

AAP ADVOCACY TRAINING



# WORKING WITH DECISION-MAKERS

American Academy  
of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™



# INTRODUCTION

- There are many problems that affect the lives of your patients and your ability to provide care and treatment. These individual problems are often part of a broader issue.
- Many of the broader issues that children and pediatricians face can be resolved through changing community norms or systemic policy change.
- For every issue you care about, there is a decision-maker who can affect or influence the outcome.



# MOTIVATING DECISION-MAKERS TO ACT

- Effective advocacy involves identifying and persuading these decision-makers to act on behalf of your issue.
- It is important to understand what motivates decision-makers:
  - **Elected or appointed officials:** Influenced by what their constituents think and value.
  - **Community leaders:** Usually not elected, but their position and scope of influence depends on them being viewed as credible, well-liked, or fair. They are influenced by public opinion, but in a less direct way than an elected official.

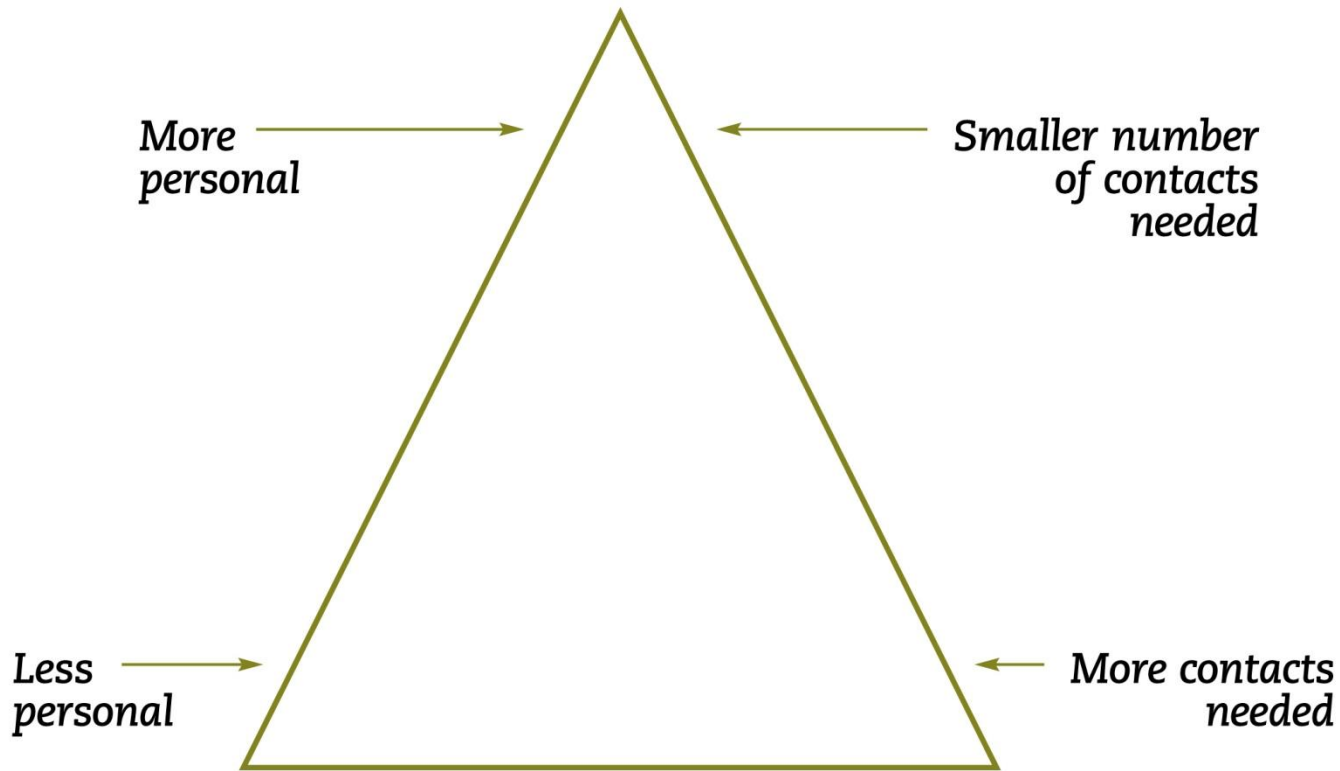


# INFLUENCING DECISION-MAKERS

- Decision-makers are influenced by personal contact and communication.
- There are many different ways to influence a decision-maker to act on behalf of a children's health issue.
- When choosing how you want to contact your decision-maker, keep in mind that **the more personal you can make your communication, the better.**



# THE CONTACT PYRAMID



- When choosing how you will contact your decision-maker consider:
  - The degree to which the activity is personal
  - The number of people you have to engage in the activity.

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO KEEP  
IN MIND WHEN **CALLING** A  
DECISION-MAKER?





