



American
Heart
Association.

YOU'RE THE CURE

ADVOCACY GUIDE





OUR MISSION:

To be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives.

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OUR GOAL:

Every person deserves the opportunity for a full, healthy life. As champions for health equity, by 2024, the American Heart Association will advance cardiovascular health for all, including identifying and removing barriers to health care access and quality.

OVERVIEW:

YOU'RE THE CURE

Every day, the lives of people in the U.S. are touched by heart disease and stroke. Whether it's our health that's affected or the health of family members, friends or co-workers, a lot is at stake in our fight against our nation's No. 1 and No. 5 killers.

Yet we all have the power to make a difference by speaking out for policies that help build longer, healthier lives and healthier communities. For more than 40 years, *You're the Cure* — the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association's grassroots network — has been doing just that.

We are a community of fathers and mothers, neighbors and friends, researchers and caregivers, patients and survivors passionate about a world free of heart disease and stroke. Each day, we work together to advocate for healthier communities through legislative and regulatory policies at the local, state and national levels.

MAKING AN IMPACT

As we all know, heart disease, stroke and other forms of cardiovascular diseases affect millions of people, including family, friends and neighbors. Science is the foundation of our work that leads to new ways to prevent, treat and even cure cardiovascular disease. Often, science tells us one of the ways to build longer, healthier lives is through public policy change. As an advocate, you can influence lawmakers and change policy to help build healthier communities.

You're the Cure makes it easy to communicate with legislators, connect with advocates near you and stay updated on the heart and stroke issues that matter most to you.

USING THIS GUIDE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

You have the ability to influence decision-makers and create change in your community. This guide provides the tools necessary to effectively reach out and influence key decision-makers at the local, state and national levels to ensure policies and programs that will build longer, healthier lives will be supported and implemented.

WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

Advocacy is an effort by a person or group to influence the decisions of persons or entities that have the power to do what you want done. It is speaking on behalf of people and the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal.



WAYS TO GET INVOLVED:

*You can make an impact in multiple ways — just take a step to get started!
Here are some suggestions:*

- 1 **LEARN** more about heart disease and stroke at www.heart.org.
- 2 **JOIN** the *You're the Cure* network by going to <https://www.yourethecure.org/join> and registering, or text **CURE to 46839** and follow the prompts.
- 3 **RECRUIT** at least five friends to the *You're the Cure* network.
- 4 **READ** about our top policy issues at <https://www.heart.org/en/get-involved/advocate>.
- 5 **RESPOND** right away to action alerts sent to you via email or text — why wait?
- 6 **FORWARD** email action alerts to your family and friends, asking them to take action, too. It takes all our voices together to make a difference!
- 7 **INTRODUCE** yourself to your lawmakers as an American Heart Association *You're the Cure* advocate.
- 8 **CONTACT** your legislator or other key stakeholders through emails, letters, tweeting or a meeting (more information on the next page).
- 9 **WRITE** a letter to the editor of your local newspaper on a particular issue — it's a powerful way to communicate with your legislators and community. (See more in the addendum.)
- 10 **HOST** or volunteer at a local *You're the Cure* meeting or event.
- 11 **ATTEND** upcoming *You're the Cure* events — watch for emails.
- 12 **SPEAK** to local groups about your experiences with *You're the Cure*. Connect with your AHA partner to get started.
- 13 **TESTIFY** at a public hearing about the importance of a *You're the Cure* issue.
- 14 **VOLUNTEER** to be an advocacy spokesperson to raise awareness about heart disease and stroke policy issues and generate support.
- 15 **LET US KNOW** who you know by taking our survey [here](#).

UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE CAMPAIGNS

Successful public policy issue campaigns frequently start with planning. Creating a plan helps you gather important information, prepare and think through challenges that may lie ahead.

This means taking time to:

- Do research.
- Build coalitions that include partners and impacted communities.
- Seek out resources to help implement the campaign.
- Recruit, educate and engage grassroots advocates.
- Identify advocates with relationships with key decision-makers.
- Engage the media.
- Use social media.
- Develop a lobbying strategy.

Campaigns begin with issue education, identifying the problem and building awareness that a policy solution is needed.



HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW:

This is just a general example of the state legislative process. It can vary, so please check with your AHA partner for more details about your state or visit your state legislature's website to see if the information is available.

The legislative process begins when issues need to be addressed through legislation. These issues can be generated by constituents (like you!), special interest groups (such as the American Heart Association), agencies, elected officials or the governor.

Advocates can impact the process throughout the legislative journey, starting with the idea for a bill. Let's walk through a state legislative session:

Introduction: A member of the legislature introduces a new piece of legislation in the form of a bill.

Reading: Once a bill is introduced, its title is read for its first reading in the chamber in which it's introduced. Then it's assigned to a committee. This is an essential step in the process, possibly pre-determining whether the bill will pass.

Committee Consideration and Report: At this point, the bill may be voted out of committee favorably in its original form, favorably with amendments, with committee substitutes, or unfavorably. The bill may also be referred to another committee or a subcommittee. The committee process is a critical step in the life of a bill because the bill can be amended, or substitutes can be offered that could change the bill considerably. The committee can also halt the progress of the bill and "kill" it.

Second Reading: After passage out of committee and/or subcommittee, the bill is then brought to the floor of the chamber in which it was introduced, and a second reading is held. During this reading, members may debate, add amendments and/or vote to pass or not pass the bill.

Third Reading: The third reading allows for more debate and consideration of the bill before a vote is taken. Amendments can also be added. At this time, members take a final vote to decide on passage of the bill. Sometimes the third reading is held immediately after the second reading; at other times it is the next day or later.

Passage 1: If the bill passes the chamber in which it's introduced, the bill is then sent to the other chamber for consideration and the process begins again. The other chamber holds the first reading of the bill the day after it receives the original bill. It's then referred to committee in that chamber and the process starts over.

Passage 2: If the bill passes the second chamber in the same form it was introduced, it then is eligible for the governor's signature. If it has been changed in any way (amendments or committee substitutes), the sponsoring house has a chance to concur with the changes. If the original chamber concurs, the bill is enrolled. If it does not concur, the two versions are sent to a conference committee to work out the differences.

Conference Committee: If the bill passed in the other chamber is a different version (has had amendments or a committee substitute), a conference committee is assembled from members of both chambers. This gives the members an opportunity to hammer out differences in the versions of the bill and adopt a Conference Committee report, the final wording of the legislation.

Conference Committee Report: Both chambers must vote on the final conference report. There usually is not much debate at this stage since differences were ironed out in the committee.

Governor's Signature: Bills that have passed the legislature then go to the governor for signature or veto. If the governor signs the bill, it becomes law and is enrolled. If the governor vetoes the bill, then the bill returns to the legislature for a veto override vote. In some cases, if the governor takes no action, the bill will automatically become law.

Enrollment: After it becomes law, the bill is printed in its final form and then sent to the secretary of state for inclusion in the Official Records and Printing.



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

3 REASONS TO KNOW YOUR LAWMAKERS

- Help your lawmaker get to know you and your community.
- Establish yourself as a credible source for information and connections in the community.
- Share vital stories of community members you want them to remember.

SHARING YOUR STORY

Your story can have a significant impact! It helps bring an issue to life for your listener.

By sharing your story, you can:

- Put a face on facts and figures.
- Connect lawmakers to constituents and what's happening in their district.
- Provide the human-interest side of an issue.
- Help gain media coverage of an issue.
- Inspire new advocates to join the effort.

When sharing your story with a decision-maker, you need a clear objective and some details to illustrate your point. Consider using transitions such as “if ... then” or “since ... then” and be sure to finish with an “ask,” meaning what you want your lawmaker to do regarding the issue.

Remember, sharing your personal experience is compelling, demonstrates passion for an issue and is “sticky” — it helps people remember you!





CONTACTING KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGISLATORS:

Key stakeholders have the power, by virtue of who they are or what they do, to effect change.

You can work to convince them that they have a stake in your issue and the outcome. That is, they win if you win. They're often legislators, but not all legislators are equally effective. Senior legislators, and those on committees that will be crucial for addressing heart disease and stroke issues, may be your top lawmakers with whom to focus on building relationships.

