

# Tips on In-District Group Visits

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Every Member of Congress and has one or more offices in their state or district in which they regularly conduct business. (In most of the larger states, state legislators also have offices, too)

Face-to-face visits with your elected officials (or their staff) in their district are a very influential form of advocacy. There are a number of times in a year when members of Congress leave Washington, DC, and return to their home districts/states for “Congressional Work Periods”. This direct lobbying can be fun, interesting, and highly motivating for those who participate! And if you can’t tell the story about the needs and concerns of long-term care consumers and the importance of this issue, it won’t be told! A small dedicated group can have great influence because our issue is not yet well known like other big issues such as taxes and budgets!

This guide lists the steps of setting up a group visit in your area.

Relationships are key to effective advocacy and organizing, so we encourage you to view all interactions with Congressional offices as opportunities for building relationship. Ideally you want those offices to see you and/or your organization as a credible, powerful, and helpful voice for long-term care consumers. .

## **1. Find the office.**

You can find contact information for your Representatives and Senators—including their district offices—by going to <http://votesmart.org/>. All you have to do is enter your zip code.

## **2. Assemble a Group**

While it’s certainly possible and effective to arrange a visit for a single individual, we recommend putting together a group, preferably one that may include one or more long-term consumers or family caregivers. Group visits are more influential, and the experience will build relationships and skills among all participants.

Identify the issue you’ll be advocating on (pick only one!!!) and the kind of delegation you seek and then pick a date for your visit and make a list of all those who are potentially interested. This step is important because you may not get your first choice for a time to visit, so plan for some back and forth with the scheduler in the office. Plan to keep the group fairly small, say 3-5 people. Ask one of the group to take the lead in the next step, working with the scheduler.

## **3. Work with the Scheduler**

A number of Members of Congress post information on setting up a meeting in the

district on their web site and many offices require a written request by submitting a web form. If you cannot find this, call the office and ask to speak to the person in charge of scheduling. Identify yourself as a constituent and member of [name your congregation/coalition], and request a meeting with the Representative/Senator on [name your issue]. Setting up a visit often requires several follow-ups calls. [Plan for the process to take 2-6 weeks to get an appointment settled.](#)

#### **4. Prepare for the Visit:**

- Research the official's record on the issue. Ideally you'll find something positive to thank them for that connects with the request you're about to make.
- Once you know where the office stands, determine your ask and what arguments/materials best support you. A friendly office can be thanked for their leadership on the issue and asked to do more. An office on the fence can be educated about the issue with compelling personal stories. If at all possible, plan to have a long-term care consumer or family caregiver tell a short version of how this issue affects their life.

Your ask should be a specific action, such as voting for/against a certain bill. .

- Identify your best arguments and assign each member of your group responsibility for covering one or more points. Learn about relevant legislation as well as effective arguments for your point of view. Ideally one member of your group can take notes.

#### **5. During the Visit:**

- Remember to have someone take notes, and listen carefully to the Member or his staff's comments.
- Thank the legislator for their time and remember to follow up quickly to answer any questions they may have asked that the group could not answer.

#### **6. Be a resource**

If you are a member of an organization or an ombudsman program, your program/agency is a unique resource in your community. Bring information about its services for the office because public officials get calls all the time from their constituents looking for assistance. If you publish a newsletter, offer to add the office to your mailing list to keep them up-to-date.