



# Advocacy

If you've never advocated before, this section provides general information regarding the many different ways in which you can make your voice heard as well as an advocacy checklist to get you started. In later chapters in the toolkit, you will find tools and templates to help support your work.

Advocacy 101

Advocacy Checklist

“A powerful example of our advocacy leadership is our work on skin cancer. As a member of the National Council on Skin Cancer Prevention, we were delighted this year when the Acting Surgeon General released a Call to Action to Prevent Skin Cancer. This disease affects over five million people in the United States each year, including me. A renewed focus on awareness, research, and access is critical to saving lives from this largely preventable cancer.”

JAN BRESCH, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT AND  
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, PREVENT CANCER FOUNDATION

# Advocacy 101

**Advocacy:** noun \ˈad-v-ˈk-sē The act or process of advocating or supporting a cause or proposal.

## IS THE WORD “ADVOCACY” INTIMIDATING?

Most people have never set foot on Capitol Hill or in their state legislature. However, advocacy is much more than supporting legislation or being involved in politics. It includes a wide array of activities and efforts that can actually be fun and easy. Here are some examples of advocacy activities that range from individual actions to group, community, and legislative or policy efforts.

**Q:** Do you stay active and maintain a healthy weight?

**Q:** Do you try to maintain a healthy diet?

**Q:** Do you encourage family and friends to take care of themselves?

**Q:** Have you asked about your family medical history?

**Q:** Have you been screened for cancer and other diseases?

**Q:** Do you keep up with news coverage about cancer and health care issues?

**Q:** Have you participated in a health-related activity in your community?

**Q:** Have you navigated a health care system for yourself or a loved one?

**Q:** Have you promoted a fitness program at your place of employment?

**Q:** Have you sent a letter to the editor regarding a health-related issue?

**Q:** Have you ever contacted your state legislator or Member of Congress in support of or opposition to an issue?

## THESE ARE ALL EXAMPLES OF ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES.

While it is critical for individuals to actively play a role in their own cancer prevention and early detection efforts, collectively we can effect even greater change through broader advocacy efforts at local, state, and national levels. Advocacy, in the classic sense, is influencing decision and policy makers in support or opposition of a cause or policy. The Prevent Cancer Foundation, however, helps individuals across the

country better understand how they can become advocates through taking steps, both large and small, in their daily lives. Prevent Cancer Foundation advocates fight for policies, laws, and regulations that will expand awareness of and opportunities for Americans to access effective cancer screening and prevention strategies. But we can't do it alone. To be truly effective, a commitment to cancer prevention and early detection needs to be made in state capitols, county boards, town halls, communities, and homes across the country. That's where you as a grassroots advocate come in.

## THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT TYPES OF ADVOCACY, INCLUDING:

### COMMUNITY

Represent the rights and interests of your community (which can be your neighborhood, place of worship, community organization, etc.). Educate those around you so that you can work together to build the strongest community possible.

### LEGISLATIVE

Work with elected officials (at local, state, or federal levels) to educate and influence them on important legislative decisions. Every individual has a constitutional right to have their voice heard by their elected decision-makers.

### MEDIA

Increase public awareness and influence public interest in prevention and early detection through letters to the editor, social media, interviews, etc.

### PERSONAL

Represent and speak up for yourself and/or your loved ones. Be informed about the issues that affect you and take responsibility to make sure that necessary changes are made, so that you have the opportunity to live a healthy life.

### POLICY

Influence laws, regulations, and rules that have an impact on your health and well-being. This can be as lofty as a federal regulation or as simple as a rule at your workplace.



# HOW WILL YOU ADVOCATE?

The following activities are examples of different ways in which you can be an advocate. All of these efforts are personal, because you are taking the initiative to improve your own wellness and create healthier communities. Many of these strategies incorporate other types of advocacy and overlap with one another as you will see below. These are just a few examples of the many ways in which you can be a cancer prevention and early detection advocate.

	Personal	Community	Media	Legislative	Policy
Ask about your family history	✓				
Organize a neighborhood walking group	✓	✓			
Write a letter to the editor	✓		✓		
Contact your elected officials in support of legislation	✓			✓	
Encourage your employer to provide a wellness policy	✓				✓
Maintain a healthy weight and eat a healthy diet	✓				
Encourage family, friends, and neighbors to take care of themselves	✓	✓			
Write an op-ed piece	✓		✓		
Stay up to date on cancer prevention and early detection related legislation at state and federal levels	✓			✓	
Understand how the Affordable Care Act (ACA) impacts you and your family	✓				✓
Work with your local government agency to develop hiking and bike trails	✓	✓			✓
Stay up to date on news stories and utilize social media to educate others	✓	✓	✓		

# Advocacy Checklist

Are you ready to advocate but aren't sure where to start? Consider engaging in some (or all) of the following advocacy steps which can help you accomplish your goals. These steps are suggestions for a successful grassroots advocacy strategy. You may complete some of these steps out of order, or at the same time, but chances are they will prove helpful to your advocacy goals.

