



## LETTING YOUR VOICE BE HEARD

At all levels of government, policy-makers cannot know every person they represent. Yet, when people develop a relationship with and act as a resource for their leaders, they can have a real impact, especially in the area of Public Health.

Some things **you can do** to be an effective advocate include:

### Prepare for Action

- *Build relationships* – Get in touch with your elected officials. The most persuasive messages come from familiar faces. Know them by name, and make sure they know you by name.
- *Gather information* – Read the paper, listen to news, ask questions about the issues of interest. Learn the policy process and how your governing bodies operate
- *Prepare* – Think about the point you are trying to make so you can state it in a clear way. The key to influence is not volume, but precision.
- *Communicate/Recruit* – Let your friends and neighbors know why they should care and join your efforts. Bring as many diverse voices to your cause as possible, but reach a unifying message.

### Communicate

- *Face to face contact is best.* Attend meetings where elected officials are likely to be present. Make appointments to talk about the issues.
- *Letters are next best.* Only use one topic per letter. Be brief. Don't ramble. Ask for what you want (support, vote, etc.)
- *Email is also effective.* Some officials prefer this method of instant communication.
- *Phone calls work.* If possible, call the official's direct line. Be brief and to the point. If you leave a message, give your name, topic, phone number and when to reach you. If the topic of your call is for a vote, just ask for support.
- *Write letters to the editor.* Submit guest op-ed columns and encourage allies to do the same. The opinion pages are read word for word by most public officials. You have their attention if your case is made in print. Never attack, always attract!

### Make Your Time Count

- *Always say "Thank You" before you say "Please."* Even if you disagree with your elected official's position on some (or even most) issues, they are more likely to listen to you if you've found some way to praise them. If nothing else, thank them for the courage to be a public officer.
- *State your case up front.* Tell what you are going to tell, and summarize your point at the end of telling. The history of your issue should not be more than a 2 minute presentation. Elected officials are not experts, but they do not need to be overwhelmed with your knowledge.
- *Give facts and figures where possible.* This will add credibility to your case. Never lie when you state your case. Always be truthful and stick to the facts.
- *Relate your issue to a local situation.* Put the issue in context of the official's district and constituents.