Writing an Email to Stakeholders/Legislators:

- **You're the Cure** action alerts make it simple for you to send an email to decision-makers who set policy and make laws.
- When you receive an action alert, personalize the message with one or two sentences and send it.
- If you have a personal story about heart disease or stroke tied to the issue, share it in your email.
- When legislators receive hundreds of personalized messages about a certain issue, they're more likely to notice and take action.

Writing a Letter to Stakeholders/Legislators:

- Be sure to let the decision-maker know where you live (city, state) and why you feel so strongly about heart disease and stroke issues.
- Emphasize your commitment to finding cures for heart disease and stroke to help build longer, healthier lives.
- Encourage the decision-maker to respond and let you know their position on heart disease and stroke issues.
- It's best to send letters to members of Congress to the local district office rather than to Washington, D.C., where mail is processed for safety and delivery can be delayed.
- Keep your AHA partner up to date on how your communication efforts are going.



CONTACTING KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGISLATORS: (Continued)

Calling Stakeholders/Legislators

Don't hesitate to call your elected officials. Often legislation moves at a fast pace and in order to have an impact on its course, we must move quickly. One of the best ways to do this is with a well-timed phone call. It takes a couple minutes to call your lawmaker, and usually you'll be asked to leave a message with their legislative aide or on their voice mail.

There are times when we'll send *You're the Cure* alerts asking you to call your lawmaker through our phone system. **It's super easy to use - follow these steps:**

- Click on the link in your email, enter your information and hit submit.
- Our system will call you right back.
- Then you'll hear a brief recording from American Heart Association staff and be connected to your lawmaker's office.
- Talking points will appear for you on the action page.
- If you need to talk to more than one lawmaker, just stay on the line and hit the star key after you finish your first message or conversation.

There may be other times when you want to call your lawmaker directly. Regardless, here are general tips when calling:

- Make sure to identify yourself, mention where you live, and share that you are calling for the AHA.
- Be brief in stating the purpose of your call, follow the talking points provided.
- If the elected official isn't available, make sure you leave a message.

Sample outline for talking points:

- Hi, my name is [first and last name].
- I live at [home street address].
- I'm calling [lawmaker's title and name] about x-issue.
- Add 1-2 sentences about why this is important to you and/or the community.
- I hope to count on their support.





SCHEDULING MEETINGS (VIRTUAL OR IN PERSON) WITH STAKEHOLDERS/LEGISLATORS:

- Learn how your elected officials operate. Some don't have offices or staff, so keep this in mind when reaching out to them. Also, some offices prefer in-person rather than online meetings.
- Receptionists and staffers are your allies, too. Get to know their names and ask for their email addresses, so that you can thank them for their help.
- Patience is a virtue.
- Persistence and follow-up are often required.
- When meeting with your member of Congress, an in-district meeting is not only fine — it's often preferred. This can also be true for state lawmakers.
- If your lawmaker is in a leadership position, it will be challenging to get a meeting directly. So you'll likely meet with their staff — and that's OK.
- If you've met with an aide, feel free to ask if they would help you set up a future meeting directly with the lawmaker — you won't insult them.
- If your meeting is virtual, be sure to determine the best technology platform (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, FaceTime, etc.) for you and the lawmaker's office and identify who will set up the meeting link.

Framing Meetings:

- Open the meeting by thanking the lawmaker (or their staff) for meeting with you.
- Let them know who you are and that you're a **You're the Cure** advocate for the American Heart Association.
- Then explain why you requested a meeting and what you hope to discuss.
- Ask your member for their position on heart and stroke issues.
- Let them know they have the power to save lives — that **"you're the cure."**
- Make it personal — share your expertise and why their support matters to you.
- Ask your member for their support on heart and stroke issues.
- Offer yourself as a resource to them and their constituents.
- Thank them for their time and ask for a photo opportunity.
- After the meeting, send a note thanking them for their time.

Don't forget to send your photo to your AHA staff partner, so your efforts can be promoted in AHA communications and social media.





PROVIDING TESTIMONY

Providing testimony, such as at city council meetings or legislative committee meetings, is one of the most effective ways to educate decision-makers about the impact, either positive or negative, that proposed legislation or legislative change might have. Legislators and other policymakers aren't always aware of all the implications a particular piece of legislation may have on their constituents.