# WHEN CALLING DECISION-MAKERS

- **Plan:** Before you make the call, plan what you are going to say. Your phone call will be very brief, so keep your message simple and to the point.
- **Message:** Be sure to tell your story succinctly, why you care about children's health, and why you need their support. Think about the key point and how your story underscores your point of view.
- **Call:** Make the call! Tell the decision-maker that you are a pediatrician and a constituent of their legislative district and/or community.
- **Staff or Message:** If you are calling a decision-maker, you may not be able to reach them directly. Be prepared to talk to staff or to leave a succinct message instead.

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO KEEP  
IN MIND WHEN **WRITING** A  
DECISION-MAKER?







# WHEN WRITING TO DECISION-MAKERS

- **State that you are a pediatrician and a constituent:** This matters because leaders are most interested in the opinions of people who live in their area.
- **Personalize your letter:** Research shows that personal letters have the most impact on decision-makers. If you are basing your letter on a form letter, rewrite it and consider using your personal stationery. This also gives you the chance to include your story, which is what will have the most impact.
- **Local, local, local:** Make a strong connection between children's health and what you and the decision-maker see in your home community.
- **Show restraint:** Keep your letter brief—1 to 1 ½ pages at most.



# ADVOCACY LETTER: WHAT TO INCLUDE

Dear Senator/Representative \_\_\_\_\_.

## **Opening Paragraph:**

- states the subject of the letter
- gives the bill number or name, if available
- identifies the writer and their connection to children's health

## **Body of Letter:**

- explains the issue simply and factually
- gives a local example of potential effects
- clearly states support for or opposition to the bill
- is polite and non-threatening
- thanks the elected official for their attention to the issue.
- offers to provide more information on request and includes your contact information
- asks for a reply

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO KEEP  
IN MIND WHEN **E-MAILING** A  
DECISION-MAKER?





# WHEN E-MAILING DECISION-MAKERS

- **In the subject line of the message, state that you are a pediatric resident and member of their community:** This strategy will increase the likelihood that your message is read. (eg, Subject: Message from a constituent and pediatric resident.)
- **If the e-mail is mass-produced, modify it:** It doesn't take much time to insert your personal story and perspective, and it makes a big difference in making your e-mail credible rather than "canned."
- **Follow up:** Because e-mail is a more casual and often a mass-produced mode of communication, be sure that you are using other methods to persuade decision-makers. Follow your e-mail with a phone call, personal letter or visit.

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO KEEP  
IN MIND WHEN **MEETING WITH**  
A DECISION-MAKER?





# WHEN MEETING WITH DECISION-MAKERS

- Meeting with your elected official gives you the chance to interact with him or her in a way that is not possible through a letter or e-mail.
- **Before the meeting:** Plan out what you are going to share, including why you care about the issue and how it affects other people they represent. Be sure to include a direct “ask”.
- **During the meeting:** Allow time for dialogue and invite questions.
- **After the meeting:** Thank the decision-makers for their time and let them know how they can reach you should they have questions. Send a thank you note, e-mail, or fax.



## ADDITIONAL TIPS TO KEEP IN MIND

- You don't need to be an expert in all of the technicalities of your advocacy issue.
- You only need to be an expert in your story—how the problem affects your patients and/or your profession and how the solution can bring about meaningful and direct change.
- Communicating with a decision-maker is not much different from the communication you use every day.
- Follow-up and repeated contact makes a difference. Send your decision-maker supporting information or work with your chapter to get them what they need.



# SUMMARY

- Effective advocacy—or getting decision-makers to support your issue—is about letting decision-makers know what you think about the issues you care about.
- Through personal and ongoing contact, not only can you gain their attention, but you can ultimately build a relationship with your decision-maker that will make them more likely to support children’s health and well-being in the future.





# MAKING A DIFFERENCE

- Regardless of whether you are reaching out to your elected official through an e-mail, letter, phone call, or meeting, keep in mind the following:
  - establish your credibility as a professional and your interest as a constituent
  - make your contact personal
  - tell your story
  - include a concrete or “direct” ask in your communication
  - thank them follow up and make repeated contact



# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND INFORMATION

- AAP Advocacy Guide ([www.aap.org/moc/advocacyguide](http://www.aap.org/moc/advocacyguide))
- AAP Chapters ([www.aap.org/member/chapters/chapters.htm](http://www.aap.org/member/chapters/chapters.htm))
- AAP Division of State Government Affairs ([www.aap.org/moc/stgovaffairs](http://www.aap.org/moc/stgovaffairs))
- AAP Department of Federal Affairs (<http://federaladvocacy.aap.org> )
- AAP Community Pediatrics Training Initiative ([www.aap.org/commpeds/CPTI](http://www.aap.org/commpeds/CPTI))