



Toolkit for Community Organizers Seeking Legislative Support for Better Health Care in Colorado
Strategy Team
Revised 8/16/2017

Our strategy should be to establish broader legislative support for universal health care such as Improved Medicare for All either nationally or statewide by convincing legislators that their constituents are in favor of it, that the trend nationally is toward an Improved Medicare for All solution to the political deadlock over health care, that better health care is badly needed by the citizens of the particular district, and that Improved Medicare for All will solve the major problem of accessibility due to escalating costs.

Before Visiting Your Representative

Step 1. Review your legislator’s biography and political history. You can use Ballotpedia to collect information about what bills your representative is sponsoring, committee assignments, campaign contributors, websites, and endorsers, as well as other information. It also has other research links.

[https://ballotpedia.org/Colorado House of Representatives](https://ballotpedia.org/Colorado_House_of_Representatives)

Scroll down the page until you see the list of the members of the House, then click the name of the representative that you want to research. You can also do this with the state senators.

Once the information is collected, prepare two “cheat” sheets, one for your team members and a second with demographics for the legislator. Any handout to legislators should be bulleted rather than full text and should be one page to insure that it is read.

Step 2. Review the demographics of your district, including such things as income levels of residents, private health insurance coverage, and the number of people receiving Medicaid, Medicare and government employee health insurance. This knowledge will help convince your legislator that you are serious and know what you are talking about.

Census data on the district can be obtained at the US Census website:

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045216/00>

You can even get maps of the district that you are researching:

https://www.census.gov/geo/maps-data/maps/sld/st08_co.html

Data on employer-sponsored insurance, individually purchased insurance, Medicare, Medicaid and the uninsured for each Colorado County as well as statistical profiles of each county are available here: <http://www.coloradohealthinstitute.org/data>

The Colorado Center on Law and Policy, <http://www.cclponline.org>, has county-level info on the "State of Working Colorado" and “The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Colorado" which breaks down how much income it takes to be self sufficient in various

counties based on age and number of people in a household.

Our old ColoradoCare website contains information on what each governmental subdivision is now spending on employee health insurance and what could have been saved with Amendment 69: <http://www.coloradocare.org/amendment/saving-cities-millions/>

Step 3. Know the facts about private insurance company waste and mismanagement of health care: Read and digest this article which gives the history of how the US shifted from non-profit health insurance and hospitals to for-profit insurance and hospitals – vastly increasing costs, reducing benefits, increasing deductibles, and moving us away from a more efficient cost-effective Improved Medicare for All alternative:

<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/07/13/putting-profits-ahead-of-patients/>

Step 4. Know the costs to local government of providing employee health insurance:

<http://www.coloradocare.org/amendment/saving-cities-millions/>

Step 5. Learn the basics of the legislative process so you can follow a bill as it moves from first reading in the first chamber to being signed into law by the Governor.

Step 5. Know what it is that you want the legislator to do, e.g. endorse an existing bill such as the Conyers Improved Medicare bill in Congress, write an endorsement letter outlining your representative's scope of support for some type of Improved Medicare for All plan, or make a public statement that can be quoted.

Step 6. Practice, practice, practice role-playing with your group to make sure everyone knows her part and is able to succinctly and clearly articulate the story that each is to tell to the legislator in less than 5 minutes staying on point and without unnecessary digression. Appoint one person to be the group spokesperson to keep the message consistent and to introduce your team and outline what you all have to say.

Step 7. As the legislation begins to move forward, become familiar with the layout of the State Capitol and where to park so you can meet with your legislator at the Capitol and testify in committee hearings. Learn the protocol for testifying in Committee hearings and be prepared to speak for no more than 3-5 minutes.

Meeting with the Legislator

Some Tips:

- You will be most effective if you have established a relationship with the legislator when she was running for office by helping with her campaign.

- You will be somewhat effective if you meet with the legislator before the session starts. Colorado legislative sessions start in mid-January, so meeting in the legislator's home district by early November is best because bills need to be submitted early in December. The Colorado legislative session ends in early-May and won't begin again until mid-January. The Congressional session is the entire year with scheduled breaks throughout and varies between House and Senate. Check the calendar at

Congress.gov.