Oral testimony is very powerful, especially when the testifier speaks directly instead of reading from their written testimony.

Tips to Prepare Your Testimony:

- The testimony should be short — most of the time you're allowed two-to-three minutes to speak. Check the website of the government body to see if it has a time limit.
- To be effective, speak from your personal experience. This will help lawmakers remember your points.
- Testimonies generally should be delivered verbally and also submitted in writing.
 - Type and print your testimony because you will be submitting copies of your testimony to members of the legislative body.
 - Write out what you plan to say or at least your key notes ahead of time. Having a clear idea of what you want to say and how you want to say it will help you stay on track and get your message across clearly.
- Follow this outline for your statement:
 - Identify yourself, where you live and your connection to the issue.
 - Example: "My name is Jane Smith and I live in Main City, State."
 - Thank them for the opportunity to provide testimony.
 - Example: "Good morning, and I appreciate having the opportunity to speak with you today."
 - State your position on the legislation/bill or policy you are testifying about.
 - Example: "I am here today to voice my support for the Nutrition Equity Act."
 - Share your experience, why you care about this issue. Use facts and data to help provide additional evidence. Always check in with your American Heart Association staff partner for some help with talking points you could share in your testimony. Your experience will bring the talking points to life.
 - Conclusion: Restate/review your position at the end of your testimony. Thank the elected officials for the opportunity to speak.
- Practice your testimony! Stand in front of the mirror and read your testimony out loud. It will help the flow of your presentation and help you stay within the time limits.

Tips for Day-Of Testimony:

- Have some written notes you can refer to — you don't have to memorize your testimony.
- Speak clearly and take your time.
- If you're asked questions after presenting your testimony and you don't know an answer, that's OK. Just tell them you'll get back to them with more information. Then contact your AHA advocacy staff partner so they can help you gather the information.



WRITING LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the editor (LTE) are an effective, simple way to spread awareness about a public policy issue. It's a short letter for publication about an issue of concern. Most LTE are written in response to a published story. You can write letters to LTEs of a local or national newspaper, online magazine or blog.

Like op-eds, LTE can be centered on a personal story or be more factual and straightforward. It's important to think about the readership of the outlet when determining your writing style. Also, keep in mind that your LTE can agree with or oppose the original piece you're responding to, or could add to the article by offering a different or missed point of view.

Tips to Write Your Letter to the Editor:

- As a volunteer, you have an important story to tell! Lawmakers read their local newspapers and can be influenced by stories from their constituents. The awareness you can bring to an issue by submitting an LTE is unique and valuable.
- Link your letter to a published story. You can respond to any article that you feel relates to your cause as a hook to get the editor's attention. Reach out to your American Heart Association contact for help to identify a story to respond to for your letter.
- Keep it short and concise, up to 250 words maximum. Most publications have limitations on how long LTE can be, so your AHA contact can share specific requirements for your letter. Generally, you'll be asked to share a few sentences telling your story and then why you want to see the issue you're discussing to be resolved. Your AHA contact can help you draft or edit your story to meet the publication's requirements, so please share it with them before submission.
- Include your contact information. Often, publications will call to verify your identity and confirm that you submitted the LTE. So be sure to include your name, email and phone number when you submit your letter.
- Use a catchy title. Your title should offer a preview of what your letter is about in a way that attracts the attention of your audience. Your AHA contact can help you create this.
- Talk about the issue from your perspective. Your LTE should seek to answer these two questions: **Why is this issue important to you? Why is it important to people in your community?**

For additional support on submitting a letter to the editor on a topic, reach out to your AHA contact directly. They can provide talking points or data to support your opinion on a public policy issue.





MEDIA ADVOCACY:

It's important to note that media and technologies are interconnected. A good advocacy campaign plan will incorporate pieces from more than one type of media.

Engaging on social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and others have changed the ways people communicate. These sites update millions of people on the latest news and what their friends, celebrities, and in some cases, strangers are doing.

In addition to connecting with fellow *You're the Cure* advocates, you can use these sites to connect with elected officials. See if your legislators are on Facebook, Twitter, etc., and "friend" them. You can find out about events they're hosting and participate, learn about their priority issues and communicate your policy issue interests.

