



**LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY  
A GUIDE FOR ALL ALLIANCE  
MEMBERS**

Updated February 2017

# **Legislative Advocacy**

## ***A guide for all Alliance members***

Why Advocacy is So Important	<b>2</b>
County, State and National Legislation Chairs: How Leaders Work Together	<b>3</b>
The AMA in Washington	<b>4</b>
Legislative and Political Activities	<b>6</b>
Communication and "a word about 'The Hill'"	<b>7</b>
Sample Letter to Legislator	<b>8</b>
Fine-tuning Your Constituency Skills	<b>9</b>
Impacting State Legislation	<b>12</b>
Planning a Day at the Capitol	<b>14</b>
Voter Registration	<b>15</b>
Legislative Advocacy Workshop	<b>18</b>
Resources	<b>20</b>
Legislative Awards for Alliance Members	<b>21</b>

## **Why Legislative Advocacy is So Important**

The AMA Alliance is the largest volunteer arm of the American Medical Association, supporting medical families through advocacy and education and serving as the volunteer voice of healthy families in our communities. With health care occupying such a focus of our nation's legislative arena, physicians and Alliance members cannot afford to stand by and watch while others make decisions that have a tremendous impact on the well being of all Americans.

Because we have such a close partnership with the American Medical Association, legislative advocacy is a primary activity of the AMA Alliance – it's also easier and faster than it's ever been to get in touch with our legislators. Our mission, as partners with physicians, is simple:

1. As members, to educate ourselves and become comfortable contacting legislators to express our collaborative views; and
2. As leaders, to develop programs and systems to help educate fellow members and enable them to engage effectively.

AMA Alliance members play a unique role as leaders in this area by actively engaging ourselves and motivating others to exercise our civic rights and responsibilities. In this way, we can and do make an important difference.

This handbook offers a framework for legislative programs that generate awareness and participation in the many aspects of the lawmaking process. Policy and procedural information, as well as a variety of ideas for education, outreach and action are included to guide you in launching new projects and refining existing programs.

### ***Before you begin, three important points should be highlighted:***

- First, the need to present a unified voice is important.
- Second, collaboration with your county and state medical societies in undertaking legislative initiatives will underscore this unity and present a clear message to legislative leaders.
- Third, AMA Alliance policy, and its status as an organization working on behalf of all Americans presents a focus on legislative rather than political activities.

### ***Today's Forces***

The forces influencing the health care delivery system of today – the high cost of health care, the competition for scarce public funding, managed care organizations, the health care reimbursement system, the skyrocketing cost of insurance and the aging of the Baby Boomers – present challenges for the family of medicine. As the nature of medical practice evolves, it is incumbent upon the AMA and the AMA Alliance, as partners, to meet these challenges.

Remember, Congress and the state legislatures exist to represent our views and our interests. By developing effective skills to interact with elected leaders, we carry out our responsibilities as leaders in the health care community – as active citizens rather than silent voices.

## **County, State, and National Legislation Chairs:**

### ***How Leaders Work Together***

As a *County Legislation Chair*, you serve as a critical information link to your fellow members. Your responsibilities include the following:

- To collect and disseminate information to Alliance members on legislative activities and the action needed;
- To maintain current information and updates on state legislative matters;
- To organize and maintain a current county electronic and phone database;
- To arrange legislative and educational forums for your members.

As a *State Legislation Chair*, you are an important link in getting information to your county chairs and members. Your responsibilities include the following:

- To plan and implement educational activities;
- To maintain a current electronic database system, and/or phone bank;
- To disseminate information to Alliance members and county chairs on state and federal legislative activities and action needed; and
- Collaborate with the medical society on pertinent aspects of legislative activities.

If you are a member of the *AMA Alliance Legislation Committee*, your role is to keep chairs and members informed across the nation. Your responsibilities include:

- To support the legislative activities pertaining to health and health care approved by the AMA and the AMAA Legislation Committee;
- To educate county and state Alliances on relevant, national legislative issues concerning health and health care;
- To encourage programs that will increase membership interest, knowledge, and involvement in legislative activities pertaining to current health and health care issues;
- To encourage programs that will assist state and county medical societies in legislative activities pertaining to relevant health care issues; and
- To increase the knowledge and confidence level of Alliance members in contacting legislators.

