



WISCONSIN  
**Oral Health**  
COALITION

★ Children's Health  
Alliance of Wisconsin



Grassroots  
**Advocacy**  
Toolkit



Contact your legislator today



# Grassroots Advocacy Toolkit

Welcome!

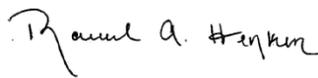
As an oral health advocate, we need your voice and knowledge to help us promote policies that support optimal oral health in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Oral Health Coalition's Advocacy Toolkit provides tools and information for effective engagement with elected officials. Legislators look to staff, lobbyists and citizens to help guide decisions directly affecting the community. It is vital that legislators hear from constituents they serve. Informing legislators about the importance of oral health can help shape important policy changes impacting oral health and overall health.

The Wisconsin Oral Health Coalition encourages open and ongoing dialogue with legislators. This helps establish trust and understanding, and creates a direct link to the core of policy development. Building and maintaining strong relationships with representatives helps ensure a strong oral health network statewide.

For additional information on advocating for oral health, please contact the Wisconsin Oral Health Coalition at (414) 337-4576 or visit [www.chawisconsin.org/wohc](http://www.chawisconsin.org/wohc).



Tina Sopwinik, DMD  
Wisconsin Oral Health Coalition, Chair



Rachael Henken, JD  
Wisconsin Oral Health Coalition, Project Manager



## **Grassroots Advocacy**

The Wisconsin Oral Health Coalition is prepared to mobilize grassroots support for any legislation benefiting oral health in Wisconsin communities. The Coalition has the infrastructure and membership to provide input to lawmakers, committees or subcommittees needing guidance on oral health policies. Being a grassroots advocate does not require a formal title. Advocacy can be as simple as writing an email to a legislator or talking to local community members.

## **Government**

The United States of America's government is a democracy, which means government officials at the federal, state and local level are elected by the people who live in the areas where the official governs.

- **Federal government**

The federal government has three branches: executive, judicial and legislative. The executive branch is made up of the president, the vice president and the cabinet. The cabinet is a body of individuals the president looks to for advice and expertise when making decisions. The president appoints individuals to run certain federal agencies, sit on the cabinet and serve on the United States Supreme Court. The legislative branch consists of members of Congress which is comprised of two groups of law makers, the [Senate](#) and the [House of Representatives](#). Congress is in charge of making laws and approving or denying the executive branch's choices for members of the cabinet. The president can veto legislation that the legislative branch approves. The judicial branch is comprised of the U.S. Supreme Court. The nine Supreme Court justices are appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate. The judicial branch determines if laws are unconstitutional. Federal laws govern the entire country and affect all United States citizens. There are certain laws the federal government leaves to individual states to decide on.

- **State government**

Government structure and laws vary from state to state. There is no federal law that requires all states to have a three-branch government, but most do. The state executive branch includes the governor and lieutenant governor. The governor can veto legislation that the state legislature approves. The state legislative branch is comprised of legislators from two groups, the Senate and the House of Representatives. The state legislature is in charge of making laws. The state judicial branch is comprised of the state Supreme Court. The state Supreme Court hears appeals from the local court system. They do not hear trials of their own.

- **Local government**

Local government is separated by counties and municipalities. Municipalities are typically located around population centers defined by state constitutions. Local governments are typically responsible for police and fire departments, county and municipal courts, public works, and parks and recreation. There are various elected officials in local government such as city councils and mayors.

## **Federal and State Policy 101**

Bills are created by people who want to see change. When an individual or group has an idea, they meet with a legislator for support and guidance on creating a policy. Once a legislator creates a draft bill around the idea, it is circulated to other legislators for co-sponsorship and introduced to the two chambers of the legislative branch, the Senate and House of Representatives. Once the bill is heard in session, it receives a legislative number and is assigned to an appropriate committee for further research and discussion. This is where individuals have the ability to attend public hearings to provide testimony to support or oppose the bill. Once edits to the bill have been made, the bill is voted out of committee to be taken back to the floor of the chamber for approval or denial. Once the bill has been



approved on the Senate or House of Representatives' floor, it goes to the other chamber to have the same process occur again. There are circumstances when a bill goes through this process with the House of Representatives and Senate at the same time. The goal is an approval of the same bill from both chambers. If the bills differ after the public hearings and edits have occurred, members from the chambers create a special committee to combine both bills into one. The combined bill goes back to the floors for approval. If the legislators approve the bill, it goes to the executive branch to be voted on. If the president or governor approves, the bill becomes law.

