Introduction

Dear Advocate,

Thank you for your interest in advocating for the nuclear medicine and molecular imaging community. Your efforts will help in getting patients access to innovative diagnostics and therapies and ensure healthcare professionals practice with the most state-of-the-art tools. The Society of Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging (SNMMI) recognizes that both our member and patient voices are essential to the success of any advocacy effort. With that in mind, SNMMI would like to share this toolkit with you, developed for the nuclear medicine community but appropriate for use by anyone with an interest in ensuring patients have access to the procedures they need.

Whether public policy and advocacy work are second nature or you’re a novice, you can be an effective advocate. Your personal story is the most important and valuable tool you’ll need. Policymakers highly value constituent stories, often developing their policy priorities based on what they hear back home. By translating those experiences to policymakers, you can play a critical role in shaping legislation that affects the patient community.

Establishing and strengthening relationships with your members of Congress is key to being an effective advocate. Recognizing the importance of these relationships, we’ve consulted with some of Washington DC’s most experienced healthcare lobbyists and lawyers to present you with these tips and techniques for communicating and engaging with your elected officials.

There are many ways to advocate. This toolkit was created to guide you through the who, what, why, when, where and how of communicating and engaging with your elected officials. We cover everything from the most basic fundamentals of how Congress operates to engaging with your lawmaker in-person and virtually through traditional and less traditional media outlets.

Our collective voice can influence policies that have the potential to ensure safe diagnosis and treatment for those battling a wide range of diseases. We look forward to advocating with you and appreciate your commitment to the patient community.

Thank you for your advocacy,

The SNMMI Health Policy & Regulatory Affairs (HPRA) Team

hpra@snmmi.org
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The engagement and communication tactics described in this toolkit are focused on federal advocacy but can be translated to advocacy efforts with state and local lawmakers. Strengthening relationships with state and local lawmakers is an important step for SNMMI members, patient advocates, and stakeholders, given the number of relevant policymaking initiatives that take place at these levels.
Before you directly engage with federal policymakers, it is important to become familiar with a few of SNMMI’s recommended best practices, as well as several aspects of Capitol Hill and local district operations.

What is grassroots advocacy?

Grassroots advocacy is raising awareness on issues to local, state, or federal lawmakers. It involves individuals contacting their members of Congress to weigh in on pieces of legislation or federal policymaking of importance to their business.

Federal advocacy at the grassroots level plays a key role in the policymaking process. Consistent messaging on policy topics allows policymakers to better understand an industry’s position and best determine a solution to their policy challenge. Thus, it is imperative that all SNMMI members who choose to engage in advocacy have aligned messaging with the organization as a whole.

Additionally, it is important to understand the audience receiving the message you share. The main audience you will engage with on behalf of SNMMI are federal policymakers and staff in Washington, DC, as well as their district staff at home. Because federal policymakers are most responsive to their own constituents’ needs, SNMMI has found that grassroots campaigns are most successful when members, patient advocated, stakeholders focus on their respective congressional members, representing either their hometown or business.

In this next section we explain how to identify, contact, and engage with your members of Congress. We also outline recommended messaging points for you to share as you advocate on SNMMI’s behalf.

Who are my members of Congress?

Your members of Congress consist of two Senators who represent your state and a Representative who represents your congressional district within the state. Your Representative is likely to be most responsive to your constituent needs as they are more focused on your local community, whereas Senators must focus their attention on the entire state.

To look up your Representative, CLICK HERE and type in your zip code for your hometown or business. To determine your two Senators, CLICK HERE and choose your state. Once you find your Representative and Senators, please visit their websites to find more information on how to contact them by phone or email.
Who is the appropriate person to contact?

Each member of Congress has staff in both Washington, DC (federal staff) and in their representative district or state (district staff) who represent the first line of communication between the member and constituents. To get in contact with staff, it is always best to visit the Representative’s or Senator’s website to determine which office (DC or district) to call and request the name and contact information for the district or DC scheduler and/or staffer who handles the issue area of interest to you. Each office has a scheduler who handles all meeting requests of the Senator or Representative in DC and in the district. Oftentimes, offices have two schedulers - one responding to DC meeting requests, while the other scheduler handles local/district requests.