## How We Communicate With Each Other

The members of the AMA Alliance Legislation Committee will personally contact State Legislation Chairs throughout the year by electronic, phone and face to face methods. We also publish info in the e-newsletter *LINK*, *AIM* and *Physician Family* magazine. These communications enable the national committee to share AMA/AMA Alliance legislative goals and help to identify the specific needs of state and county Alliances

State Legislation Chairs are urged to share this information with County Legislation Chairs by the same means, as well as in their newsletters and at meetings.

This direct communication also allows states to share successful projects and current concerns, and to request assistance when needed. State and County Legislation Chairs are urged to contact AMA Alliance Legislation Committee members at any time during the year for assistance.

## The AMA in Washington

Did you know that roughly one-third of the measures introduced into each Congress concern American medicine? And of those, that few are actually passed and signed into law? One of the reasons for this is that the AMA not only works to get favorable legislation passed, but it must also work against the passage of onerous bills.

But the AMA's work doesn't stop there. Once new laws are passed, administrative agencies assume responsibility for implementation, and the regulations drafted by these agencies determine precisely how a law will ultimately affect the practice of medicine and the delivery of health care. Intelligently drawn regulations can sometimes improve inadequate laws; and badly drawn regulations can make well-intentioned laws unworkable.

To represent physicians in the relationship between the legislative and executive branches of the federal government regarding laws and their implementation, the American Medical Association has maintained an office in Washington, D.C., since 1944. The Washington office operates under the direction of the AMA's Senior Vice President for Advocacy, and is organized into the following sections/groups.

The primary mission of the **Advocacy Group** is to represent physicians relating to both the public and private sectors. In Washington, the Advocacy Group is divided into the Government Affairs Group, the Political Affairs Group and the Group on Advocacy Communications. These staff sections focus on achieving favorable results for the AMA by representing the interests of the profession before Congress and the Administration.

The **Government Affairs** section is responsible for lobbying and providing information to the Congress and the executive branch. This includes performing liaison activities and coalition building with the medical specialty societies that support this primary function.

The **Congressional Affairs** section is comprised of registered lobbyists who are responsible for covering all 553 members of Congress. Special attention is paid to the members of the key committees through which the bulk of important health legislation must pass. Each lobbyist also serves as liaison to a number of state medical societies.

The **Federal Affairs** section includes lobbyists who work closely with the departments and offices of the executive branch, as well as the White House, to influence the federal regulatory process and the formulation of major legislative initiatives such as health system reform. The growing federal regulatory burden represents a major concern to physicians.

### ***How the AMA Shapes Its Policies***

The AMA Washington Office advocates AMA policy, which is made through a series of steps that allow practicing physicians' viewpoints to be communicated to the legislative and executive branches.

The AMA House of Delegates sets legislative objectives, usually in broad policy guidelines. The AMA Council on Legislation uses these guidelines as it reviews the many and varied issues developing in government. The Council then recommends to the AMA Board of Trustees that legislation be proposed, supported, amended or opposed. Once the board has acted, its decisions are sent to the Advocacy Group for appropriate action in Chicago and/or Washington. In this way, practicing physicians' viewpoints are communicated to the legislative and executive branches of government.

### ***The AMA's Role as a Special Interest Group***

Congress generally welcomes AMA views because it recognizes that the public cannot be well served unless all sides of a question are carefully explored. While some AMA positions are rejected, many are accepted, and many more influence the adoption of ultimate compromises. Independent factors, such as organized medicine, contribute to the process by monitoring government activities and recommending realistic and reasonable solutions to health-related issues.

### ***Congressional Testimony and Statements***

The AMA communicates its views to Congress and the agencies on a regular basis both through personal contacts and through formal communication as well. On an average of two to three times each month, AMA representatives appear at Congressional hearings to express the Association's views on a particular issue or bill. After presenting the AMA's position, the witnesses respond to questions from members of Congress or agency representatives. The AMA also submits more than 100 written statements to Congressional committees and regulatory agencies each year.

