

INTRODUCTION

How Government Programs Affect Your Business

Government at federal, state and local levels can affect your business and your life dramatically. Taxes and regulations can impose heavy burdens on the ability to operate community pharmacies, to provide jobs, and to deliver services to your patients and your communities. Pharmacy reimbursement is directly tied to government action.

Although certain government actions can impede your ability to provide quality services, not all legislative action is adverse. Public officials are supportive when they understand the role of community pharmacy and see that we provide essential services to our patients. In this regard, the result of active participation in the political process is far-reaching and benefits our profession and health care in general.

Here Is Your ACTION PLAN for Getting Involved

This How-To Guide provides a proactive plan for active political and community involvement — at the community or “grassroots” level. It is a team effort focused on public affairs.

National Community Pharmacists Association (NCPA) members nationwide are front-line health care providers with thousands of employees and millions of patients in communities across America. Our voice is strongest and is most credible when it comes from our local pharmacy professionals speaking directly to their elected representatives. That voice is even more persuasive when community pharmacists cultivate solid relationships with community leaders and elected officials at local, state and national levels.

If pharmacists hope that someone else will do it, then persuasive impact is lost. The solution is to take hands-on action in the public affairs arena. Proactive participation helps you and it supports community pharmacy. Stand up and speak out!

HOW TO... PUT A LOCAL FACE ON NATIONAL ISSUES

You Have a Great Story to Tell

You are an integral part of your community because you care for local patients, provide jobs, make a large contribution to the local economy and tax base and provide an essential local need — easily accessible community pharmacy care.

As a local business leader, whose efforts generate enormous benefits for your community, people will appreciate your participation in community affairs. Make the most of it! These activities can not only protect your ability to provide quality care, but also help establish publicly the linkage between community pharmacy and the well being of your patients.

Community Involvement Is the First Step

Just by getting to know national and state elected officials in the course of community, county, statewide and regional events, you make it less likely that they will target our businesses with burdensome legislation or further reduce our reimbursements. Without a “human face” in mind, legislators are more apt to see community pharmacy as a suitable target or even an easy target.

How do you accomplish this personal contact?

Invest one or two hours a month in some form of community participation. This will gain recognition for you and for community pharmacy. It will put that all-important “human face” on issues of vital importance to community pharmacy. For example, start by joining civic clubs such as the Jaycees or Chamber of Commerce. Make friends and become active. If you are already a member, volunteer more and take more of a leadership role. Any business organization that has a legislative committee is an excellent vehicle for promoting issues of importance to our profession, such as Medicare and Medicaid.

You’re the Expert! Elected Officials Need to Know What You Know

National and state legislators and other elected officials are just people. You can approach them with confidence. Their job is to listen to and represent their constituents. Moreover, constituents like you – medical professionals and local business owners – have valuable expert insight to offer.

Whenever you have access to a legislator, talk positively about the many ways your pharmacy is caring for patients, particularly seniors and contributing to the community. Feel free to discuss issues that concern you and your business future.

Community pharmacy is concerned with complex and often confusing issues like Medicare, Medicaid and insurance reimbursement – even legislators become confused – so your expert insights will be welcome.

Don’t just chat. Talk specifically about the patient population to whom you provide services. Also, make it a priority to explain the potential positive or negative impact of pending legislation on your pharmacy, your patients and employees.

Checklist of Objectives

1. Get to know your national, state and local elected officials well enough for them to recognize you.
2. Get to know the staff in your legislators’ local district offices.
3. Send emails to your legislators on issues that affect community pharmacy. Also, ask for their viewpoints.
4. Invite national and state elected officials to visit your pharmacy to see first-hand how community pharmacy works.
5. Enlist other community leaders to urge support of Medicare and Medicaid issues that help the poor and elderly.
6. Urge consumers and other citizen advocates to join with you in promoting our positions on these issues.
7. Urge churches, clubs, academic, health care, civic and consumer groups to discuss issues relating to Medicare/Medicaid recipients.