In the DC offices, the staff range from a staff assistant who handles every day constituent requests, to legislative staff who work on policy matters and make recommendations to the member of Congress, to the Chief of Staff or Legislative Director who make policy and political decisions on behalf of the member. Each of these staff positions plays a key role in each office operating effectively and efficiently.

In addition to the federal staff, each member has district staff who operate in the satellite offices across the state or district handling constituent casework or specific district/state needs. The district staff play a key role in deciphering constituent concerns on federal policy at the local level as well as helping the member understand what key industries and constituents think about the member’s policy positions. The district staff scheduler is the best individual to contact directly about any local events you would like the member to attend.
Establishing relationships with elected officials is the foundation of advocacy. When reaching out to your congressional members’ offices, it is always best to connect and establish a relationship with the legislative staffers who work on health issues. These staffers advise legislators on policies related to research funding, diagnostic and therapeutic reimbursement, and access to care.

There are many mediums to use to tell your story and develop and maintain relationships with your member of Congress. The following guide is meant to give you some tips on finding the style that best suits how you would like to communicate your story.

When emailing, calling, or meeting with your members of Congress and their staff, it’s important to talk about your experience with nuclear medicine, whether it be an SNMMI member, stakeholder, or patient advocate. Sharing your story on how certain policies are affecting the practice of nuclear medicine or your receipt of care puts a real face on issues that are important to the nuclear medicine community and aids in establishing legislator-awareness of the field.

Below are stories two nuclear medicine patient advocates have shared with their lawmakers.

**Betsy D., Michigan:** When I was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma nearly 19 years ago, my life was turned upside down. Cancer was all I thought about and I threw myself into research to find the right treatment and planned to fight with all I had.

I was first treated with two different types of chemotherapy. Despite some early optimism, neither of these treatments worked. This was devastating for my husband and me as we dealt with the feeling that our options were slipping away.

But almost like a miracle, hope came in the form of a new radioimmunotherapy which had just recently become available and I was eager and ready to give the new treatment a try. After just two doses over a 7-day period, the therapy had successfully delivered targeted radiation directly to the cancerous cells. At the time I couldn’t believe it, but I’ve been cancer free ever since.

My fight taught me so much, but perhaps more than anything, this experience showed me the live-saving radiopharmaceuticals are important for improving patient outcomes, but only for patients who have access to these revolutionary drugs.

**Example of closing remarks for patient/member stories:** Dishearteningly, many Americans are facing severe access barriers for other radiopharmaceutical-based approaches, especially when it comes to diagnostics. This is because current Medicare policy, instead of providing sufficient reimbursement for radiopharmaceuticals, allocates payment at a rate that is significantly less than the actual cost of the drug. As a result, these diagnostic drugs that find and confirm disease, are extremely difficult to access.

The [Bill X] would change the current reimbursement system to ensure patients can access advanced nuclear diagnostics. But the only way this bill will pass is if patients, like us, voice our support for this legislation. I’m glad I had access to the radiopharmaceuticals I needed, and now I’m asking Congress to support this bill and make this innovation available for countless patients to come.
About SNMMI

If you are an SNMMI member, you should always begin by providing an overview of SNMMI to ensure the staffer understands our mission, federal priorities, and presence in the member’s local community.

SNMMI was formally established in March 1953. The Society maintains a membership of over 15,000 physicians and professionals across the United States. The Society of Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging (SNMMI) is a nonprofit scientific and professional organization that promotes the science, technology and practical application of nuclear medicine and molecular imaging. SNMMI advocates for safe, high quality, and cost-effective care for all patients by setting a standard of excellence. The Society supports both clinical and operational education, advocacy for policies affecting the ability of nuclear medicine providers to practice, patient access to life-saving radiopharmaceuticals, rational policies that promote and support innovation in the field, and technologies that improve patients’ clinical outcomes and their quality of life.

