

# LeadingAge Wisconsin - Guide to Grassroots Advocacy

## What is Grassroots Advocacy?

Grassroots advocacy refers to the efforts by individuals or groups to influence the decision-making process of elected officials. For long-term care providers, this often involves mobilizing your organizations and rallying support from residents and their families, your staff, and the broader community to influence public policy and legislation that impacts the long-term care sector.

## Why is it Important?

Your grassroots advocacy ensures that the concerns of long-term care providers and the residents and families you serve are heard by your elected officials. As constituents, you represent a critical sector of healthcare significantly impacted by legislation and regulation. As a community leader, you are a vital link between your legislators and your association and can provide on-the-ground insights that put a local face on state and national issues.

## Tools for Effective Advocacy and Communication

**#1 – Letters and Emails:** Letters and emails are the most common forms of communication with elected officials. Effective letters and emails should include:

- **Who:** Identify yourself, your facility, your role, the number of residents you serve, and the number of employees.
- **What:** Clearly state the issue, your position, and specify any relevant bill numbers or titles.
- **Why:** Explain the importance of the issue and its impact on your facility's ability to provide quality care.
- **Where:** Describe how the issue affects your facility and its operations.
- **When:** Mention the timeline and urgency of the issue.

**#2 – Phone Calls:** Phone calls can be more personal than letters. When calling, you are likely to speak with a staff member or get voicemail. Use a script similar to your letter and ask for a callback to discuss the issue further.

**#3 – In-person District Office or State Capitol Office Meetings:** In-person meetings have a significant impact and help build relationships with legislators. Tips for meetings include:

- Call ahead to make an appointment and specify the issue.
- Plan your agenda based on the time available.
- Treat meetings with staff as seriously as those with elected officials.
- Provide a one-page summary of the issue and your proposed solution.
- Offer to be a local resource on long-term care issues.
- Follow up with the legislator's staff, with help from your association.

**#4 – Facility Tours:** Inviting legislators to tour your facility provides them with firsthand insight into your operations. Tips include:

- Propose the tour during a personal meeting or through a letter.
- Schedule tours during election campaign seasons.
- Prepare a fact sheet about your facility.
- Plan for interactions with staff and residents.
- Discuss long-term care issues at the end of the tour.

**#5 – Virtual Meetings:** When in-person meetings aren't feasible, virtual meetings are a good alternative. To request a virtual meeting:

- Indicate your interest in setting up a virtual meeting and identify yourself and your facility.
- Briefly explain your role and the services your facility provides.
- Discuss the issue, number of attendees, and your availability.
- Confirm the meeting platform and follow up with necessary details.

**#6 – Website Advocacy:** Use website advocacy tools provided by your association to quickly and effectively communicate with legislators through "Calls to Action" or "Action Alerts."

**#7 – Social Media:** Leverage social media to engage with elected officials:

- **Facebook:** Like and follow your legislators, post updates on long-term care issues, and connect with colleagues.
- **Twitter (X):** Follow legislators for real-time updates, mention them in tweets, and use direct messages to communicate your positions.

**#8 – Working with Your Association and Their Lobbyists:** LeadingAge Wisconsin's advocacy team, including in-house staff and contracted lobbyists from Husch Blackwell Strategies, is a valuable resource for advocating on behalf of the long-term care industry in Wisconsin. Collaboration with your association team and coalition building among other associations will strengthen the industry's advocacy efforts.

By actively participating in grassroots lobbying, you can help shape policies that impact long-term care, ensuring your voice and the needs of your residents are heard.