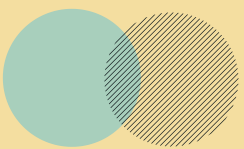


Vermont  
Medical  
Society

*Use Your Voice to*  
**Have Impact**



take action with our  
**VMS ADVOCACY Toolkit**



# THE VMS ADVOCACY TOOLKIT





# Become a VMS Health Advocate!

*Nothing motivates elected officials or government administrators as much as receiving authentic, real-life input from their constituents. Your experience caring for Vermont patients gives you a critical perspective on health care policy. COVID-19 presents unique opportunities where testimony can be provided remotely and lawmakers are actively seeking your experiences from the front lines in order to help strengthen Vermont's health care infrastructure and pandemic response.*

## ***Follow Legislation of Interest!***

- Track a bill
- Follow VMS involvement and participate in VMS Advocacy Alerts via the VMS Rounds Newsletter & VMS Legislative Bulletin
- Contact your legislator and/or members of key legislative committees following the bill to express your opinion. You can also find handouts, lists of witnesses, and information on testifying on the Committee webpages.
- You can reach legislators by emailing them, calling their home phone, or by leaving a message at the Statehouse by calling (802) 828-2228. (Messages will be forwarded even in remote session).
- Write a letter to the editor of your hometown newspaper.
- Inform VMS of your willingness to testify before legislative and policy committees or to visit the statehouse to lobby lawmakers in person. VMS Legislative Priorities for 2021.

## ***Contact Legislators!***

- Get to know your local legislator before you have a policy “ask” – introduce yourself and offer to be a resource on health and health policy issues. Find Your Legislator.
- Attend VMS Legislator Meet & Greets and the annual VMS Advocacy Day
- Invite legislators to speak at organizational meetings or with medical groups

*Please reach out to Jill Sudhoff-Guerin, VMS Policy and Communications Manager, at **[jsudhoffguerin@vtmd.org](mailto:jsudhoffguerin@vtmd.org)** or call at 802.917.5817 to learn more about becoming an advocate.*



# Effective Messaging & Communication

## *Hook, Line & Sinker* MESSAGING



*"You cannot mobilize people unless you ask them to do something. Awareness is not the end goal, it should be leading you to action" - WHO*

*Practice the "Hook, Line and Sinker" method...*

- **The Hook: *The Problem*** Describe the problem as it exists today and how your proposed solution could alleviate the problem in the future.
- **The Line: *Your Story*** Provide a personal story or experience to better illustrate why your solution is critically necessary to address the problem.
- **The Sinker: *Your Ask*** What do you want your listener or reader to do when you are finished delivering your message? Craft a specific "ask" and don't be afraid to ask for a commitment from a legislator.

## Tips from VMS President:

*"Begin testimony with a brief introduction including your professional background, training, area of specialty and place of residence. Avoid technical language and jargon. Use straightforward, humanizing language when describing people who seek care, people who struggle with substance use or mental illness.*

*Remind those present that we are discussing policy that affects our neighbors, our children, our parents, our communities. Remember, you are the expert in the room. Part of your role is to educate the committee. You have important knowledge to share."*

*- Dr. Simha Ravven*



# Media Know-How

*The goal of using media as a tool in health advocacy is to raise awareness and to build a community of support for your ask. The more specific you are in identifying your audience: whether it is the legislature, the media or the general public, the more effective your message will be.*

## **Media advocacy targets include these audiences:**

- **Grassroots Awareness:** media that builds public awareness and urgency to the core issues of your campaign.
- **Grassroots Action:** widespread mobilization of the public to take a tangible action that has an impact on the decision maker or decision-making process of the policy campaign.
- **Grasstops Decision-Makers/Key Opinion Leaders:** directly engaging decision-makers or key opinion leaders (those who hold sway over decision-makers).

## **Paid Media vs. Earned Media**

Although it is easier to control the message in paid advertisements, paid ads do not engender trust and action. Earned media is seen as the most credible form of media advocacy - legitimizing your issue to a broader audience. Earned media tactics include:

- Press conferences
- Press releases that lead to interviews
- Op-eds
- Letters to the Editor
- Social media

## **Social Media**

Social media is a great tool to get campaign messaging out quickly and to spread it broadly. Don't be afraid of the hashtag! A hashtag can be an effective tool to build a community of supporters and to keep the campaign messaging flowing consistently and authentically.