Top Five Tips for Effective Messaging with Member and Staff

1. Highlight your local connection and focus on building a rapport with the member and appropriate staff.

2. Explain how the policy will impact you as a physician, technologist, patient, and the nuclear medicine community as a whole.

3. Know your audience, including whether the member sits on a relevant committee that has jurisdiction over the policy issue you wish to discuss. Keep in mind that members and staff are not always experts in all policy issues, especially if they do not sit on the appropriate committee.

4. Keep your message concise and easy to understand. Members of Congress and their staff have limited time available.

5. Follow-up with staff and thank them for their time. This is essential to continuing a dialogue and fostering stronger relationships with your district Representative or Senator.
Advocacy How-Tos: When, Where, and How?
When is the best time to engage with my member?

Knowing the best time to approach a member of Congress can make the difference between a member's ability and desire to listen and take action on your issue or not.

About the Congressional Calendar

The congressional calendar is created by Senate and House leadership and released at the end of the prior year. This calendar features the days when each chamber is in session or on recess and when federal holidays take place. It is important to remember that leadership has the ability to alter this calendar at the last-minute by shortening or extending the days in session. You can find an up-to-date CONGRESSIONAL CALENDAR HERE.

Where is the best place to communicate and engage and how do I do it?

There are numerous avenues for communicating and engaging with your members to build and strengthen your relationships. Earlier, we provided important messaging tips and specific talking points for this engagement. In this section, we provide you with the processes for how to:

• Express your views on a particular issue by email, phone, social media, and the press (any time of year) and/or
• Meet your member in-person by inviting your member for a hospital/facility site visit (for SNMMI members and during a district work period)

Virtual Engagement

Sending Emails

Sending an email to legislative staff in your Representative’s or Senator’s office is a productive way to highlight concerns as a constituent and underscore key policy proposals that you believe should be included or maintained in legislation. Though you may not always receive a written response, your communication will be tallied and saved into the system for the member’s consideration. We drafted a template email that can help guide you through how to best message your legislative concerns. See Appendix 1 for an example of an advocacy email.

Making Telephone Calls: Call the DC Office

While we recommend writing to your district Representative or Senator, it is also an option to call their office to discuss policy matters. Phone conversations should remain short and concise. Oftentimes, the staffers answering the phones may not be able to provide an in-depth response to your policy inquiry, but they can identify the legislative staffer who handles the policy area you are interested in and give you a sense of where the Representative or Senator may stand on a particular issue. Calls are more effective after you have developed a relationship with a particular staffer, either in person or via email. SNMMI has drafted a general outline of a “phone script” to help guide you through a phone conversation. See Appendix 1 for an example of an advocacy phone script.
Virtual Engagement

Use Social Media
Given the vast amount of time Americans now spend on social media, members of Congress use this as a key method for communicating with their constituents — from announcing policy positions and providing updates to soliciting feedback and perspectives on specific issues. Below we've listed a few tips for how to use social media to express your views:

- “Follow” or “like” your members on Facebook and Twitter and subscribe to their press releases and newsletters - members usually offer this option on their websites
- Expand your social media presence by following other members of Congress and news organizations so your message reaches a wider audience
- “Tag” your member in a social media post to share your thanks or disappointment in a position on an issue or encourage the member to vote a particular way
- Be mindful that some tweets can end up on the news, so keep it professional

See Appendix 1 for examples of social media posts.

Participate in SNMMI's Letter-Writing Campaigns
SNMMI subscribes to an online platform that makes writing and sending letters to your members of Congress a piece of cake. Click here to see a list of campaigns you can participate as an SNMMI member, patient advocate, or concerned citizen.

In-Person Advocacy

Contact SNMMI’s HPRA at hpra@snmmi.org to participate in Hill Day visits, a day or series of days in which SNMMI members and patient advocate interact with members of Congress.