## **The Difference Between Legislative and Political Action...**

### ***An Important Distinction***

Your Alliance involvement in legislative action is vital to continued quality health care. It represents a primary means of implementing the following AMA Alliance Policy, which states that AMA Alliance programs focus strictly on legislative activities, as opposed to political activities:

The policy of the American Medical Association Alliance in legislation and program areas shall be governed by that of the partner organization. An Advisory Council, the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees of the American Medical Association, shall provide consultation and direction.

*\*No commercial interest nor any candidate for public office shall be endorsed by the AMA Alliance.* Neither the name of the AMA Alliance nor the name of any officer in an official capacity shall be used in any connection with a commercial concern or with any political interest, provided, however, that the AMA Alliance may endorse or oppose pending legislation and assume a stance on matters of public policy if so recommended by an Advisory Council of the American Medical Association.

### ***Legislative Activity***

Simply put, legislative activity refers to any action calculated to influence the status of impending bills before a legislative body. It includes attempts to mold public opinion and stimulate legislative action by supporting or opposing specific legislative issues or philosophical attitudes.

#### ***Legislative activities include:***

- Formulating policy positions on specific bills;
- Preparing and presenting testimony before legislative committees;
- Initiating telephone calls, sending faxes, or writing e-mails or letters to urge a particular action on specific or categorical legislation;
- Encouraging voter registration and voting in the medical community;
- Sponsoring or holding meetings, furnishing speakers, or preparing and distributing pamphlets and other literature to stimulate reaction to legislation; and
- Circulating petitions, contacting legislators, or participating in other efforts to impact legislative issues.

### ***Political Activity***

This refers to any action intended to influence the nomination, election or appointment of any person (candidate) to public office.

Similar to legislative activities, political activities are governed, in part, by the tax status of the organization under the US Internal Revenue Code. *A tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(4) of the Code is prohibited from directly or indirectly engaging in political activity.* (Special legal restrictions apply to the amount of communication that can be supplied by a tax-exempt organization.)

Note: Each tax-exempt organization must obtain the advice of legal counsel before engaging in legislative or political activities.

**Political activities include:**

Raising funds for legislators and candidates;  
Making contributions to candidates' campaigns; and  
Distributing pamphlets regarding a specific candidate.

**A Word about “The Hill”**

Knowing how to work with and through congressional staff is an important part of advancing your agenda. U.S. Senators typically employ 25-30 staffers, whereas House members are likely to have 9 or 10 staff members each. Typical positions include district representatives, press secretaries, legislative aides, senior legislative aides, staff assistants, and interns. Committees and subcommittees also have an assigned staff, which include chiefs of staff, staff directors, staff assistants, and clerks.

***Writing Letters and E-mails***

Note some general rules to follow when writing to legislators:

- Be sure you know the legislator's district and how to spell his/her name.
- Don't send form letters or obviously mass produced letters or emails.
- Write on one subject per letter.
- Don't write a letter longer than one page unless absolutely necessary.
- Use exact bill numbers and popular bill titles.
- Know where the bill you are interested in is in the legislative process.
- Include statistics and other facts that lend credibility to your views. Be sure to verify dollar figures, percentages and other numbers by contacting your state medical society staff.
- Explain how the issue affects you, your family and your community.
- Be sure to include how you can be reached.
- Be very specific about what action you need from your legislator on an issue i.e. vote “yes” next Tuesday on HB 3.
- Make the tone of your letter friendly and positive, not threatening or hostile. If you oppose your legislator's position on a bill, offer the alternative solution proposed by your medical society.
- Send a thank you note, if the legislator votes in support of your viewpoint.
- Send a copy of your letter and a copy of any reply to your medical society to keep them informed of your legislative activities.

## Sample Letter

Honorable John Doe  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Doe:

I am writing to you to express my deepest concerns about HR 1234, which contains language that would severely impact both the physicians and patients of this nation.

The Conference Committee will soon consider HR 1234, and I urge you to enact the following changes in the legislation and to urge your colleagues to do the same.

1. Physicians must be able to obtain binding written advisory opinions from the appropriate enforcement agencies as to whether or not anticipated conduct violates the law.
2. Civil monetary penalties should be commensurate with the offense committed, and the language should require the individual to know that his or her conduct is prohibited before they are imposed.
3. There should be no creation of an inappropriate county system that would finance enforcement activities with fines.
4. Any data collection program should protect patient privacy.

