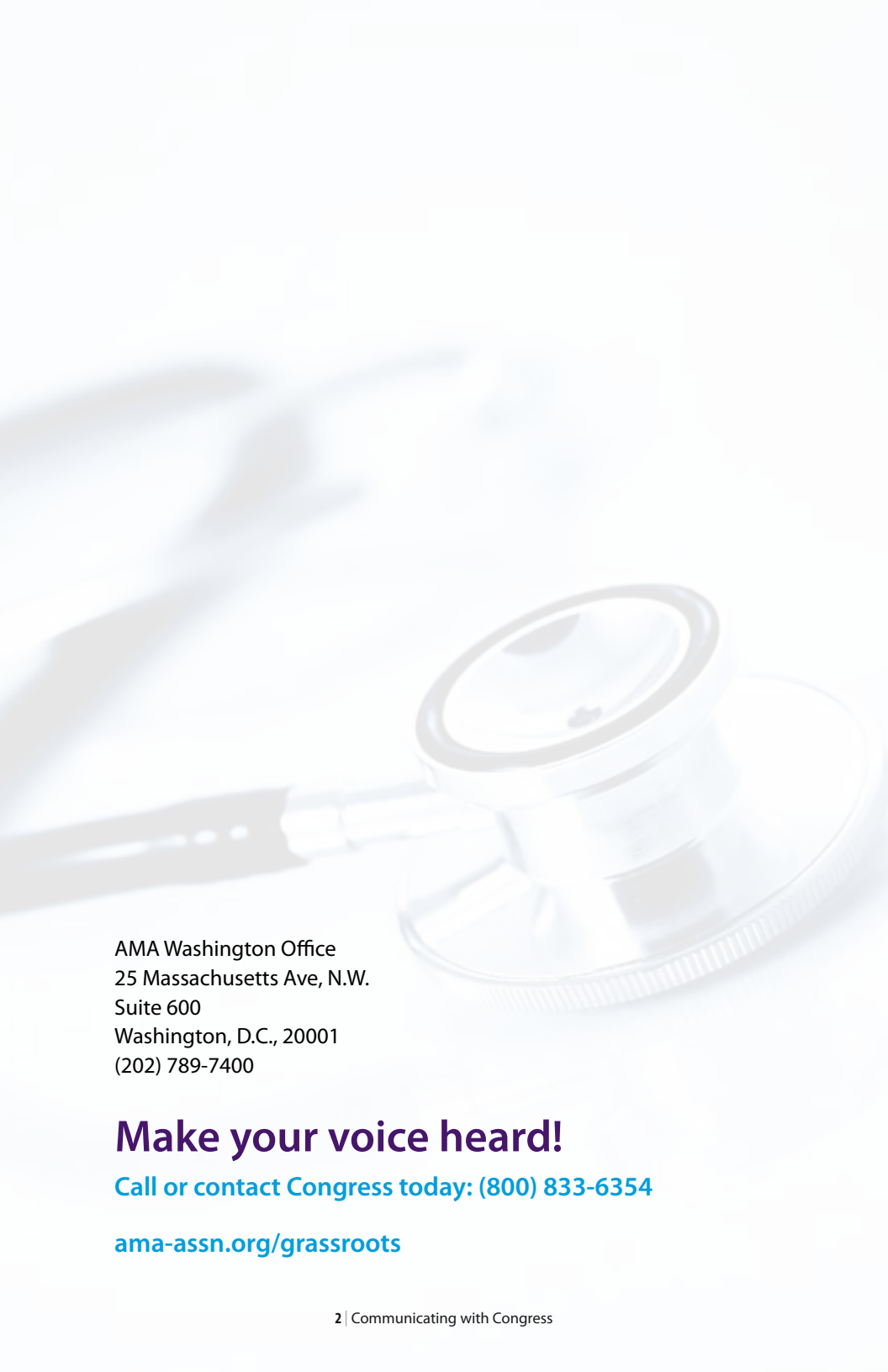




How to make your voice heard by Congress.

**A publication of the
American Medical Association**





AMA Washington Office
25 Massachusetts Ave, N.W.
Suite 600
Washington, D.C., 20001
(202) 789-7400

Make your voice heard!