One social media tactic is to use hashtags. For example: You can share pictures, videos, and posts with your advocacy actions and the hashtag: **#VMShealthadvocates**



# Virtual Communication Strategies

*In person meetings were upended during the pandemic, but advocacy efforts don't need to be stalled as a result. Sure, meeting with lawmakers on Zoom makes it easier to "leave" your meeting and it's more challenging to build personal relationships in a chilly virtual setting. Social distancing and advocacy don't always go hand-in-hand, but we've found ways to adapt to this new normal and you can too!*

## **Zoom Meeting**

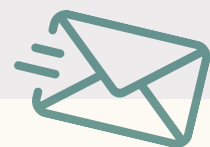
- Humanizing questions are still valuable
- Phone calls can be effective, but video chat is more memorable
- Remember to send important information via email prior to meeting with lawmakers
- You may be asked to share a document on Zoom, be prepared to share a final version of your content. [How to 'Share Screen' on Zoom.](#)
- Send a follow-up email thanking whomever you met with

## **Phone Call**

- Once on the phone with a legislator, first identify yourself and where you are from
- Briefly state your position, either in opposition or supporting, of a current or upcoming item of legislation -stay on message!
- When closing, request a response from them and leave your email address and phone number
- Follow-up on your conversation with an email and any additional materials promised.

## **Written Exchange**

- Make sure your name and address are visible so they'll know you are a constituent, also include additional contact information.
- Keep your correspondence clear and concise and include: **1.** Who you are and your standing **2.** Your personal story **3.** Your specific ask **4.** Any local data
- Proofread, proofread, proofread!
- We encourage you to send your letter to the VMS Policy Staff as well!



# Frame Your Message

## ***Craft Your Message: Start by Framing Your Message\****

**People, Pocketbooks, and Principles:** *In the current circumstance, what does your audience care most about? Which frame aligns your message with their values?*

*A framing statement can often be crafted by completing one of the following sentences with your audience in mind: “We can all agree that...” or “We all benefit when...”*

*For example: “We all benefit when our seniors are healthy and can access medical care in an effective and sustainable manner.”*

### **These questions can help define your message:**

**Problem:** *What is the problem today? For example:* Vermont seniors are reluctant to access telehealth services through video means. They often call for care and then physicians face unsure/unequal reimbursement

**Solution:** *What is the solution/the proposed fix? For example:* Standardizing coverage for audio only services will allow physicians to be reimbursed for care via phone

**Action:** *What is your ask or call-to-action?*

*For example:* Require insurers to cover audio-only telehealth services



## ***Practice, Practice, Practice Your Message:***

- After you craft your message, practice your message with your family or colleagues*
- Time yourself - you will probably be surprised at how much you can simplify your ask*
- Relax! Remember you are the expert in the field of health care, making you qualified as a VMS Health Advocate!*

*\*This messaging exercise has been adapted from Carol Kelly's Pivot Point Trainings*

# VMS Policy Team Tips!



**Policy and Communications Manager, Jill Sudhoff-Guerin, shares...** "Don't be afraid to share your personal story. Know your facts inside and out, but a personal story that establishes a human connection is your hook. Lawmakers are people too, that share a similar drive as clinicians, to provide service to their communities. Often they won't remember your facts, but will remember a story that illustrates the urgency around your policy ask."

**VMS Deputy Director, Stephanie Winters, shares...** "You are the expert that needs to be heard. I often hear, "I am passionate about this, but I am not an expert". To this I say - If you are passionate, you ARE the person that needs to be heard!"



**VMS Executive Director, Jessa Barnard, shares...** "Pretending arguments on the other side of an issue don't exist doesn't make them go away. Anticipate the top 1-3 questions you will face and proactively weave your best responses into your statement. Practice, practice, practice - in your head, out loud, on a walk, in the shower. The more comfortable you feel with the material the more confident you will sound."

