

## Policy change is an essential strategy to improving cardiovascular health for all



The American Heart Association is marking four decades of nonpartisan advocacy for public policies that improve cardiovascular health.

The Association's advocacy priorities include improving access to quality, affordable health care; increasing access to healthy foods; creating opportunities for physical activity; improving air quality;

strengthening the public health infrastructure and systems of care; and ensuring state and local governments address the health concerns of their residents. More recently, the Association's [2020 presidential advisory on structural racism](#), which established a scientific link between institutional racism and poor health, elevated the importance of addressing racism and other social determinants of health through public policy.

"Policy change is essential to achieving our mission, and our advocacy efforts are designed to have maximum impact," said AHA CEO Nancy Brown. "Our advocacy successes have improved people's lives in ways that include increasing access to health care, making more public spaces tobacco-free, reducing food insecurity, promoting physical activity and boosting investments in heart and brain research."

The Association helped to pass or defend more than 100 priority policies at the state and community levels this past year alone, and remains an advocacy force in Washington, D.C., having supported the following federal policies:

- **NIH funding increases** – The National Institutes of Health budget has increased more than 400 percent since 1990.

- **Affordable Care Act** (2010) – Landmark legislation that includes numerous protections for patients in the insurance market.
- **Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act** (2010) – Empowers the U.S. Department of Agriculture to update nutrition standards for all food sold in schools.
- **Every Student Succeeds Act** (2015) – The biggest-ever federal commitment to physical education, including the Fitness Integrated into Teaching (FIT) Kids Act, a bill promoted by the association to improve physical education in schools.
- **Furthering Access to Stroke Telemedicine (FAST) Act** (2018) – Significantly expands access to tele-stroke care nationwide.
- **Tobacco 21** (2019) – Increases the federal sales age for all tobacco products to 21.
- **Surprise medical billing** (2020) – A bipartisan agreement to shield patients from bills for medical services and remove patients from payment disputes between providers and insurers.

Other major milestones include:

- Expanding advocacy across all levels of government.
- Elevating grassroots voices through [You're the Cure](#), a nationwide network of advocates who ensure the voices of patients and their families are heard in policy debates.
- Researching and translating science.
- Engaging in global advocacy.
- Catalyzing community advocates through the creation of [Voices for Healthy Kids](#) in 2013, a critical resource for community groups to be more effective advocates.

[Join the AHA's network of grassroots advocates by visiting yourethecure.org.](#)

[Read the full story here](#)

It is the 40th anniversary of [AHA Advocacy](#), and our legislative and regulatory priorities remain clear. We advocate for federal, state and local policies that help Americans build healthier lives free of cardiovascular diseases and stroke.

## Generosity honors father, raises funds for lifesaving research

When Margie and Sam O’Krent found out the American Heart Association would no longer host its Golf Classic, the couple knew funds that fight heart disease and stroke would be lost.



*Sam and Margie O’Krent are members of the American Heart Association Paul Dudley White Legacy Society after including the AHA in their estate plans.*

So they teed up their own tournament.

Since 2003, they’ve conducted the [Arthur O’Krent Golf Classic](#) each October in San Antonio, Texas, to honor Sam’s father, who died of [heart disease](#) at age 62 — and to raise money for the AHA.

“My father had so much life left to live,” Sam said. “Sadly heart disease took that away from him. He had a strong work ethic and enjoyed giving back to the community. To this day, my dad inspires me, and his legacy lives on with the Arthur O’Krent Golf Classic. The tournament also honors our other family members affected by heart disease.”

In addition to the annual Golf Classic, the O’Krents included the American Heart Association in their estate plans ensuring future impact for years to come.



*Sam and Margie O’Krent*

“Our family has a long history of giving back and being involved with meaningful causes,” he said. “It’s a legacy we plan to continue in years to come.”

Margie grew up surrounded by heart disease, as her father is a cardiologist and serves patients living with heart disease.

The O’Krents’ connections to heart disease made them passionate AHA volunteers, with Sam serving as a

board member in 1998–99 and chair of the board in 2000–01 for the AHA in San Antonio.