Call or contact Congress today: (800) 833-6354

ama-assn.org/grassroots

Make your voice heard

As a member of the medical community, your responsibility in communicating with members of Congress is especially important because no one can better explain the complex nature of medically related policy decisions than those involved on a day-to-day basis in the medical profession.

Elected officials count on—in fact, they need—constituent input like yours in order to be effective legislators. Ongoing communication is the only way public representatives will know and understand how voters feel about particular issues.

Letters, emails, phone calls and personal visits are typical ways in which constituents deliver their message to legislators.

You can be most effective in conveying a message by relating issues to your own personal experience or professional expertise, or relating them to the effects they will likely have on a Congressional member's constituents.

This guide, developed by the American Medical Association (AMA), will give you tips on how best to communicate your concerns to your elected officials in Washington, D.C.

Visit our website at ama-assn.org/grassroots for more information on how you can communicate effectively with elected officials.



Be a “Very Influential Physician”

The AMA has developed a program to help physicians take on a leadership role in grassroots activities on behalf of organized medicine. Our Very Influential Physicians (VIP) program helps physicians learn how to create, maintain, and effectively leverage relationships with members of Congress and their staff in order to advance our shared agenda on Capitol Hill.

As a VIP, you will have the opportunity to educate and engage members of Congress on important issues. You are a trusted source to them. You are an authority on health care, and they will listen to your thoughts. As legislation begins to move, you may be asked to personally contact those elected officials by phone, email or conduct an office visit.

Visit ama-assn.org/go/vip and become a VIP today!

Grassroots resources for AMA members

The AMA has created several programs specifically designed to help you communicate with your elected officials. Visit ama-assn.org/grassroots for more information on how these programs can benefit you and your patients.

VIP program

The VIP program is designed to help physicians develop and effectively leverage high-level relationships with members of Congress and their staff. VIPs are leading advocates advancing organized medicine's agenda and they are encouraged to reach congressional leaders directly—sometimes on short notice—by phone or by scheduling face-to-face meetings when important legislation is moving in Congress. Become a VIP by signing up online at ama-assn.org/go/vip.

Physicians' Grassroots Network











The Physicians' Grassroots Network ("PGN") website—ama-assn.org/grassroots—features up-to-date "Take Action" pages for physicians to contact their members of Congress on timely issues of importance to physicians and patients. Members can also access information about their member of Congress, receive email alerts and background information on important legislation, and quickly access election results.

Patients' Action Network

The Patients' Action Network ("PAN") website—patientsactionnetwork.org—features daily changing news, "Take Action" pages encouraging action on issues that affect patients and opportunities for patients to participate in discussions via social media channels, including Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

The “DOs” and “DON’Ts” of effective communication with your member of Congress

DO

-  Identify clearly the subject or subjects in which you are interested, not just by the U.S. House and Senate bill numbers.
-  State why you are concerned about an issue or issues. Your own personal experience, particularly as a member of the medical community, is excellent supporting evidence.
-  Explain how you think an issue will affect patients, the medical profession, your community or family.
-  Restrict yourself to one or, at most, two topics.
-  Put thoughts in your own words. If a member of Congress receives numerous letters with nearly identical wording, he or she may discount them as part of an organized pressure campaign.
-  Try to establish an ongoing relationship with your representative and senators, which will give you more influence as a constituent.
-  Get involved early in the legislative process by communicating while legislation is being considered by congressional committees, as well as when it is on the House and Senate floor.
-  Find out the committees and subcommittees on which your representative or senators serve. Members of Congress have much more influence over legislation within their committees’ and subcommittees’ jurisdiction.
-  Use the AMA Grassroots Hotline to call Congress: 1 (800) 833-6354
-  Visit the AMA in Washington website to sign up for action alerts and/or contact Congress today: ama-assn.org/grassroots

DON'T



Don't ever, ever threaten. Don't hint, "I'll never vote for you unless you do what I want." Present the best arguments in favor of your position and ask for their consideration in a respectful manner.



