

Tips for Meeting with a Member of Congress or Candidate at Your Health Center

- Find out in advance how much time your visitor will have. Let the scheduler know you would like to include a brief tour of the health center, followed by a sit-down meeting. Ideally, you should allow one hour for a tour and meeting.
- Choose areas within your health center that demonstrate the impact of your organization on the health of constituents. Walk the tour yourself in advance to make sure everything is in order and that you deliver your intended message.
- Provide opportunities for the Member of Congress or candidate to meet key health center staff — a physician, a board member who knows the legislator, and an employee such as a nurse or social worker who works directly with patients. Inform participants in advance so they can be prepared.
- Prepare a fact sheet on your health center to give to the visitor. Include information such as the number of patients served, number of employees and volunteers, amount of indigent care provided, Medicare and Medicaid patient load, etc.
- **Notify NACHC and your state association about the planned visit.** Your state association can provide you with background information on the elected official and help you compile any statistics or information needed to illustrate your concerns.
- With the permission of the visitor, arrange to photograph the visit and include a story on the visit in your organization's communications. For candidates, be clear in the communication that the individual was not visiting as a campaign event, they were visiting for educational purposes, stating that the opportunity has been extended to all candidates. Send the visitor copies of the story and/or pictures to remind them of their visit. If local press coverage is desirable, coordinate solicitation of coverage with the legislator's staff.

Tips for Meeting with a Member of Congress or Candidate at an Event or Their Office

- Introduce yourself and any others in your group, stating where you are from and each of your roles with the health center. If you are going with a group, decide in advance who will lead the discussion and what points you want to make.
- Keep your meeting short and simple. State the purpose of your meeting and outline the case for your position on a particular piece of legislation or the issue that prompted your meeting. If this is a first-time meeting with the elected official, be prepared to go over the basics of “What is a Community Health Center,” including who you serve and how you serve them.
- Give examples of how pertinent issues affect your health center and the Member of Congress' (or candidates') constituents. Stay focused on the two or three key messages you want to leave with the legislator. It is easy to get off track and run out of time, particularly when dealing with seasoned politicians.
- Answer any questions asked of you. If you don't know the answer, say you don't know the answer, but will find out and get back to them.
- Leave behind any relevant materials specific to your issue and/or about your health center (such as an annual report). Include your name and contact information with the materials.
- Be prompt but be patient if the Member of Congress is running late.
- Don't be disappointed if you end up meeting with staff, rather than the Senator or Representative. Legislators depend on advice from their staff because it is impossible for them to follow all issues themselves. Staff are gatekeepers and they can sometimes be the real driving force on an issue.