You're the Cure has a Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/yourethecure>. You can like the page and change your follow settings to receive news and event updates along with sharing your story or hearing about others. This is a great way to build a community of supporters who can act on alerts, participate in events, and most importantly, feel personally connected to the mission to create change.

YouTube and other video-sharing websites have also become mainstream in spreading information, gaining support through numerous views of video clips and creating the occasional viral sensation. Most social networking sites share video as well, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok.

You can also stay informed, engage in the political process and comment on heart and stroke health issues via Congress YouTube sites:

- <http://youtube.com/househub>
- <http://youtube.com/senatehub>

Major news sites also have video imbedded, creating a multi-faceted approach to media.

Personal video messages can be another effective way to communicate with lawmakers at all levels. Consider sharing a video message and sending a link to your lawmakers to view. Messages from the heart make a difference.

Blogs and microblogs are an outlet to express your opinions on many topics and create a readership audience. Readers can respond, so blogs offer more of a conversation online. Microblogging is a short form of communication and on many services are limited to no more than 150 characters. The most popular microblogging tool is Twitter.

You can also subscribe to health care policy blogs or the personal blogs of elected officials to learn about priorities and start a dialogue in these forums. Also, look for opportunities to comment on blogs on newspaper websites to deliver your message on topics relevant to AHA policy issues.

As media continues to evolve, these popular sites may change. So be sure to connect with your local AHA advocacy and communications staff who can be a resource for you.

As advocates, it's important to influence lawmakers who are present on social media through a host of different communication channels to make a difference.



How to Contact Your Legislators

1. Find your legislators. Use the following links to find your state and community legislators:

2. Contact your legislators. You can contact your legislators by phone, email, or in person. You can also write a letter to the editor or contact your legislators through social media.

3. Write a letter to the editor. Write a letter to the editor of a local newspaper or magazine.

4. Contact your legislators through social media. Contact your legislators through Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.

5. Contact your legislators through a community organizer. Contact your legislators through a community organizer who can help you reach your legislators.

6. Contact your legislators through a public hearing. Contact your legislators through a public hearing where you can speak directly to your legislators.

To learn about the state/community/district when contacting a legislator or writing a letter to the editor:

1. Find your legislators. Use the following links to find your state and community legislators:

2. Contact your legislators. You can contact your legislators by phone, email, or in person. You can also write a letter to the editor or contact your legislators through social media.

3. Write a letter to the editor. Write a letter to the editor of a local newspaper or magazine.

4. Contact your legislators through social media. Contact your legislators through Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.

To learn about stakeholders and legislators:

1. Find your legislators. Use the following links to find your state and community legislators:

2. Contact your legislators. You can contact your legislators by phone, email, or in person. You can also write a letter to the editor or contact your legislators through social media.

3. Write a letter to the editor. Write a letter to the editor of a local newspaper or magazine.

4. Contact your legislators through social media. Contact your legislators through Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.

5. Contact your legislators through a community organizer. Contact your legislators through a community organizer who can help you reach your legislators.

6. Contact your legislators through a public hearing. Contact your legislators through a public hearing where you can speak directly to your legislators.





FINAL THOUGHTS

The resources outlined in the guide are meant to get you started on your journey as a *You're the Cure* advocate. Your actions truly can change public policy and create a world of longer, healthier lives.

So, start your journey today and let us know what additional resources you need to be successful. You can message us at advocate@yourethecure.org.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

We want to hear from you! Email us at: advocate@yourethecure.org.

FIND YOUR AHA ADVOCACY PARTNER

Eastern Region

- Katey Aquilina, Team Lead (katey.aquilina@heart.org): New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Washington, D.C., Virginia, West Virginia
- Rebecca Scharler (rebecca.scharler@heart.org): Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Vermont

Southeast Region

- Julie Howell, Team Lead (julie.m.howell@heart.org): Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Puerto Rico
- Aline Stone (aline.stone@heart.org): Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee

Midwest Region

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- Alexis Richards (alexis.richards@heart.org): Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Michigan, Indiana

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- Chris Turner (chris.turner@heart.org): Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Wyoming

Western States Region

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- Kami Sutton-Hieronymus (kami.sutton@heart.org): California, Alaska, Washington, Arizona

Federal Grassroots

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