Don't pretend to wield vast political influence. Contact your member as a constituent, not a self-appointed spokesperson for the medical community.



Don't use trite phrases or cliches. They can make your letter sound mass-produced when it isn't.



Don't link campaign contributions to legislative support.

Visit ama-assn.org/grassroots for more information on how to communicate effectively with members of Congress.

Call the AMA Grassroots Hotline at (800) 833-6354 to sign up for action alerts or to learn how to contact your members of Congress.

How to communicate effectively with elected officials

PHONE CALLS

Phone calls are an effective way to communicate with members of Congress. They can be very useful to a constituent who wants to make his or her views known to a member of Congress, although often times constituents will speak with congressional staff. Phone calls can also be used to learn where a member of Congress stands on an issue, which you can then incorporate into a follow-up letter. Phone calls are very effective when time is of the essence, such as in the days or hours leading up to important votes.

Be sure to do your homework before you call. Chances are good that the staff person on the other end will specialize in your issue concern. And remember, “I don’t know,” is an acceptable response, especially if it’s followed by, “but I will be sure to get back to you.”

Visit AMA’s website at ama-assn.org/grassroots for more tips on how to write an effective letter to your members of Congress.

If you don’t know a member of Congress’ phone number, call the AMA Grassroots Hotline at (800) 833-6354 to be connected to your member of Congress.



LETTERS

Letters can be delivered to your member's office by email, fax or postal service. Written communications are most effective early in the legislative process. Visit ama-assn.org/grassroots to find your member's contact information.

Be sure to write on personal or business stationery. This will eliminate any doubt about your name and address. If you don't have printed stationery, type your name and address at the end of your letter and sign above it.

Representatives read a significant portion of their mail personally, while senators often ask their staff to select the most interesting and captivating letters to read. Congressional offices keep a weekly and, in some cases, daily, count of contacts regarding particular issues.

Your letters count! Be sure to avoid "form" letters and just be yourself!

Planning a personal visit

Meeting with a member of Congress or their congressional staff is a very effective way to convey a message about a specific issue or legislative matter. Below are some suggestions to consider when planning a visit to a congressional office.

Plan your visit carefully: Be clear about what it is you want to achieve; determine in advance which member or committee staff you need to meet with to achieve your purpose.

Make an appointment: When attempting to meet with a member, contact his or her appointment secretary or scheduler. Explain your purpose and whom you represent. It is easier for congressional staff to arrange a meeting if they know what you want to discuss and your relationship to the area or interests represented by the member.

Be prompt and patient: When it is time to meet with a member, be punctual and be patient. It is not uncommon for a congressperson to be late, or to have a meeting interrupted due to the member's crowded schedule. If interruptions do occur, be flexible. When the opportunity presents itself, continue your meeting with a member's staff.

Be prepared: Whenever possible, bring to the meeting information and materials supporting your position. Members are required to take positions on many different issues. In some instances, a member may lack important details about the pros and cons of a particular matter. It is therefore helpful to share with the member information and examples that demonstrate clearly the impact or benefits associated with a particular issue or piece of legislation.

Be political: Members of Congress want to represent the best interests of their district or state. Whenever possible, demonstrate the connection between what you are requesting and the interests of the member's constituency. If possible, describe for the member how you or your group can be of assistance to him or her. When it is appropriate, remember to ask for a commitment.



Be responsive: Be prepared to answer questions or provide additional information in the event the member expresses interest or asks questions. Follow up the meeting with a letter of thanks that outlines the different points covered during the meeting, and send along any additional information and materials requested.

Update the AMA: After your visit with your elected official, take the opportunity to also update the AMA, your state medical society and/or your specialty society. Sharing your experience not only offers the AMA good feedback for future AMA member outreach, but also enhances its ability to lobby that issue. With your help, the AMA can advocate more effectively on behalf of its physician and student members.

The AMA wants to make sure you get the most out of your visit with your representative. Please visit our website at ama-assn.org/grassroots for more tips on how to arrange a meeting with your elected officials, or to update the AMA on how your visit went.



Make your voice heard!

Call or contact Congress today: (800) 833-6354

ama-assn.org/grassroots