I am pleased with the current attempt to pass incremental health insurance reform and support many of the provisions in this legislation. However, I cannot tell you how detrimental these civil and criminal penalties would be to American medicine and to the health care system. I know that my husband, a practicing physician in Springview, would find it difficult to practice in an environment where he could be fined and/or imprisoned for making an honest mistake in violation of an ill-defined law.

Similarly, he would not want to be fined heavily for using an incorrect CPT code or ICD-9 code on an insurance claim form. If you have not examined these codebooks, please do so. They are extremely confusing inasmuch as multiple codes seem to apply to any given diagnosis and procedure. In many cases, it is difficult to know the correct one to use. Although I have worked with these codes on a daily basis for many years in my job as an office assistant, I am often unclear as to the applicable code for a specific procedure or diagnosis.

I hope that our community can count on you to support the above changes and to encourage your colleagues to do so as well.

Sincerely yours,  
Sandra Jones  
37 Bellevue Place  
Springview, NY 10534

## **Fine-tuning Your Constituent Skills**

You have a right and responsibility to make your voice heard to your elected officials. Communication is the key to making your voice heard. Using the right tools is critical. For example, every grassroots communication should always contain local information. Every time you contact an elected official, use either a local example of how something works or a story that involves hometown people. Here are more specific methods to maximize your interaction with legislators.

### ***Phone Calls***

Phone calls to your elected officials can be tools of mass pressure and become very important when sudden legislative action makes letters too slow.

Tips to remember when calling:

- You may deal with a staff person who knows little about your issue.
- Clearly identify the subject, title or bill number to which your call refers.
- Make clear what side of the issue you are on and what action you would like your official to take.
- Identify yourself as a constituent.
- If the elected official has more than one office, such as one local and one in Washington, DC, calling the local district office can be a good tactic. The people who answer the phone there don't always get the same blitz of communications the Washington office receives. A dozen phone calls to them on the same topic may be reported to the elected official as strong constituent support.

### ***E-mail***

When speed is essential, e-mail can work better than a phone call (if your officials check their e-mail). Like a call, e-mail can be instant. However, e-mail allows you to offer a more detailed rationale.

### ***Office Visits***

If you are already a key supporter or a close friend of your elected official, an office visit is the strongest way to make a personal appeal. If you have never contacted your elected official before, the office visit can be a great first step to develop a lasting relationship. The goal of your visit should be to advocate your position with local information and to build your relationship with the legislator.

### ***Delivering Local Information***

Small talk at the beginning of a meeting places everyone at ease. But you must send a signal that you have something specific to discuss. Bring with you a one-page fact sheet that outlines your concerns with the pending legislation and what you would like the legislator to do.

Show your concern for people and bring both a national and local perspective to the issue. Use personal stories as illustrations. After the meeting, introduce yourself to the official's staff. Mention your role in the community as an AMA Alliance officer and member. This will help you in reaching the elected official next time you call.

### ***Meeting with Staff Only***

When an elected official has a scheduling conflict, you may be asked to meet with staff. A similar personal and local presentation may be made to the staff member to pass along to the legislator. Ask the staff member about his/her involvement in health care issues, and extend an offer to act as an information resource.

### ***Building the Relationship***

The end of the meeting should be the beginning of your relationship. Let your representative know that you wish to stay in touch.

Always offer to serve as an information resource: "If you need information on any issues relating to health care, please give me a call." Be sure to leave your card.

Offer to serve on the official's health care advisory committee, if there is one: "If you have a formal health care advisory committee, or if you start one, I'd like to serve."

Ideally, a relationship with your legislator should begin before there is an issue to discuss. A good way to make the first step is by participating in a Day at the Capitol event, inviting legislators to speak at your local Alliance meeting, or asking a mutual friend to introduce you to a legislator. Before meeting in person, it is also a good idea to research the legislator's personal background and career, their committee memberships, positions on issues, voting record on important issues and areas you have in agreement.