“Heart disease has long impacted both of our lives and our families, as well as the lives of our colleagues and friends,” said Margie, who met Sam 42 years ago when they attended rival high schools. “With so much heart history, we felt compelled to fulfill the role of hosting the Golf Classic.”

Each year, the O’Krents raise between \$70,000 and \$100,000 through the golf classic. And the COVID-19 pandemic couldn’t stop them. Transitioning to a digital event, they still managed to raise about \$50,000 through a virtual raffle and sponsors dedicated to eradicating heart disease. Since inception, over \$1.4 million has been raised through the tournament.

“I am blown away and deeply touched by the support of the individuals, families and businesses in our community,” Sam said. “This is an incredible demonstration of people coming together during adverse times to make a true difference in meaningful philanthropic work.”

Among others, the O’Krents remembered their tenured 36-year employee and one of their best friends during the 2020 classic. Both passed away from sudden cardiac events.

“We put up purchased memorial markers in memory of loved ones who are no longer with us, whose lives were afflicted with heart disease,” Margie said. “They serve as a true testament to the meaning of the tournament. These markers line the stairway and parts of the course, serving an impactful reminder as to why the golfers are there and why the community is raising money.”

Besides hosting the golf tournament and volunteering for the AHA, the O’Krents also serve on the boards of other nonprofits dedicated to health care, CPR training, food security and more.

Sam said his company, O’Krent Floors, which celebrates its 107th anniversary this year, is committed to giving back to the community. Margie added that their company’s building was the first local retail facility in San Antonio to install an [automated external defibrillator](#) (AED).



*Sam and Margie O’Krent*

### Leaving a Lasting Legacy

Your Will and Estate Planning Guide



To learn more about leaving a gift through your will or estate plan, fill out our [online form](#) to get your free brochure, *Your Will and Estate Planning Guide*. Questions? Contact us at [PlannedGiving@heart.org](mailto:PlannedGiving@heart.org) or 888-227-5242.

## Retired teacher dedicates free time to art — and to make a difference

After retiring from teaching elementary science for 34 years, Micki Gershowitz discovered new passions.

"I truly enjoy painting, drawing and taking photographs," said the Brooklyn, New York, resident. "When I'm not at home being artistic, I enjoy being outside and visiting national parks."



**Micki Gershowitz**

Gershowitz said her fond memories of visiting the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone Park and other natural landscapes inspire some of her artwork and photographs. She gives many of her pieces to family and friends, hoping to inspire them and make them smile.

Her giving spirit extends beyond her art — she also provides financial resources to nonprofits that share her goals.

"Throughout my teaching career, I donated to important causes," Gershowitz said. "Once I retired, I realized I could make a greater impact by using qualified charitable distributions from my [individual retirement account \(IRA\)](#). These fulfill my required minimum distribution (RMD), and instead of using the funds as income and paying more taxes, I donate the money to two charities that are most meaningful to me: the American Heart Association and the Alzheimer's Association."

Gershowitz, who lost her father to heart disease at age 55 and mother to Alzheimer's disease, is also leaving a legacy gift by listing the AHA as a beneficiary of her trust.

"I do not want other individuals and families to go through what my family and I experienced," she said. "I was my mother's caregiver the last few years of her life, and it was traumatic watching her forget all the memories she spent her entire life creating. It was also hard watching my father experience multiple heart attacks. I hope that my contributions help put an end to these diseases."

**To learn more about making a Qualified Charitable Distribution gift through your IRA and instructions to get started, fill out our online form by visiting [www.heart.org/IRA](http://www.heart.org/IRA) to get your free one pager.**

**Questions? Contact us at [PlannedGiving@heart.org](mailto:PlannedGiving@heart.org) or 888-227-5242.**



### Rosemary-Peach Chicken Kebabs with Orange Glaze Recipe

**Serves 4**

#### **Ingredients • Kebabs**

Chicken	2	large ripe but firm peaches, cut into 16 1-inch wedges
Cooking spray		
1 lb. boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into 16 1½-inch pieces, all visible fat discarded	1	large green bell pepper, cut into 16 1½-inch squares
	¼	tsp. pepper
	⅛	tsp. salt