### **Reasons to Contact Your Legislator**

<http://legis.wisconsin.gov/pages/cg/contact.aspx>

- **Develop a relationship**  
Contacting your legislator allows you to build a relationship so your legislator can look to you as a content expert and resource.
- **Request or recommend legislation on a specific topic**  
Ideas for legislation come from many sources, including individuals who contact their legislators - citizens who think "there should be a law regarding this." Your suggestion for legislation may relate to general public policy, such as ensuring adequate funding for a particular program, or it may be a very specific recommendation in response to a particular problem that you have encountered.
- **Register a position on a bill or a specific topic**  
One of the most common reasons for contacting your legislator is simply to them how you feel about something. It may be a bill that the Legislature will be voting on in the near future, or a general topic that the Legislature is likely to take up. You may agree or disagree with their position on the subject. Whatever the case, a brief phone call or short email message is usually all it takes to voice your position. Legislative offices record this information, so that the legislator knows how their constituents feel.
- **Find out what the law or state policy is on a particular topic**  
One of the key elements of a democratic society is an informed public, which includes knowing what the law is and what policies and programs your government is implementing. That is more than any one person can know, but your legislator's office can help you find this sort of information.
- **Weigh in on the state budget**
  - The State of Wisconsin's budget covers a 2-year period from July 1 of one odd-numbered year through June 30 of the next odd-numbered year. Development of the biennial budget involves a nearly year-long process.
  - In the fall of the even-numbered year, state agencies submit budget requests to the Department of Administration. Requests are compiled by the State Budget Office for review by the Governor.
  - The Governor is required by law to deliver the budget message to the new legislature on or before the last Tuesday in January, although the legislature can extend the deadline at the Governor's request.
  - To meet the state's budgetary cycle, the budget should be signed and effective by July 1 of the odd-numbered year. If there is a delay, state agencies operate at their appropriation authority from the prior budget until the new budget is in effect.



## How to Contact Your Legislator

[http://lc.legis.wisconsin.gov/media/1041/citizen\\_contact\\_legislator.pdf](http://lc.legis.wisconsin.gov/media/1041/citizen_contact_legislator.pdf)

- **Phone.** You can find these phone numbers on the members' home pages. To find a phone number, go to the Legislature's home page at <http://legis.wisconsin.gov>, click on "Assembly" or "Senate," and then click on "Representatives' Home Pages" or "Senator's Home Pages." Additionally, you can leave a message for your legislator's Capitol office or indicate your position on legislation through the toll free hotline at (800) 362-9472.
- **Email.** The e-mail addresses of members of the Wisconsin Legislature all have the same format. For members of the Assembly, the format is [rep.lastname@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:rep.lastname@legis.wisconsin.gov); for members of the Senate, the format is [sen.lastname@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:sen.lastname@legis.wisconsin.gov).
- **Mail.** You can reach your legislator by mail at one of the following addresses:
  - Representatives whose last names begin with letter A to L: P.O. Box 8952, Madison, 53708
  - Representatives whose last names begin with letter M to Z: P.O. Box 8953, Madison, 53708
  - All Senators: P.O. Box 7882, Madison, 53707-7882
- Many legislators keep "**office hours**" or conduct listening session in their districts. These are specifically designed to give constituents direct access to the legislator. Watch the newspapers for announcements, or call the legislator's Capitol office to ask if the legislator is planning such a session.

## Things to Remember When Contacting Legislators

[http://lc.legis.wisconsin.gov/media/1041/citizen\\_contact\\_legislator.pdf](http://lc.legis.wisconsin.gov/media/1041/citizen_contact_legislator.pdf)

- **Contact your own legislator.** If you have strong feelings about a bill, there is the temptation to contact the author to express your views, even if the author is not your legislator. While you are free to do so, a legislator will give less weight to the opinion of residents of another legislative district. It is particularly important to contact your own [legislators](#).
- **Provide your name and contact information.** If you are asking for assistance, your legislator will need to know how to reach you. Include your contact information in any email communications and on letters you send, in case the envelope is lost or discarded.
- **Ask for a response.** Ask what your legislator's position is on the topic you are writing or calling about. As a constituent, you are entitled to know.
- **Be specific and clear.** If you are calling in regard to legislation, be sure you know the bill number prior to contacting your legislator. If you are calling to recommend legislation, describe the problem that you believe needs to be addressed and, if you have a particular solution in mind, describe that as well. Be sure to state your reasons for the positions you want your legislator to take.
- **Be timely.** If you want to influence a vote, you need to get your correspondence to your legislator before the vote is taken.
- **Be personal.** To have the greatest impact, take the time to learn about the issue, then sit down and write a letter in your own words or make a phone call stating your own thoughts. On controversial topics, advocacy groups deluge legislators with hundreds of identical postcards and phone calls. Legislators count these contacts, but give them less weight than individually composed communications. A personal story has much more impact than a generic statement of support.
- **Be courteous.** If you are calling because you disagree with your legislator, remember common courtesy. Your first contact will most likely be with your legislator's staff, who is working to help you, even if you disagree with your legislator.