- To meet with your state representative and senator, you will be less effective but still have an impact if you participate in stakeholder meetings at the Capitol and at Town Hall meetings before the session or early in the session but not later than January or early February.
- To meet with your congressperson in person, it is best to call her Colorado staff to determine when she will be in Colorado and can meet with you.
- To find out when you can attend your Congress representative's Town Hall, you can check her website or call staff for particulars.
- Barring these early opportunities, you can still meet with the legislator during the session, especially regarding specific bills.
- Of course, employing all of the above opportunities for meeting with the state legislator or congressperson rather than just one would be optimal.
- Find out from the legislator or her staff the best way to communicate with the legislator: email, letter, phone call at home, cell or office, or text.

Next Steps:

1. Assemble and brief a small (probably no more than four people) contingent of citizens, preferably those who can represent a constituent group such as a nurses' association, a political group, an activist organization, a local union, or a civic organization. If you can recruit someone who has some personal connection to the legislator or who has a particularly compelling story about a relevant health care issue, that would be optimal, and it would put a real face on the problem.
2. Make sure that your group is all on the same page as to the steps above.
3. Call your representative and request a meeting to discuss health care issues that your organizations have as a result of the confusion and disruption that is occurring nationwide because of the various repeal and replace attempts and issues with Obamacare (Affordable Care Act or ACA). You may need to explain to the office staff that you are seeking endorsement of a particular bill or would like to have the representative give you her views on the way forward or that you want to plan ahead to try to create a Third-Way solution to the political deadlock over health care and that your group has some suggestions.
4. Rehearse and practice what you intend to say, who is going to say it, and try to anticipate and meet likely questions and/or objections from your legislator.
5. Prioritize your visits to legislators who may be facing electoral pressure as a result of the general dissatisfaction with the Trump health care agenda.
6. If you are one of their constituents, be sure to include where you live so they know you can vote for them. If you are not their constituent it is still okay to meet with a legislator because they have a certain position of power as the speaker, president of the senate, chair of a committee, serve on a committee or because they have shown special interest in health care.

7. If you do meet with a legislator outside your own district be sure to let the regional organizer for the legislator's district know ahead of time so you can coordinate your efforts and avoid confusing the legislator with conflicting information.

Engage the Legislator in a Productive Manner

A. Thank the representative for meeting with you to make her constituents healthier and happier. Compliment the legislator to the extent possible for some legislative victory or public statement or some other accomplishment.

B. Explain the reason for your visit and what you hope to achieve. Show the need for your proposal by using the demographics of the district to illustrate the problem. Tie this in with the numbers of folks on Medicaid, Medicare and other insurance versus those not covered or poorly insured. Talk about the failure of the American Health Care Act (AHCA) or other repeal/replace proposals to correct the problems and that the AHCA would instead make things worse for 2 of 5.3 million Coloradans. Include a specific story from the legislator's district to illustrate the problem. Contrast this with how the act benefits the wealthy by cutting their taxes at the expense of health care for others. Discuss the overall health care costs in the U.S. compared to other countries and the fact that we pay more and get far less with many millions not covered at all while other systems cover everyone without the administrative costs, loopholes, and deductibles. Make favorable comparisons of Improved Medicare to these other health systems.

C. Ask the legislator her views on what you have presented. Engage in a dialog to nudge the legislator to conditionally consider if not endorse your proposals, but do not argue or threaten.

D. The purpose of the initial meeting may not be to have the legislator immediately "sign on" to sponsor or co-sponsor the legislation, but rather to establish rapport for future meetings to then get support for a specific proposal – or you may even want to engage with hostile legislators in an effort to move them away from resistance and toward acceptance or, at least, neutrality, and this experience will sharpen your advocacy skills.

E. If you already have some written endorsement or newspaper article showing the support of fellow legislators from the legislator's own political party for your proposed legislation, drop a copy for your representative to read. Also, if you have some particularly succinct and convincing article on Improved Medicare for All, share it.

F. Schedule a follow-up meeting and ask about the date and location of their next Town Hall. End the meeting by thanking the representative, suggest further dialog on the issue, and offer to host a public forum or debate on the issue with the representative to involve more citizens in the conversation.

G. Write a thank-you letter summing up your discussion and closing with the hope of meeting and talking again. Let her or him know you're looking forward to the next meeting.

For Additional Tips and Training Check Out:

Video Training Program:

<https://www.healthcare-now.org/enroll-grassroots-legislative-advocacy-training/>

Listen to a Discussion on Legislative Advocacy led by Dr. Carol Paris with Commentary by people in the field to learn from their experiences and lessons:

https://www.mixcloud.com/Popular_Resistance/health-over-profit-for-everyone-national-call-august-7-2017/

Powerpoint tips on how to approach legislators:

<http://www.longmontdems.org/events/2017-clean-training-presentation/>