



Advocacy Toolkit

Meeting in Person

Meeting with your elected officials in person allows you to share your story face-to-face. It gives members and their staff an opportunity to ask questions and have an in-depth conversation about the matters important to you.

Please keep in mind that during the COVID-19 pandemic, elected officials will not be as available to meet with constituents. Contact your elected official's office to see if they are planning any opportunities for virtual meetings such as virtual town halls.

Visiting with your legislator while they are in their constituency office is often more effective than a meeting in their government office which is a hectic and fast-paced environment, meaning elected officials have very limited time to spend with constituents. Visits conducted in the constituency offices frequently last longer, leaving more time for you to share your story. Elected officials travel back to their homes and hold meetings during recess periods (times when Parliament or Legislature is not in session and elected officials conduct business at home).

If you're not able to conduct an in-person visit or prefer not to, that's okay! Choose the advocacy option that works best for you. Here are some tips for meeting with your elected officials:

Before the Meeting

Schedule an appointment

Locate your lawmaker's in-district office(s) by using ACE's [elected official finder](#) and using the lookup tool. Many officials have electronic meeting request forms on their websites. Or you can call the office directly to ask for an appointment. During recesses, elected officials' calendars fill up very quickly. Look to book several weeks in advance.

The scheduler will ask you about the purpose of your visit. Tell them the issues you will discuss, keeping it to 2-3 issues at most. Elected officials usually bring a staffer to constituent meetings, so by sharing your issues ahead of time you ensure the person working on health topics will be present. In some cases, the elected official will not be able to attend the appointment and you'll be told you're meeting with the health staffer. Speaking with staff is just as important as speaking with an elected official because they play a significant role in shaping the elected official's policies.

Determine what you'll say. Use the talking points and handouts in this toolkit to plan what you'll say in your meeting. Review these documents several times so you feel comfortable speaking on these topics. Print the handouts to bring to your appointment and leave with your elected official and/or their staff.

During the Meeting

Be patient

Elected officials and their staff often have very tight schedules. It's not uncommon for the elected official to be late or for your meeting to be interrupted, and you may speak in the hallway or while walking between rooms. If prolonged standing or walking is too difficult, though, speak up. They'll work to find alternative arrangements for your meeting.

Remain flexible

Prepare to meet with your elected official or their staff. Treat both with equal respect. If the elected official arrives in the middle of the appointment, continue the conversation and allow them to ask questions if needed. If you discover your elected official is not able to join the meeting, don't be discouraged. Remember, educating staffers on your needs is critical.

Tell your personal story

No one is in a better position to educate elected officials on arthritis than those who are living with it every day. Sharing your experiences will help your member understand how public policies impact the arthritis community.

Stay focused

Keep your conversation limited to one or two policy issues and be specific about the positions you'd like your elected official to take. Have your key requests organized so you can present them concisely.

Be honest.

It's okay if you don't know the answer to a question. Offer to figure it out and get back to the staffer.

Keep politics out of it. Your elected official may not support the issues you cover in your meeting, but they could be your ally on future topics. Do not discuss elections or campaign support and respect the elected official's political views.

Say thank you and leave educational materials.

Express your gratitude and leave copies of ACE materials so the office can review the issues again. Take the staffer's business card so you can stay in touch. Elected officials don't give out their personal email addresses; you'll keep in touch with them through their staff.

After the Meeting

Follow up.

There are many ways to share your thanks after a meeting. You can send an email to your elected official and their staff summarizing the issues you discussed and expressing your gratitude for the visit. (If helpful, you can use the template message below.)

Or, you can tweet at your elected officials and thank them for their time. Elected officials are often eager to take pictures with their constituents during meetings, so feel free to ask for a shot and then attach it to your tweet! And, if you prefer traditional mail, you can always send a handwritten note (just be aware that it may be delayed due to government security measures).

Dear *[elected official / staffer name]*:

Thank you for the opportunity to meet on *[date]* to talk about policies impacting the arthritis community. I appreciate your consideration of these issues.

As discussed during our meeting, *[list the issues you discussed, for example]*:

- Arthritis affects more than 6 million Canadians, yet no standardized model of arthritis care is available. Inequitable models of care exist from province to province. Where you live can be more important in determining arthritis treatment than how sick or disabled you are.
- The time to address models of care in arthritis is now and it is critical. By 2025, it is estimated that one third of Canadian rheumatologists will retire, coupled with an anticipated growth in patient volume driven by an aging population.
- With the knowledge of the impact of early diagnosis and treatment on outcomes in rheumatologic diseases, we must find alternative approaches to patient care.

[Add a few sentences here about your personal connection to the disease and the impact it has on you and your family.]

[If the elected official or staffer asked for more information, wanted to speak to someone at Arthritis Consumer Experts and/ or planned to discuss an issue with their colleagues before giving an official position, be sure to follow up on these points here.]

It was a pleasure meeting with you. Again, thank you for taking the time to speak with me. I look forward to staying in touch with you on these topics.

Sincerely,

[Your name] [Contact information]