## 1 Define Your Role

The easiest, yet most important, question to ask is “Why you?” Why do you care about cancer prevention and early detection?

- Did you lose a loved one to cancer?
- Have you recently committed yourself to a healthier lifestyle?
- Do you have a family history of cancer?
- Do you want to reduce the cancer risk for your children?
- Does your community have a high rate of cancer and chronic illness?
- Do you want to see health care dollars spent more wisely?

You have a story to tell and you have to determine how you would like to frame your story to have the biggest impact possible. The good news is that your story matters and you have information that your elected officials want and need to hear. Whether you have a compelling personal story or strong data and facts, you have the power to help shape public policy.

You may have heard of “grassroots advocacy” which simply means that you, as a constituent, make your voice heard by contacting your elected officials and communicating your position on an issue or piece of legislation. You wield significant power—more than a paid lobbyist or professional advocate—because you live in the geographic location that your elected officials care about and your experiences are important for them to understand. They want to hear about your concerns and work with you to try to address them.

## 2 Build Your Team

Do you have loved ones, friends, or colleagues who might also be passionate about cancer prevention and early detection? What about...

- Family members
- Friends
- Neighbors
- Colleagues
- Members of your place of worship
- Parents and teachers at your child's school
- Professors and students at the local university (particularly in fields like public health, social work, public policy, etc.)
- Health care professionals
- Members of the media

Ask them if they are interested in cancer prevention and early detection. They might be helpful allies in your advocacy efforts.

## 3 Identify the Issue

As an advocate, you probably have many different concerns you'd like to address. Limit them. Determine what's most important to you right now, and what you could get others to be energized about. Learn as much as possible about the one or two issues that you care most about. Questions you should be able to answer about your issue include:

- Why do you care about it?
- Do your fellow community members care about it?
- Why should your elected officials care about it?
- Have they already taken a stand on this issue and if so, what is it?
- Why does it specifically matter in your congressional district, state, or community?

**CONTINUE TO STEPS 4-11**

## Target the Audience

You've decided that you'd like to take a stand on an issue. You now have to determine what to do next and those you need to engage in order to help you accomplish your goals.

Is your issue legislative or policy-focused and if so, will you address it at the federal, state, or local level? You need to determine who your elected officials are.

**FEDERAL:** If you want to address your concerns at the federal level, you should contact your U.S. Representative (1) and your U.S. Senators (2). The President of the United States heads the executive branch of the federal government.

**STATE:** If you want to address your concerns at the state level, you should contact your state legislators. Every state (except Nebraska) has a bicameral legislature with both a House and a Senate. The Governor of each state heads the executive branch.

**LOCAL:** You can even identify your local elected officials if you want to address a community or county-level concern.

You can find out who your elected officials are by visiting [www.preventcancer.org/advocacy](http://www.preventcancer.org/advocacy).

## Do Your Homework

It is important that you do your homework before contacting your elected officials, particularly if you are going to meet with them, or their staff, in person. Here are some ideas to get you started:

1. What are the names of your elected officials?
2. What political party do they belong to? Are they Republicans, Democrats, or Independents? Are they conservative or liberal?
3. What committees do they sit on? Are these committees relevant to the issue you are addressing?
4. How do they tend to vote or lean on your issues? For instance, are they typically supportive of health care measures? Have they been known to vote to increase funding? You can find this information by visiting websites like [votesmart.org](http://votesmart.org) or by visiting the elected official's website.
5. What issues are most important to your elected officials? Is there any way you can connect or frame your issue to relate? For instance, cancer might not seem to be their number one priority, but perhaps they've shown leadership on diabetes. Many of the same prevention strategies work for both diseases. You can use that to your advantage.
6. How does your issue affect the people that your elected official represents? Do you have statistics on how many people have cancer in your community or how much money is being spent on preventable disease-related health care in your state? You may have to search for this information through state or federal agencies or nonprofit organizations.