### ***Contact After the Meeting***

Send a follow-up letter or e-mail to the elected official and/or staff member repeating your points and expressing thanks for their attention. Renew your offer to serve as an information resource and briefly touch on your key points.

Pay close attention to the response of your legislator. If you get a commitment to support or co-sponsor a bill, be sure to report it to the AMA Washington Office or to your state medical society lobbyists. They know how this legislator can be most helpful in the specific legislative situation. Also inform the AMA Alliance about the meeting and your views on its results.

Stay informed on your legislator's positions on issues and of his or her public statements.

### ***Letters to the Editor***

Letters to the editor and op-ed articles are a way to communicate with your elected official and the public at the same time. A letter to the editor that mentions the name of an elected official is certain to be read by that official.

Here are some helpful guidelines for crafting your letter to the editor.

- Most letters that get printed are in response to an editorial or article that appeared in the paper previously. Therefore, begin a letter by making a reference, such as, “I was surprised to read in your paper that...”
- Generally the shorter the letter, the better your chance of getting it printed.
- Newspapers do not have the space to print every letter received. It’s a good idea to have several people write letters on the same topic, increasing the odds that at least one letter will be printed.
- Be sure to give your phone number. Newspapers are cautious about people signing phony names, so they may call to verify that it’s your letter.
- Every time you send a letter to your elected official, look in the newspaper for a tie-in for a letter to the editor on the same topic.
- If you praise your elected official in your letter to the editor, send a copy to your elected official at the same time you send it to the newspaper. Even if the newspaper doesn’t run it, the official will appreciate your effort
- Get a committee to recruit people to write letters to their papers, but don’t furnish a form letter for everyone to sign. The best method to getting published is to discuss some general talking points and to let individuals compose their own letters in their own words.

## **Impacting State Legislation**

The effect of state legislation on the day-to-day practice of the physician can be more direct in many ways than that of federal legislation. For example, the thousands of bills on health issues introduced into state legislatures each year include legislation on such topics as medical licensure and discipline, professional liability, and patient access to medical records.

The AMA tracks these bills and communicates information to state and specialty medical societies. More than awareness is needed, however, to see that health legislation enacted by state governments will benefit the people in the state. Action is needed by concerned, knowledgeable people. Due to a variety of factors, the power of the constituent is very strong. Votes, public demonstration of support, and donations of time and money to political campaigns get legislators elected and re-elected. Grassroots involvement is crucial to the legislative process, and members can choose many ways to be involved. Effective grassroots action will encompass the following tips.

### ***Coordinate your efforts with the medical society.***

This is very important to the success of any legislative projects you take on. It is essential to approach the legislature with a unified position whenever you are representing your organization and, through it, the medical society.

### ***Suggest projects.***

Talk to society leaders about projects in which cooperation with the medical society is desirable. Seek a place on medical society committees. Having a seat on medical society committees helps maintain the relationship between the Alliance and the medical society. Working with their legislation committee is an excellent way to know and relate the medical society's legislative goals to your Alliance and coordinate your actions. In return, some Alliances invite medical society members to sit on their boards and committees.

### ***Keep ongoing communications.***

Request time at the medical society annual meeting to report on Alliance projects and programs. Also ask if your Alliance can have a column in the medical society newsletter.

### ***Work with the medical society staff.***

Cultivate a relationship with the executive director of the medical society whose support is needed for coordinated activities with the Alliance. Treat the medical society staff as a professional team with whom a reciprocal relationship can be mutually beneficial.

***Know the substance of legislative proposals.***

While most Alliance members will probably not have the time to become as conversant with a piece of legislation as the medical society staff, learn as much as you can about particular bills and pass your information along to other members.

***Communicate with legislators in person whenever possible and through letters, faxes and e-mails.***

Make your view clear and make sure the legislator knows what action you would like taken. Don't threaten the legislator or cut off communication if he/she doesn't agree with you. If you are writing a letter, your home address should appear at the top, so the legislators know they are hearing from a voting constituent.

***Attend legislative committee hearings on a bill whenever possible.***

Coordinate attendance with your medical society prior to the hearings. Your presence at the hearings will enable the person testifying to demonstrate support for the position.