8. Above all, know the facts. Make strong arguments. However, it's not a good idea to back a legislator into a corner. Allow him or her to disagree with you. Be sure you leave them with solid reasons to support community pharmacy.

HOW TO... UNDERSTAND THE POLITICAL PROCESS

The WHY and the HOW

“All politics is local.” So said House Speaker Tip O’Neill, one of the most notable politicians of the past century. Relationships with local decision-makers are critical to community pharmacy and the operation of your business.

Begin by developing a simple list of your national, state, county and municipal elected officials and community leaders. Representatives, state legislators, city and county officials vote on matters that affect you.

That is the most important reason for your grassroots involvement. Now that you know the reason, the following sections will tell you how to practice some basic grassroots techniques effectively.

Learn the Legislative Process!

Out of the 10,000 bills introduced in Congress each session and the hundreds of thousands introduced in state and local legislatures, they enact fewer than 10% into law. Most successfully passed legislations starts out with just a small following and little public awareness. Therefore, it's important to express your views to your elected representatives early in the legislative process.

Aim for Prime Time

When is the prime time to present community pharmacy's position on a proposed bill? After one or more legislators introduce a bill, it is referred to one or more congressional committees responsible for the subject addressed by the bill. Usually the congressional committee chairs will refer the bill to a subcommittee, which holds hearings on the measure. This is the prime opportunity to present strong, organized, well-documented testimony on any bill. NCPA's Government Affairs team will usually coordinate this process.

At the state level, this legislative and committee process works in much the same way, and it is the focus of much of the work of your state association. They will welcome your support of their efforts – and they will support yours.

Here's How the Complex Legislative Process Works

1. The subcommittee with jurisdiction votes to refer the bill to the full committee for action, or to reject it.
2. If the committee votes to pass the bill, it is forwarded to the full House or Senate where the leadership decides whether to bring it to a vote.
3. When the House or Senate passes a bill, it goes to the other body where the processes of referral, debate and committee and subcommittee hearings start over.

4. If both the House and Senate pass similar, but not identical bills, a joint Conference Committee is appointed to work out a compromise, which is then sent to each body for a final vote.
5. If the bill is approved by both bodies, the bill goes to the President (or governor in the case of state legislation) who may sign it into law or veto it.

This is a simplified scenario, and most proposed legislation goes around with changes and compromises at every turn. The important thing is that at every step of this long and involved process, NCPA members have the opportunity and responsibility to make their views known.

HOW TO... REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Personal relationships are the key to business success. The same is true in politics. So, get to know the national and state officials who represent you. You are a constituent. It is their job to serve you. Constituents who call, write, appear in person at public events and visit their legislators will get attention.

- Make sure their local office phone numbers are in your contacts.
- Put reminders on your business calendar to keep in contact with them.
- Look at health care issues before legislators, note those that affect community pharmacy, and share your knowledge and expertise with them via email or phone call.
- Ask for their positions on any issue of importance to your business.
- Follow up any phone call with an email and ask for a written reply.

Your Views Have Clout

Elected officials listen to constituents. Remember, you are an expert on community pharmacy care. Legislators look to local knowledge before having to vote on complex issues such as health care. Thus, legislators expect to hear from you on issues of importance to our profession.

Prepare for your political calls just as you would for a business call:

1. Educate yourself thoroughly on the issues. Read NCPA's issue papers.
2. Develop a message and make a case for each issue.
3. Condense these arguments into two or three powerful selling points.
4. Practice your delivery until you feel comfortable and confident in your presentation.

HOW TO... ENLIST THE HELP OF THE "PROS" AT NCPA AND YOUR STATE ASSOCIATION

To help you get your grassroots initiative going, you should look to your NCPA Government Affairs team in Washington or your state association for:

- Background materials on legislative issues
- Background on your legislators and their support on our issues
- Assistance in preparing to meet with your legislators
- Press release preparation
- Help in responding to media inquiries

- Crisis response” assistance

Call us at (703) 683-8200 or contact us at: www.ncpa.org

HOW TO... PARTICIPATE IN OUR POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE (PAC)

PACs are authorized by federal and state law as tools for organizations and their employees or members to participate in one of the cornerstones of democracy, the electoral process. An effective PAC depends on widespread individual involvement.