## **Meeting with Legislators and Policymakers**

Developing a relationship with policymakers expands your potential for affecting policy. Your elected official will know who you are and what issues your organization stands for. This makes it easier to relate to you and your organization, beyond a signature on the bottom of a letter. Additionally, having regular meetings and being available to a policymaker can help you and your organization be seen as a valuable resource on your issues. Below are tips for successful legislative or administrative visit.

- **Arrange a visit**
  - Call or send an email of introduction, including information on your subject area and the background of your organization. If you are a community-based organization operating out of a legislator's district, you may be more likely to find time in their schedule when they are not in session. [Click here](#) for the 2017-19 Wisconsin State Assembly Session Schedule.
  - Request an appointment to discuss your ideas and explain why their support on this issue is important. Be flexible when trying to schedule a visit.
  - Oftentimes, your appointment may be attended by a staff member instead of the legislator. If this occurs, approach the meeting the same as you would if you met with your legislator. It can be beneficial to build a relationship with the staff in addition to your elected official.
  - See **How do I contact my legislator** above or visit <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/pages/cg/contact.aspx>
- **Prepare your talking points**
  - Time with your legislator will be limited, so expect 5-10 minutes to speak. Prepare and organize a short presentation before you go to the meeting. If you are going with a group, get together before the meeting to develop your strategy. Assign each member of your group a topic to discuss to ensure that the essential matters are raised and that you avoid repeating information.
  - Prepare brief fact sheets and other reference materials for distribution to the Legislator before the meeting or to leave with the Legislator for later reference.
- **Practice**
  - Record your speaking points, listen to yourself and critique your presentation. Share your presentation with someone who knows very little about the issue and ask the person if they understand the points you are trying to make.
- **Make it local**
  - Whenever possible, bring local constituents to the meeting. This gives the legislator an opportunity to hear how the policy or bill would impact people in their district. Additionally, invite legislators to attend meetings going on in your community.
- **Ask about their position on your issues**
  - When speaking with legislators, try to understand their thoughts and concerns on your issue and present them with a win-win strategy.
  - Bring copies of all important materials, duplicates of information you sent prior to the meeting, and have background materials available. Offer to explain and follow-up with answers to their questions.
- **Do not give inaccurate information**
  - If you do not know an answer, offer to follow up with the correct answer and provide contacts who can provide additional information, if requested.
  - By making this agreement, you get an additional chance to promote your issue.
- **Educate**



- As an advocate, your job is to present factual information that educates policymakers and their staff about the benefit of allocating resources to your issue.
- **Avoid applying too much pressure**
  - First impressions are important. Listen carefully and take note of concerns, so that you can address them and decrease hesitation.
- **Leave contact information**
  - Leave a business card and include your name, address, email and telephone number on materials for the policymaker and their staff.
- **Send a thank you**
  - A simple note of thanks goes a long way. Recap what you discussed, what was planned or promised, and reiterate your willingness to provide additional information when needed. This can be written or emailed.

### **Providing Testimony: Telling Your Story**

A citizen's interaction with the Legislature often takes place in legislative committee meetings, which is where much of the Legislature's work gets done. A committee's primary function is to advise the full body (the Assembly or the Senate) regarding legislation and other matters within their subject areas. Periodically, committees hold briefings and oversights, or informational hearings, in which they learn about programs administered by state agencies and look into problems or controversies that arise in those programs.