***Contact your legislator when a bill is still in committee.***

If your legislator serves on the committee, he/she will have a direct say on whether or not the bill comes out of committee. If your legislator is not on the committee, he/she can still have an impact by communicating his views.

***Encourage family members and friends to write to their legislators.***

Quantity does mean something, and this is a great way to the entire family of medicine involved.

***Mention the positive alternatives supported by the medical society when opposing a bill.***

In addition, work with your medical society to develop positive, private sector, non-legislative programs that will prevent the need for any legislative action.

***Don't give up once a vote has been taken.***

Continue to communicate. Also, thank your legislator for any support he/she gave.

Know what activities you can perform without concern about your state's lobby registration law and which ones would require registration. Usually, if you are not paid for your legislative communication, the law will not be of concern. Check with your medical society for guidance.

## **Planning a Day at the Capitol**

The purpose of a Day at the State Capitol is to familiarize members with the process of state government, the people involved in state government and how members can work with and through state governments to achieve results.

A Day at the State Capitol brings Alliance and medical society members from one or more counties to the capitol for a day focusing on state issues, meeting with legislators, and letting state government know that the medical community is active and involved. The program can include legislative workshops; lobbying initiatives on pending legislation; and luncheons with featured speakers, including the governor, medical society lobbyists, or prominent legislators. State and county Alliances have planned a variety of innovative days at the legislature, and here are some specific ideas.

One state distributed bag lunches and coffee mugs to all state legislators on their Day at the State Capitol. The mugs, as well as all the paper goods packed with the lunch, featured the state Alliance and medical society slogans and logos.

Another state Alliance found that the best way to organize a Day at the State Capitol is to organize county days at the legislature. Each county picks its own day and hosts local legislators at a meal. Members are encouraged to bring friends and relatives with them to the legislative session.

In one state, Alliance members attended their Day at the State Capitol for a briefing on the legislative process and the key issues being considered. After the state day, visits to the legislature continued twice a month, with each county Alliance taking its turn as organizer and host. Members were able to track legislation from discussion in committee to debate in the house.

One state Alliance had a Day at the Capitol at the nation's capitol. Buses picked up members from three areas in the state for the trip to Washington, DC, where participants visited their representatives and received a legislative briefing.

Attending a high-profile event like a Day at the Capitol to get in touch with elected officials is important, but staying in touch on a regular basis after you have returned home is also key. Lawmakers need to know how proposed bills can affect patient care and access to medical care. They depend on informed people like you to help them make educated decisions.

## **Voter Registration**

Maintaining a high level of voter registration within the medical community should be an ongoing goal of your Alliance. With just one voter registration project per year, or several smaller ongoing efforts, you can help make sure medicine's influence is a strong one in the legislative arena. An added bonus will be more publicity of the Alliance in the medical community. The following are some simple steps for holding a voter registration drive.

### ***Contact the local election office.***

Contact your county or state election office to get literature about procedures in your area. Request information on registration, absentee ballots, polling locations, absentee polling locations and appropriate deadlines.

### ***Set goals and target a population.***

Is your target the members of the Alliance and/or the medical society? Or is there another segment of the medical population you wish to target? Some suggested segments are medical students or resident physicians and their spouses, retired and older physicians, and hospital personnel.

### ***Obtain approval.***

Alert your state and county medical societies of your plans. They may have some suggestions and may even want to volunteer their services.

### ***Select one or more methods of registration.***

Dependent on the state, Alliance members may have several different registration methods to choose from. Determine what method may be the best way to meet your goals, given your time and resources.

*Centralized:* The unregistered voter must go to one established location (usually the county courthouse or city hall) and register at the appropriate office. Organizations sponsoring a centralized voter registration are responsible for setting up materials and volunteering as deputy registrars.

*Branch:* A branch registration allows for an Alliance to set up a registration booth in places such as medical centers, hospitals, community centers, libraries, etc. Some states have pre-determined locations and times for branch offices to set-up; other states will accept suggestions on places and times.

*Deputy:* By becoming a volunteer deputy registrar, a member can hold conduct voter registration drives, visiting various locations and doing "on-site" registration. Contact your county election office for information.

