You’re the Cure
A Guide for Advocates
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American Heart Association Mission Statement
Building Healthier Lives, Free of Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke

American Heart Association Advocacy Mission Statement
To Actively Change the Social, Political, Legal, Medical, and Business Environments to Support our Mission.

Overview

You’re the Cure advocates are…
The moving force behind policy change for the American Heart Association and American Stroke Association are You’re the Cure advocates bringing heart and stroke statistics to life by sharing their personal expertise with lawmakers at the local, state, and national levels. Through emails, phone calls, letters to the editor, press events, and face-to-face meetings with decision makers, You’re the Cure advocates directly influence policy and improve the quality of life for not only our family members, friends, and neighbors, but for all of our fellow Americans.

Why Advocate with You’re the Cure:
As many advocates know too well, heart disease, stroke and other forms of cardiovascular disease affect millions of people across the United States including family, friends and neighbors. Cardiovascular disease is the No. 1 and most costly killer in the United States, but there is hope as medical research is our best defense—leading to new ways to prevent, treat and even cure cardiovascular disease. As a You’re the Cure advocate you can influence lawmakers and change policy to make communities heart healthy. Fellow advocates have created smoke-free communities, placed life-saving devices like AEDs in public places, and have increased federal funding for medical research.

How This Manual Can Help You Make a Difference:
You have the ability to influence decision-makers and make heart healthy changes in your community. This manual is designed to give you all the tools necessary to effectively reach out and impact key decision makers at both the local and national level to ensure that policies and programs that help fight heart disease and stroke will be supported and implemented.

Contact Information:
Find your local staff contacts by going to www.ahaadvocacystaff.org.
Ways to Get Involved:

1. Learn more about heart disease and stroke at www.americanheart.org
2. Join the You’re the Cure network by going to http://www.yourethecure.org and registering
3. Recruit at least five (5) friends to the You’re the Cure network
4. Respond right away to action alerts—why wait?
5. Ask your friends to respond to the action alerts by forwarding the email
6. Share your story online regarding heart disease and stroke with You’re the Cure
7. Introduce yourself to your legislator as a member of You’re the Cure
8. Contact your legislator and other key stakeholders through e-mails, letters, or a meeting—more information on the next page
9. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper—they are a powerful way to communicate with your legislators and community. They are usually used to respond to a particular story in a newspaper or you can look for an article where you can draw a link to your issue.
10. Host or volunteer at a local You’re the Cure meeting or event
11. Attend your state lobby day
12. Speak to local groups about your experiences with You’re the Cure
13. Provide testimony at a public hearing about the importance of You’re the Cure issues
14. Tell your personal story related to an advocacy issue at a press event to help raise awareness and generate support.
How to Contact Key Stakeholders and Legislators:

“Key Stakeholders” are those stakeholders who have the power, by virtue of who they are or what they do, to effect change. It can be your job to convince them that they have a stake in your outcome. That is, they win if you win. They are often legislators, but not all legislators are created equal in terms of effectiveness. Senior legislators, and those on committees like health that will be crucial for heart disease and stroke issues, are the ones that may be your primary targets for relationship-building.

Writing an E-mail to Stakeholders/Legislators:

- *You’re the Cure* action alerts make it simple for you to send an e-mail to the people who set policy and make the laws
- When you receive an action alert, personalize the message and click ‘send.’
- If you have a personal story about heart disease or stroke, share it in your e-mail
- When legislators receive hundreds of personalized messages about a certain issue, they have no choice but to take action and notice

Writing a Letter to Stakeholders/Legislators:

- Emphasize your commitment to finding cures for heart disease and stroke
- Be sure to let the legislator know where you are from (city, state) and why you feel so strongly about heart disease and stroke
- Encourage the legislator to respond and let you know their position on heart disease and stroke issues
- Remember that when sending a letter to Members of Congress it is best to send to the local district office rather than Washington, DC where mail is processed for safety and can delay delivery
Scheduling Meetings with Stakeholders/Legislators:

• Learn how your local officials operate, some officials do not have offices or staff so keep this in mind when outreaching to them
• Receptionists and staffers are your friends too
• Patience is a virtue
• Persistence and follow up are often required
• In district is not only fine—it’s often preferable when meeting with Members of Congress
• If your lawmaker is in a leadership position, it will be very challenging to get a meeting directly with the lawmaker—and that’s okay.
• If you’ve had the opportunity to meet with an aide, feel free to ask if he/she would assist you in setting up a future meeting directly with the lawmaker—you won’t insult them!

Framing Meetings:

• Who you are and that you’re a member of the You’re the Cure network
• Why you requested a meeting and what you hope to discuss
• Ask your member for his/her position on heart and stroke issues
• Let them know they have the power to save lives—tell them you’re the cure
• Make it personal—share your own expertise and why their support matters to you
• Ask your member for his/her support on heart and stroke issues
• Offer yourself as a resource to them and their constituents.
• Thank them for their time and ask for a photo opportunity—you efforts can be promoted in AHA communications
Meetings: Step by Step

Preparation for Meetings:
- Research is critical
- Never go in unprepared
  - Know all you can about your stakeholder target
  - Know how to frame your message in order to impact this stakeholder target
- Remember AHA advocacy staff locally are your resource. Don’t know who your staff partner is? Check online: www.ahaadvocacystaff.org
- Include grassroots stories whenever and wherever possible
- If you’re going in with other You’re the Cure members make sure you coordinate your plans and talking points