#### **Ingredients • Glaze**

¾	tsp. grated orange zest	3	Tbsp. chopped, fresh rosemary
3	Tbsp. fresh orange juice	1½	tsp. honey
		1½	tsp. canola oil <b>OR</b> 1½ teaspoon corn oil

#### **Directions**

1. Lightly spray the grill rack with cooking spray. Preheat the grill on medium. Meanwhile, thread the chicken, peaches, and bell pepper alternately onto four 14- to 16-inch metal skewers. Sprinkle the pepper and salt over the kebabs.
2. In a small bowl, whisk together the glaze ingredients. Set aside half the glaze (about 2 tablespoons). Brush both sides of the kebabs with the remaining glaze.
3. Grill the kebabs for 6 to 8 minutes, or until the chicken is no longer pink in the center and the vegetables are almost tender, turning once halfway through and brushing with the reserved 2 tablespoons of glaze, using a clean basting brush. Reduce the heat or move the kebabs to a cooler area of the grill if they are cooking too fast.

For more American Heart Association recipes, visit [recipes.heart.org](http://recipes.heart.org).



## What is a donor advised fund, and why should I use one?

Many people donate directly to charities, while others find the features of a donor advised fund (DAF) makes gifting easier and simplifies record keeping for tax time. For some, a donor advised fund provides most of the benefits of a direct gift or private foundation without additional paperwork and costs.



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### **Deduct it now, gift it later.**

A DAF qualifies your contribution as a tax-advantaged donation when you gift the funds and allows you to disburse the money over time. It simplifies your record keeping because the acknowledgement of your gift to the DAF is the only document you need for tax purposes.

Major investment firms, such as Fidelity, Charles Schwab and Vanguard, as well as the American Heart Association and community organizations, offer DAFs. The sponsoring organizations have minimum initial investment requirements typically around \$5,000 and charge fees for managing the account.

### **Organize and schedule gifting.**

One big advantage of donor advised funds is how they organize and manage your gifting. Through online portals, you select the receiving 501c(3) charity, decide on a gift amount and provide special instructions such as a purpose for the gift. You can choose to be recognized as the donor or donate anonymously. And much like online banking, you can schedule recurring gifts. This is particularly handy for the end-of-year gifting season, when holidays can crowd out our best intentions to gift to make charitable donations.

Not sure what you gifted last time? No problem. With a DAF, you can review the history of your gifting by organization or year.

A Donor Advised Fund might be a good option for you too. [Fill out our online form to get your free brochure](#), *A Smarter Way to Give – The American Heart Association Donor Advised Fund Program*.

### **Easily gift highly appreciated assets.**

If you've donated stocks or other highly appreciated assets to charity, you know how much paperwork is involved. Donor advised funds make this easy. You donate the securities or other assets to the DAF and the sponsoring organization sells them, making the funds available for you to distribute to the charities of your choice via the online portal. You don't have to send written instructions to the custodian, notify the charity or charities of the pending gift and wait for their acknowledgement letter showing the final value for tax purposes.

### **Grow your charitable fund for the future.**

For money that you're not going to immediately gift to charity, donor advised funds offer ways to invest it for a fee. Ultimately, if your funds aren't gifted to charity during your lifetime, they're distributed to the charity or charities you selected as your beneficiaries for the account.

### **When in doubt, consult.**

Depending on your charitable goals, a direct gift to a charity might be best, or your legal and tax advisors may recommend establishing a private foundation. Consult charities with donor advised funds to discuss your options.

[Learn more about the American Heart Association's Donor Advised Fund program by visiting \[heart.org/AHADAF\]\(http://heart.org/AHADAF\).](#)

### **Submit Your Question to an Advisor**

*Ask an Advisor* is an American Heart Association column that addresses common or unique questions answered by a professional advisor. If you have a question you would like to ask a professional advisor, please email [AskAnAdvisor@heart.org](mailto:AskAnAdvisor@heart.org).

