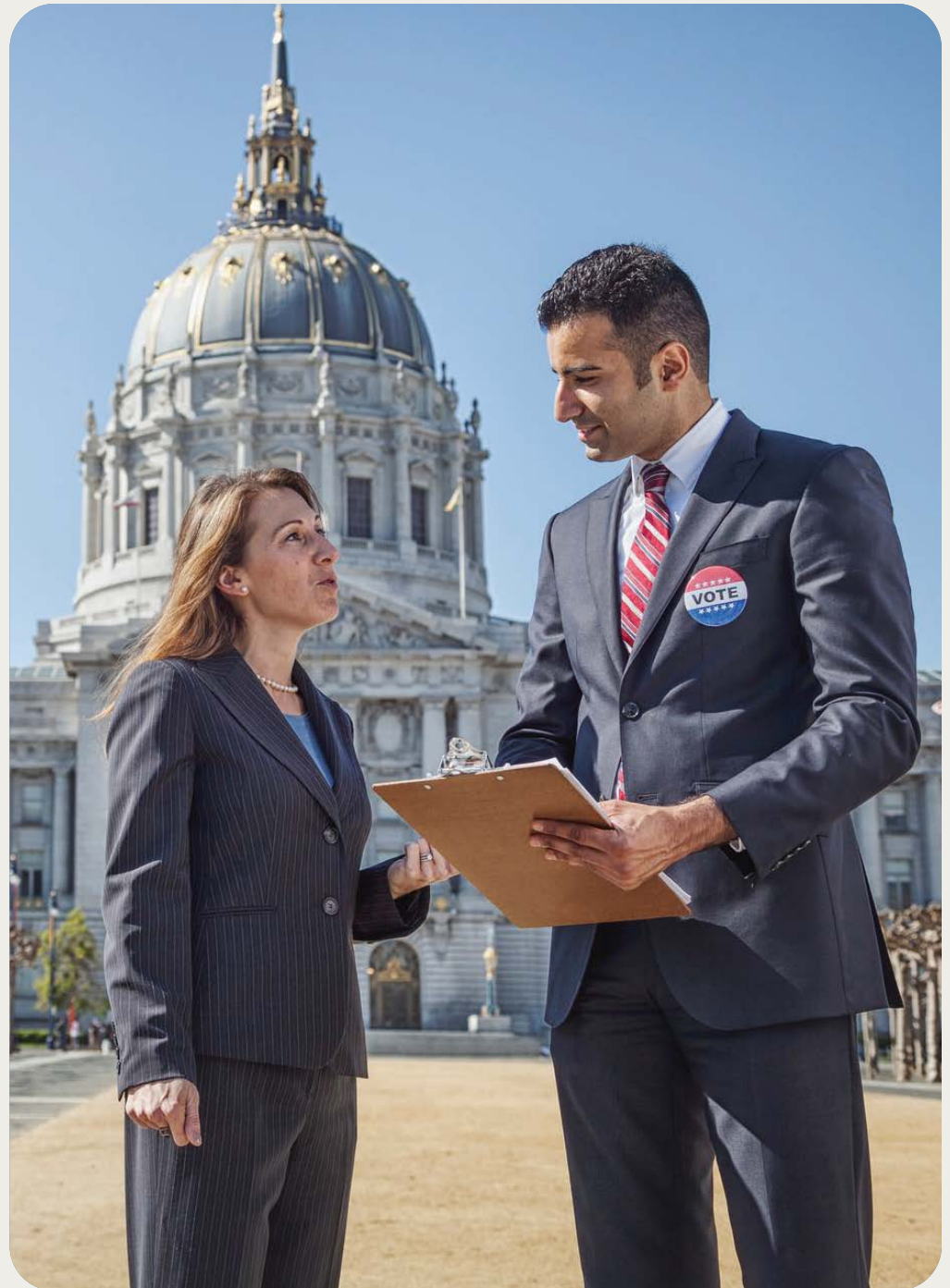
# Speaking with Legislators

Meeting with legislators is a critical part of influencing how policy gets created. They need to hear from you in order to understand the importance of the law and what problems it must try to solve. Legislators want to hear from constituents. You should feel confident reaching out and asking to meet. Here are some steps to ensure you have a great connection once you've secured a meeting.

- ✓ **Plan your conversation.** When meeting with a legislator, it is especially important to show up prepared. **Become educated on your issue, prepare examples and resources and have a clear ask for your legislator.** By meeting with legislators in-person, you can have a lasting impact on the policy directives they are prioritizing and how they vote on key issues.
- ✓ **Arrive on time.** Legislators are remarkably busy. Some elected officials will meet with dozens of constituents in a single day. **Arriving to your meeting on time and ensuring you are prepared to utilize that time is key in leaving a good impression.**
- ✓ **Follow up.** After having a conversation with your state or federal representative, **it is important to follow up with a thank you email, phone call and/or social media post that reiterates your ask.** By following up, you are showing that you care about your issue and the time your legislator took to learn about it.

Follow up with a social media post and tag your legislator, thanking them for meeting with you while highlighting the issue.

Tip



## Getting to Know Staffers

Having a good relationship with your legislative representatives is critical to ensuring they will be a good champion for your cause. But an invaluable and often overlooked relationship for advocates are legislative staff members. Many visitors to the capitol may feel slighted when they must meet with a staff member, instead of the member themselves but this is not an opportunity to be wasted!

- ✓ **Staffers often know more about the status of a bill or issue than the member themselves.** For this reason it is important to have a good relationship with legislative aids who deal with health care matters. They will be able to provide you the inside scoop.
- ✓ **Keep in mind that the legislative staffer is responsible for keeping an eye on ALL bills in their portfolio,** and that can cover multiple issue areas, so that your representative does not miss anything. If you are offering to help track an issue or provide solid background info when they need it, they will likely accept your offer and return the favor!
- ✓ **Remember, you are an ambassador for your patient group, dedicating your time to advocate for a cause that is important to you.** It's appropriate to reach out to staff members directly and consistently. Once a staffer knows you are legit and not a disgruntled taxpayer, they will likely share their personal email or phone number with you to share information more directly.

## Other Forms of Policy Advocacy

Policy advocacy can mean more than spending all day at the Capitol. Advocates can create policy change in many ways, including getting advocacy days recognized by local government, sending letters to legislators and attending rallies in support of your issue. Follow key advocacy organizations to keep track of important events and opportunities for you to advocate. Check out the Chronic Disease Coalition website to send a letter to your legislator.