*Postcard:* The Alliance sends unregistered voters a postcard to fill out and send to the registrar's office. The postcards are provided by the election official in your area. Regulations on registration by mail vary and you should check with your registration official's office.

***Form a coalition.***

Forming a coalition to conduct a voter registration drive can maximize your time and resources; and if your Alliance has never conducted a drive before, it may be advantageous to learn the ropes from an organization that has, such as the League of Women Voters.

Under the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, states are required to implement procedures designed to facilitate voter registration in federal elections. Pursuant to the motor voter provisions, states must allow voters to register when applying for or renewing a driver's license. For voters who have physical disabilities, postcard registration must be permitted. Voters with economic disabilities may register at government agencies where they are most likely to seek help. Some states are now utilizing the State Division of Taxation, the State Division of Employment Services, state transit authority offices, as well as armed forces recruitment offices, as locations in which to carry out their statutory obligations.

***Promote your project.***

Voter registration projects offer a unique opportunity to generate awareness for your Alliance. Send a news release or announcement to your contact at the local newspaper, radio and television station. Also, think of ways to reach your target population; for example, place announcements in the medical society journal, the Alliance newsletter, and the hospital newsletter; and distribute fliers or hang posters in the hospitals and medical centers. Visibility will make your efforts more effective.

***Follow up.***

There will be paperwork to complete for your election office. Keep a copy of all names, addresses, and telephone numbers of those you register so that you can contact them later to remind them to vote. And don't forget to thank your volunteers, your medical society, partner organizations, and those at your registration location.

***Make it a membership service.***

Many state and county Alliances have made voter registration a service of membership by establishing a clearinghouse of information complete with voter registration forms, absentee applications and ballots, schedules and locations for voting and other useful forms.

***Name a chair.***

Assign a politically savvy member to keep abreast of new laws and developments within your state and county. Members can ask the chair about issues such as redistricting, jurisdictional boundaries, and laws specific to your area. This person can also become a deputy registrar and register people at meetings.

***Provide information.***

Knowledge leads to action, and nothing will get your members more determined to exercise their right to vote than keeping them informed about what their legislators are doing. Notices in the newsletter and updates at meetings are two easy ways to keep members informed. The more your members feel a part of the process, the more active they will be.

**A WORD OF CAUTION:**

The main thing that needs to be avoided in voter registration activities is conducting them in a way that favors one candidate over another. This can cause problems under the election law, and for Alliances that are exempt under 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code, could cost them tax exemption status.

## **Legislative Advocacy Workshop**

A legislative workshop or forum is a great way to get members interested in the legislative process because they can come to learn without feeling pressure for not being up-to-date on the issues. Forums with lively speakers, open discussions, and a relaxed atmosphere can go a long way toward getting both physicians and Alliance members more active and involved.

### ***Planning***

A program on legislation requires much thought since issues change rapidly. Optimally your program should whet the appetites of participants and involve them in your legislative work.

Getting a program off the ground begins with the selection of a planning committee. The committee should include members of your own legislation committee and a representative from the medical society legislation committee or council.

### ***Topic Ideas***

There are several ways to present the subject of legislative advocacy. Choose one issue, such as a current bill or choose a broad subject such as how the legislature works and how a bill is passed. The following are some possible topics:

- Panel discussion on current critical issues facing organized medicine
- Forum on government with emphasis on access to health care
- Panel discussion on the role of the state medical association, the legislature, the legal profession and the insurance industry in legislation
- The legislature, the law and you
- What's Happening Day – a program designed to help members understand a current medical issue, to anticipate public questions about the issues and to foster understanding of their legislative responsibility
- Meeting with local legislator to discuss issues of importance to the medical profession
- Educational dinner meeting with the state or county medical associations to hear prominent speakers ( i.e. a political analyst, a medical association lobbyist, a state hospital association representative, etc.)
- State legislative workshop to inform members of basic governmental procedures, tips for letter-writing, current federal and state health legislation, state medical society legislative programs
- How to communicate with state legislators
- Developing a legislative partnership with your a) Alliance b) your legislator c) medical society

### ***Selecting a Format***

Here are a few different formats to consider using:

- A speaker, such as a member of the state legislature or a Congressional representative
- A panel discussion, involving a legislator, medical society representative, physician and layperson;
- A debate between two speakers;
- A small workshop or discussion group on subjects presented by a speaker/panel;
- A question and answer period. Since issues frequently cultivate interest and tempers, at least one half hour should be saved for this purpose.