## Follow these steps one-by-one to accomplish your advocacy goals.

### Set Goals and Objectives

Working in advocacy can be challenging. It is difficult to pass bills into law, both at the state and federal levels. Yet, if individuals and groups choose not to advocate for causes that matter, progress would never be made.

Therefore, you have to determine what success is to you and find ways to stay motivated. Once you've determined the issue that you care about, you need to outline your overall goals and list the objectives that you need to accomplish in order to be successful.

#### EXAMPLE

(The following is an abbreviated example of an advocacy plan. A full advocacy plan could include dozens of objectives and take several years. However, this abbreviated version of a plan will give you an idea of how to begin.)

**Issue:** Reduce the incidence of skin cancer in my community.

**Goal:** Work to pass legislation in my state to ban minors (those under 18) from using tanning beds.

#### Objectives:

1. Reach out to the state nonprofit organizations that focus on skin cancer and volunteer to work with them on the issue.
2. Determine which members of the state legislature care about skin cancer and form relationships with them.
3. Find ten pieces of comparable legislation in other states and meet with members of the legislature who may be interested in introducing a similar bill.
4. Research skin cancer statistics specific to the state (including how many lives are lost to the disease as well as how much money it costs the state per year).
5. Reach out to the media to cover the issue of skin cancer and work to place at least two articles regarding the issue of minors using tanning beds.
6. Work with local stakeholders, including members of the legislature as well as nonprofit organizations, to hold a briefing at the state legislature on skin cancer.

**CONTINUE TO STEPS 7-11**

## 2 Prepare Your Position

You will need to prepare to discuss an issue with your elected officials. Your elected officials are going to want to have as much information as possible in order to make an informed decision about your request. Here are some questions to consider before you approach elected officials or decision makers:

1. What issue(s) do you care about and want to contact your elected officials regarding?
2. Why do you care about the issue(s)? Do you have a personal connection or story?
3. Why should your elected officials care about this issue? How does it affect the health and well-being of their constituents?
4. Is there data to back up your issue (particularly for your district/state)?
5. How does this issue affect your district/state/community?
6. Is there already legislation at the state or federal level addressing this issue? If so, what elected official introduced it and which elected officials have signed on as cosponsors?
7. Are there other advocates or organizations that support or oppose this issue? If so, why?
8. What is your “ask”? Do you want your elected officials to support or oppose a piece of legislation, provide additional funding for a cause, or stay informed of a certain issue as they make decisions moving forward?
9. Will it cost money and if so, how much and where will that money come from?

## 3 Develop a Solution

It is helpful to approach elected officials with some idea of how they can address the issue that you care about, although you do not have to have all of the answers. There may be legislation that has already been introduced or elected officials, staff, or other experts who can help you find a solution.

You don’t necessarily have to figure this out yourself, but if you can put as many pieces of the puzzle together before approaching your elected officials, your chances of success are greater.

## 4 Take Action

You’ve put in all of the hard work preparing for this step and now you just have to do it. Elected officials often look to constituents to educate them about specific issues. Don’t assume that they know more than you. Whether you call, email, write a letter, or meet with your elected official (or their staff) in person, remember that you want to educate them on your issue and try to persuade them to agree with you.

Later in this toolkit, you will find advocacy tools to help you reach out to your elected officials and have the strongest impact possible.

## 5 Don’t Give Up

Advocacy can move slowly. It can be difficult. There will be times when you don’t think you can overcome obstacles in your way. These are the moments when you can’t give up. Keep pushing. Ask for answers. Be assertive. As a constituent, you have a right to make your voice heard and you deserve answers to your questions and concerns. Your elected officials may not always agree with you, but you deserve to engage in a respectful conversation to understand their perspective and position.

## 6 Evaluate and Report Back

We want to help you be the best advocate possible. We will not only work with you to prepare to take action, but we also want to hear your feedback once you’ve done so. Utilize the reporting form (pg. 24) in this toolkit and we will work together to figure out how we can best support your efforts.

Reach out by emailing [Advocacy@PreventCancer.org](mailto:Advocacy@PreventCancer.org).

Progress in Washington, DC  
is increasingly made back home.  
Policy makers look for widespread  
grassroots support from organizations  
and everyday citizens who care enough  
to lend their voice and their feet to  
promoting an agenda. Advocacy can  
be challenging and time-consuming yet  
so very rewarding — especially when  
great things are accomplished.

KIMBERLEY FRITTS, CEO, THE PODESTA GROUP  
& PREVENT CANCER FOUNDATION BOARD MEMBER



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