The Meeting:
- Whether you speak to a legislator or a staff member, be friendly and thank them for taking the time to speak with you
- You can persuade your legislator by presenting facts and resources provided by the American Heart Association and American Stroke Association
- Briefly sharing your story can often be the most convincing part of the conversation—it makes the issue real to people who may otherwise not have a vested interest

Leaving or Sending Written Materials:
- Less is more
- A concise one-pager is ideal, and the legislator is more likely to read it all
- Bring a few fact sheets available online or from staff

Closing Meetings:
- Every good meeting closes with an “ask”—Legislators expect it!
- Cultivation takes time and relationship-building. The ask keeps the conversation going and helps build the relationship
- The ask will vary depending on the stakeholder target and what’s currently happening in the community
  - For your first meeting your ask will often be for the legislator to support heart and stroke issues, perhaps by identifying a point person on his/her staff with whom you can work

Post Meeting:
- Remember to let your American Heart Association staff know when you’ve heard from or spoken to your legislators
- Don’t forget to thank your legislator
- Follow up on your ask
Resources for Advocacy:

Visit the Resource Center for You’re the Cure advocates at www.americanheart.org/resourcesforadvocates to learn more about heart disease and stroke issues, along with the latest in advocacy news. Within this site you will find:

- AHA/ASA news releases
- Pulse newsletter—which contains the most recent newsletter and archives
- Advocacy videos and advertisements
- Fact sheets and statistics that can be useful for advocacy outreach
- Links to coalitions that AHA and ASA are a part of that have similar goals
- Successes of You’re the Cure—keep up the good work!

Key resources to learn about the community/district when contacting a legislator or writing a letter to the editor:

- Wikipedia—has a wide range of information on the community
- Epodunk—contains census information and other statistics about communities

Key resources to learn about the stakeholders and legislators:

- General search (Google, etc.)
- Campaign websites—you can learn more about where the legislator stands
- Legislator lookup webpage: http://www.usa.gov/Contact/Elected.shtml
- State websites will contain: committee memberships, cities/towns represented, leadership status
- News search—has recent information about the legislator’s activities
Using New Media:

An important thing to note about new media and technologies is that they are all interconnected. A good advocacy plan will incorporate pieces from more than one type of media. The following examples of new media are not strict definitions, especially as the internet and cell phone technology continue to expand and in an increasing number of phones, merge.

**Facebook**—You’re the Cure already has a Facebook Group and a Fan page. You can join and receive news and events updates along with sharing your story or hearing about others. This is a great way to build a community of supporters who can take action on alerts, participate in events, but more importantly feel personally connected to the mission to create change.

**Engaging on Social Networking Sites for Advocacy**—Facebook, MySpace, Bebo, Friendster, are all social networking sites just to name a few, and they are changing the ways that people communicate. These sites keep millions of people up to date on the latest news and what their friends, celebrities, and in some cases total strangers are doing. In addition to connecting you with fellow You’re the Cure advocates these sites can also be a way to connect with elected officials. See if your legislators are on Facebook and friend them. You can learn about events they are hosting and be a participant, learn about their priority issues, and communicate your own policy issue interests.

**YouTube and other video sharing websites** have also become mainstream in terms of spreading information, gaining support through numerous views of video clips, and creating the occasional viral sensation. Several of the social networking sites share video as well, including Facebook and MySpace, while Flickr is for photographs. Major news sites have video imbedded in their sites creating a multifaceted approach to media.

How can you use video sharing services to engage in the political process? Congress recently created their own channel and this can be a great way to stay informed about their work as well as comment on heart and stroke health issues. You can see what Congress is posting on the following two sites: on http://youtube.com/househub and http://youtube.com/senatehub. Personal video messages from you can also be a great way to communicate with lawmakers at all levels. Consider sharing a video message and sending a link to your lawmakers to view. Its those personal messages from the heart that make a difference.

**Blogs and microblogs** are an outlet to express your opinions and commentary on pretty much any topic. What’s the difference between the two? Microblogging is a short form of communication and on many services are limited to no more than 150 characters. The most popular microblogging tool is Twitter. Individuals use blogs to express opinions and create a readership audience. Readers do have the ability to comment so blogs offer more of a conversation online.

How can blogs be used in advocacy? You can stay up to date on AHA/ASA advocacy efforts by visiting and subscribing to the You’re the Cure blog (http://yourethecure.blogspot.com) or your local AHA advocacy blog. This is an easy way to stay informed about legislative goals and offer comments. Besides staying informed you can subscribe to healthcare policy blogs or the personal blogs of elected officials to learn about priorities and start a dialogue in these forums. Also look for opportunities to comment on blogs on newspaper websites to deliver your message on topics relevant to AHA policy issues.

As new media continues to evolve the popular sites may change so don’t forget to connect with your local AHA advocacy and communications staff who can be a resource for you. Lawmakers are diving into the world of social media and as advocates it is important to influence them through a host of different communication channels to make a difference.
In closing the resources outlined in the guide are meant to get you started on your journey as a You’re the Cure advocate. Your actions can truly change policy and create a world free of cardiovascular disease. So start your journey today and let staff know what additional resources you need to be successful.