- **Legislative committees hold two kinds of meetings.**
  - In **public hearings**, committees hear testimony from legislators, agency staff and members of the public regarding the matters before them. The purpose of a public hearing is to educate and inform a committee of emerging bills. Public hearings are one of the primary means by which legislators learn about these issues.
  - In **executive sessions**, committees debate the merits of proposals and take votes. A committee's report consists of its recommendations to the full body regarding what amendments to a proposal should be adopted and whether the proposal should be passed.
  - The public can attend and participate in public hearings, but they cannot participate in executive sessions. At informational hearings, testimony is often limited to invited speakers, who are usually experts on the subject being examined or they are agency staff responsible for the program under the review. WisconsinEye broadcasts many committee meetings on television and online at <http://www.wiseye.org/>.
- **Below are a few tips for success when providing testimony at a public hearing:**
  - **Don't be afraid of the committee** or other people present. Elected officials work for you and everyone has the right to testify, even if you are a regular citizen and even if your point of view is greatly outnumbered by other speakers.
  - **Keep your testimony brief** and to the point, no more than five minutes. The chair may limit testimony during long hearings. In this case it is often only three minutes.
  - **Make your testimony personal.** Tell the committee how the bill would affect you or how you came to be personally concerned about the subject. Discussion of abstract concepts or statistics is fine, but a personal story is more compelling.
  - **Try not to read your testimony** to the committee. Instead, look at the committee members and tell your story.
  - **Do not repeat** what other speakers have said, especially in a long hearing when numerous speakers have already said what you planned to say. Instead, state your general point of



- view and indicate that you support the views expressed by previous speakers, adding any thoughts of your own that may be new or different.
- **Make arrangements.** If the hearing is long and you cannot stay until the end, notify the committee clerk, via the messenger, and request to be called early. Such requests are usually granted to the extent possible.
  - **Be respectful** to everyone in the room. It is possible to disagree in the strongest terms while remaining courteous.
- **How should I prepare to testify at a public hearing?**  
[http://lc.legis.wisconsin.gov/media/1044/citizen\\_testify\\_final.pdf](http://lc.legis.wisconsin.gov/media/1044/citizen_testify_final.pdf)
    - Testifying at a public hearing is a form of public speaking and preparing ahead of time will make your testimony more effective.
      - **Familiarize yourself with the bill.** Read about the bill, talk to others about it and read the bill itself.
      - **Prepare your testimony.** Think about what you want to say. Compile your thoughts and organize them on paper. Finally, make copies (20 for an Assembly committee or 10 for a Senate committee).
  - **What do I do when I get to the public hearing?**  
Fill out a hearing slip. Write your name clearly, so the chair can read it to call on you. Check the appropriate box, indicating that you are testifying in favor, in opposition, or for information only. Give the hearing slip to the messenger, take a seat and wait to be called.
  - **What if I do not testify?**  
You may register your position on the bill by checking the box on the hearing slip indicating that you support or oppose the bill, but do not want to testify. This will be recorded in the committee report. You are welcome to attend a hearing and simply listen without filling out a hearing slip.
  - **What do I do when I am called?**  
Give copies of your testimony to the messenger to distribute to committee members. Take a seat in the witness chair. When the chair acknowledges you, thank the chair and present your testimony. When you are finished, thank the committee and wait to see if committee members have questions for you.
  - **Important rules**
    - The purpose of the hearing is to educate committee members. You speak to them and they ask questions of you, but witnesses and members of the audience do not ask questions of the committee or staff.
    - Clapping, cheering, booing, waving signs or making other expressions of sentiment is not allowed. In addition to maintaining an appropriate level of decorum, this rule is necessary to ensure that everyone, regardless of point of view, has the opportunity to address the committee without intimidation.
  - **Other things to know**
    - You may have to wait a while to testify. The chair may not take bills in the order they are listed on the meeting notice and there may be many people testifying on your bill.
    - Written testimony is distributed to all committee members and it is posted on the Legislative Council's website.
    - Committee members may come and go during the hearing. This is often because multiple hearings are going on simultaneously. In most cases, the member's staff are taking notes and collecting written testimony for the member's use.



- You may be on television. The WisconsinEye Network broadcasts many legislative hearings live, and records others for later broadcast.

### **Communicating with Legislators on Social Media**

- Social media is a great tool for reaching legislators and the public. Most lawmakers have a social media presence because it is an easy way for their constituents to contact them. You can “tag” a legislator in your post by typing @theirname. This will link to their page and bring their attention to your post.
- Social media is the perfect platform for sharing visuals. Take photos and videos that support your advocacy campaign. Use infographics, photos and other visual representations of data.
- Keep messages consistent. As with any advocacy campaign, a strong and solid call to action is necessary. If multiple people from your organization are contacting lawmakers via social media, it is important that they have the same message. The more legislators hear the same message, the more they will remember it.

The Wisconsin Oral Health Coalition supports informing legislators about the importance of oral health by creating open and ongoing dialogue. Your advocacy can help shape important policy changes impacting oral health and overall health. Remember, it is up to you to voice your concerns about the health of the individuals in your communities. Thank you for becoming an oral health advocate.