### ***Who to Invite?***

The physical facilities and the program content will dictate the invitees. Remember to invite both Alliance members and nonmembers – physicians' spouses might be encouraged to join the Alliance if they found a program that stimulated their interest.

### ***Timing is Important***

Keep your program brief enough to hold interest, but long enough to cover your issue thoroughly. Save enough time for questions and answers as interest often intensifies through interaction with the program speakers.

### ***Finding Speakers***

Speakers on public affairs and socioeconomic issues are available from a variety of sources. Your state and federal legislators are often willing to give their services in this manner, since it provides them with a forum for meeting constituents. Physicians too can be both interesting and informative spokespeople. Some medical societies have speakers bureaus set up for this very purpose.

The AMA Alliance Speakers Bureau can also help. The Speakers Bureau is comprised of all members of the AMA Alliance board and committees who are available for leadership training and workshops. State and county Alliances may request specific topics to be addressed at the workshop, and the Bureau will provide a speaker conversant with the requested topic. A request for Speakers Bureau services can be made through your State President.

## **Resources**

**(AMAA) Alliance** [www.amaalliance.org](http://www.amaalliance.org)  
800-549-4619

**AMA) American Medical Association** [www.ama-assn.org](http://www.ama-assn.org)  
800-621-8335

**AMA Alliance Advocacy Pages** <http://www.amaalliance.org>  
**On home landing page, Click on Menu tab LUC - Engage - Advocacy**

**AMA Political Action Committee (AMPAC)** [www.ampaonline.org/](http://www.ampaonline.org/)

**AMA Advocacy Resource Center**  
**AMA website, type "Advocacy resource" in search box**

**AMA Grassroots Smartphone App**  
**AMA website, type "AMA Grassroots" in search box**

**Guide to gov't information and services** [www.USA.gov](http://www.USA.gov)

**Library of Congress – Thomas** <http://thomas.loc.gov/> or [www.congress.org](http://www.congress.org)  
**THOMAS** was launched in January of 1995, at the inception of the 104th Congress. The leadership of the 104th Congress directed the Library of Congress to make federal legislative information freely available to the public.

**Senate** [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)

**U.S. House of Representatives** [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov)

**White House** [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)

## **Legislative Awards for Alliance Members**

To recognize your Alliance achievements in legislative activities, there are currently three different awards in two categories you may apply or be nominated to.

### ***Belle Chenault Award***

The Belle Chenault Award is given by AMPAC, the bipartisan political action committee of the AMA, every other year (on the odd year 2015, 2017, 2019 etc.) to recognize one Alliance member for his or her volunteer activities in a state or federal political campaign. The award is named for 1969-1970 AMA Alliance Past President Belle Chenault, who served on the AMPAC Board of Directors and encouraged Alliance members to participate in political activism.

As is always the case, nominations for this prestigious award must be endorsed and submitted in the name of a state PAC with a letter from an officer. Only one Alliance member per state can be considered for the award. For more information about the award or to receive a nomination packet, please visit the AMPAC Web site at [www.ampaonline.org](http://www.ampaonline.org)

### ***Legislative Education and Awareness Promotion (LEAP) Awards***

The Legislative Education and Awareness Promotion (LEAP) Awards were initiated in 2002 by the AMA Alliance and AMPAC to recognize excellence in the legislative education and awareness programs and projects of county and state Alliances throughout the nation.

Two awards are given each year – one to a county Alliance and one to a state Alliance - to recognize excellent legislation projects conducted throughout the nation. The LEAP awards are presented at the AMA Alliance Annual Meeting in June in Chicago. The AMA Alliance and AMPAC invite one person from each winning county and state to make a short presentation and then honor both Alliances during the Annual Meeting. Organized resident physicians' spouses and medical student's spouses groups are eligible to apply for a county LEAP award.

Guidelines and an online entry form are available on the web site [www.amaalliance.org](http://www.amaalliance.org).