Site Visits (for SNMMI members): Site visits can vary widely, depending on the location of the meeting and number of attendees. In these cases, a member of Congress will tour a facility or nuclear medicine department, with the host’s leaders, and reserve at least 30 minutes for a sit-down conversation. A site visit offers the opportunity for the member to see your business first-hand and the value you provide to the community, and learn about any challenges you may be experiencing. Most importantly, it offers you the opportunity to make a specific policy request of the member (e.g., pass legislation, prevent a cut to reimbursement, etc.). Site visits may also be done virtually in the even that an in-person visit is infeasible. Read more about site visits in Appendix 2.
Appendix 1: Sample Materials

Facebook:
Here's a sample post you can use.

As a member of SNMMI/patient advocate, I urge @member to support the [legislation] (H.R. XXX/S. XXX) by including it in comprehensive healthcare reform legislation. This bill would benefit thousands of patients by XXX.

Email:

Subject: Pass H.R. XXX/S. XXX

[Insert Personalized Greeting]

As a member of SNMMI, I urge you to support the [name of legislation] (H.R. XXX/S. XXX) by including it in XXX healthcare package.

[About SNMMI and its members, specific highlights about the bill]

Including [legislation] in XXX vehicle is a common-sense solution to...Again, I urge you to include this bill...

Best,
(Signature)
Appendix 1: Sample Materials

Phone:

Introduce yourself and SNMMI

As a member of SNMMI/patient advocate, I urge you to support the [name of legislation] (H.R. XXX/S. XXX) by including it in comprehensive healthcare reform legislation. This bill would benefit thousands of patients by XXX

The [legislation] would:

• Outline 5-8 key talking points about the bill

Twitter:

Here’s a sample tweet you can use

I urge you to include [H.R. XXX/S. XXX] in healthcare reform legislation.

#passhealthcarereform @SNMMI

Or share one of our tweets
Appendix 2: Site Visit Preparation

- **Develop agenda and theme.** Decide which policy issue(s) or challenges the site visit should highlight.
- **Send your invitation.** At least 6 weeks in advance, send an invitation via email to the district office scheduler. If you do not know who to contact, call your member’s office and ask for the name and email of the district scheduler. In your email, you should offer a variety of dates to accommodate the member’s busy schedule. The request should include the date, time, location, likely attendees, and the proposed agenda and theme. If the member has made any positive statements or actions related to the decided issue, express your thanks and highlight this in the email. Be sure to include the names of any additional participants. Most importantly, emphasize you are a constituent and make the case as to why the member should want to attend by including specific details about the local community.
- **Coordinate with SNMMI.** Contact SNMMI’s Government Relations Department at hpra@snmmi.org to keep SNMMI informed.
- **Advertise.** If desired, coordinate with the scheduler to invite members of the press to attend (they can be excused following the tour to allow for a closed-door meeting).
- **Collect RSVPs.** To the extent possible, collect a list of confirmed attendees and share this with the member’s staff.

**During the Site Visit**
- **Welcome.** Begin the event by welcoming and thanking the member of Congress for attending. In smaller settings (fewer than 20 attendees), encourage other attendees to introduce themselves so the member knows who is in the room.
- **Facilitate discussion.** Assign a moderator role to keep the discussion moving.
- **Make your ask.** When appropriate, make your specific policy request of the member, tying it into the site visit and local community.
- **Take a picture.** Ask your member to take a picture with the group and be sure to send any photos to SNMMI.

**After the Site Visit**
- **Thank you.** Wrap-up the site visit by thanking the member of Congress. Send a thank-you letter to the member of Congress for attending and use social media to advertise the event and expand your audience. Don’t forget to “tag” the member so he/she can re-circulate your post.
- **Follow up.** Collect contact information from willing participants and send out a survey seeking suggestions for improvement.
- **Coordinate with SNMMI.** Contact hpra@snmmi.org to keep SNMMI informed.