The NCPA-PAC is a separate legal entity set up to receive and disburse voluntary contributions from association members on behalf of political and legislative goals at the federal level. Federal law sets maximum contribution amounts.

PAC activity is a carefully regulated and recognized way for individuals in a particular profession or industry to join in support of candidates. Remember, collective actions are only as effective as individual participation. To work, a PAC needs broad participation.

The future growth and prosperity of community pharmacy will be vitally influenced by the effective use of our PAC. And it all hinges on the participation of individual members like you.

Why Our PAC Matters

NCPA-PAC contributes to candidates who give us access and listen to our views. We support those who vote for our issues in Congress or are willing to work with us on our critical issues.

NCPA-PAC supports national political candidates who agree with our political aims. When legislative decisions are made, especially on a close or controversial vote, the issue is much more likely to go our way if we have already identified candidates who supported our position and helped them win their election. Since the founding of our country, this has been a commonsense part of democracy.

The voice of our profession is strongest and most convincing when it is a collective voice — that is what your contribution to the NCPA-PAC makes possible.

Who Gets PAC Support... And Who Decides?

Our PAC is nonpartisan. Political candidates are selected to receive contributions based on their views on issues important to community pharmacy, not according to party affiliation. All your contributions are made on the basis of these criteria. Selection of candidates for PAC contributions is made according to the following procedures:

- Public statements and voting records are thoroughly analyzed.
- A lawmaker’s positions of leadership and influence, such as committee assignments, are considered.
- Willingness to sponsor or co-sponsor important community pharmacy legislation.
- Recommendations are taken from our Executive Committee.
- Actions and votes are compared with the legislator’s or candidate’s statements.
- A decision to contribute is made after weighing all these considerations.

Campaigns and issues change frequently. Your ideas and recommendations are welcome. Let us know about any candidates or elected officials you think may be worthy of our support. Let your employees know how the NCPA-PAC promotes our goals and business success. Help get them involved.

For additional information on NCPA-PAC, contact NCPA at: (703) 683-8200.

HOW TO... MAKE GRASSROOTS INITIATIVES PAY OFF

A Final Word

As you consider how much time and effort to invest in community relations activities, consider what is at stake: your pharmacy, your business and your future.

National and state legislators have immense power over many aspects of health care. A stroke of a pen, a behind-the-scenes agreement on Capitol Hill or in a committee room in your state legislature can impact your livelihood any day of the week.

Know the Rules of the Game, Protect Your Interests

First, educate yourself about the political process – and the part you can play in it locally. Then educate your fellow pharmacists and pharmacy employees. There is strength in numbers, especially when the goal is to win the attention of elected officials who are always counting votes and looking to their next election campaign.

Here is a brief review of your goals:

- Get involved.
- Create opportunities to tell your story.
- Become recognized in your community.
- Regularly email elected officials on specific issues.
- Gain the positive attention of elected officials.
- Establish and develop personal contacts.
- Become a valued information resource.
- Win access to national and state elected officials.
- Learn the political game – and become a skilled player!

The Price of Inaction Is High!

When local voices remain silent because everyone is expecting “someone else” to act, we lose the initiative. The kinds of broad-based national and state initiatives, which community pharmacy needs to meet, lose their momentum without LOCAL initiative.

NOW LET’S GET ACTIVE!

It is in your interest to take a local leadership role. We have issues that the public needs to know about . . . and elected officials need to hear from as many quarters as possible. When you step forward to speak up, you help your own business while supporting all of community pharmacy.

Remember, an individual in our democracy can make a difference by helping to MAKE IT