

## Why Advocate?

As a local public health official, it can be difficult to navigate the current political climate. Some of the rhetoric out of Washington can send a local health official into a frenzy: Are my budgets going to get slashed? Does Washington understand what our needs are at the local level? Does my Representative understand the challenges local health departments face? And finally, can I get involved without portraying bias or partisanship?

The answer to the last question, is YES, you can get involved to educate and advocate for your local health department. Members of Congress actually rely on YOU, the local health department professional, to provide information about what is happening in communities all across the country. Without local health officials, Members of Congress would know nothing about Ebola, Zika, H1N1, chronic disease, environmental health, or the next pandemic. You are a trusted messenger to your representatives. This toolkit will allow you to understand how you can take action to ensure that your health department is fully funded and your communities are healthy and safe.

## What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is the “promotion of an idea that is directed at changing a policy, position, or program at an institution.” (IRS, 2016) Advocacy is a strategy that aims to draw attention to or educate a policymaker on a particular issue. Health advocacy includes educating policymakers and the public about evidence-based policy. Advocacy can often be non-partisan and based in research and analysis. Effective advocacy can do the following:

- Build relationships with policymakers;
- Educate and influence a policymaker or lawmaker’s decision;
- Alter existing policies, laws, and budgets; and
- Encourage the creation of new programs.

## What is Lobbying?

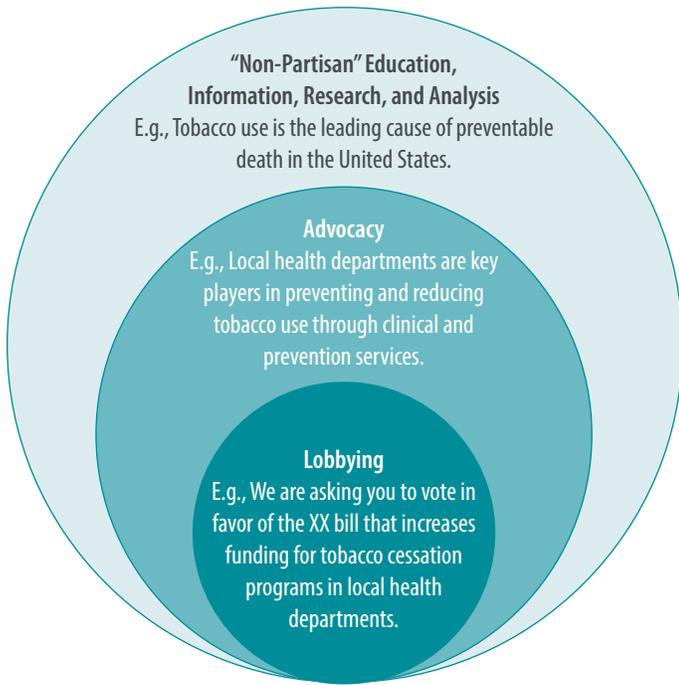
Lobbying is the attempt to influence a legislative body through communication with a member or employee of the legislative body or with a government official who participates in constructing legislation. Lobbying can include written or oral communication for or against specific legislation. Rules about lobbying vary according to local jurisdictions. Check the rules in your local health department before engaging in lobbying.

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### EXAMPLES OF ADVOCACY VS. LOBBYING ACTIVITIES

| Advocacy   | Lobbying   |
|--|--|
| Meeting with a Member of Congress to educate them about the importance of Zika funding for your community.   | Meeting with a member of Congress to urge them to vote for a bill to provide emergency Zika funding for your health department.                            |
| Preparing educational materials that depict success stories from your local health department programs.  | Preparing materials that include information on health programs at your local health department and contain messaging for or against specific legislation. |
| Tweeting statistics about diabetes and descriptions of how local health departments are helping reduce diabetes rates.                                       | Tweeting a message urging Congress to vote against cuts for diabetes prevention programs in local health departments.                                      |
| Sending a weekly e-newsletter discussing factual information on opioid abuse and outlining programmatic efforts that are proven to reduce this health issue. | E-mailing a “call to action” to members of your organization to encourage them to contact their legislator in favor of opioid prevention legislation.      |

## ARE YOU ADVOCATING OR LOBBYING?



### Five Advocacy Tips

At the basic level, advocacy is building relationships. The goal is to become a valuable resource for policymakers. No matter who the audience is, you should keep in mind the following:

1. Be confident.
2. Frame your message to answer the question, “So what?”
3. Plan and practice your message.
4. Present a clear and compelling message; less is more.
5. Offer yourself as an expert resource and provide examples from your community; stories are more compelling than statistics.

## Congressional Calendar

There are multiple opportunities to meet with lawmakers and their staff, both in Washington, DC, and back home. Members of Congress are back home in their districts during “recess” periods, at which time you should reach out to meet with Members or invite them to your local health department. Your Members of Congress want to hear from you.

| Month of 2017 | Washington, DC                    | Home District             |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| May           | May 1–4<br>May 16–25              | May 8–12<br>May 30–June 2 |
| June          | June 6–30                         | N/A                       |
| July          | July 11–28                        | July 3–7                  |
| August        | N/A                               | August 1–31               |
| September     | September 5–14<br>September 25–28 | September 18–22           |
| October       | October 2–13<br>October 23–31     | October 16–20             |
| November      | November 1–16<br>November 28–30   | November 20–24            |
| December      | December 1–14                     | N/A                       |