

Harnessing the Power of the Medical Community

Why you should engage health care providers in reproductive health advocacy:

Health care providers have a unique voice. They see the impact of reproductive health policy in their practices every day, and they understand intimately why evidence-based policy is important for their work, for their patients, and for their communities as a whole.

Health care providers are experts. Much of the anti-choice legislation we face, relies on ignorance of medical evidence and clinical best practices. Health care providers are uniquely well-suited to educate legislators and the public about the science that informs sound health policy.

Health care providers are validators. Because medical professionals are not professional advocates, they occupy an important space as neutral third-party experts.

Developing relationships with providers:

If you are new to working with health care providers, start by developing a strong relationship with several enthusiastic providers who are interested in a relatively high level of engagement – for instance, providing individual testimony on legislation or submitting a letter to the editor. Local chapters of medical associations like the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, or provider advocacy organizations like Physicians for Reproductive Health, are good places to start when recruiting provider-advocates.

Once you've found interested medical professionals, have conversations about their interests. How much time do they want to devote to advocacy? Are they comfortable with public speaking or do they prefer working with legislators one-on-one? Be sure to address any concerns they have about public-facing advocacy work, especially when working with abortion providers.

These champion health care providers are your entry point into your state's pro-choice medical community. They will be able to help you find additional providers to attend lobby days, join sign-on letters, and participate in other one-time actions.

Engaging providers effectively:

Health care providers are busy people. To work with them effectively, it is important to understand their limited capacity and provide them with advocacy opportunities that are either very simple or take advantage of their unique position and expertise. Here are some examples of both categories.

Ask for something fast:

- Signing on to a health care provider statement of support or opposition
- Calling legislators

Ask for something that only they can do:

- Speaking positions at rallies, fundraisers, or other events

Visiting legislators

- To speak on a particular bill
- Education for champions, like our primer
- Attend a lobby day

Media work

- Interviews
- LTEs
- Op-eds

Guidelines for working with health care providers on legislation

Utilize their unique voices. Make sure that the work they are doing takes advantage of their medical expertise to use their time and skills most effectively. Give them opportunities to share experiences about their patients' challenges and successes in accessing care, explain the medical benefits or harms of policy, and discuss what policy will do to their ability to care for their patients.

Provide support and guidance. Health care providers are experts in medicine, not legislative process. If you would like assistance in conducting an advocacy training for health care providers, contact Lauren Boc at laurenb@prh.org.

Remember that health care is delivered in teams. In addition to physicians, nurses, physician assistants, pharmacists, social workers, and providers in training like medical students and nursing students are interested in prospective legislation and how it will affect their patients.

Recognize that health care providers' schedules may be set far in advance. Make any requests for testimony or legislative visits as early as possible.