

# The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' Grassroots Advocacy 101



**T**HE ACADEMY OF NUTRITION and Dietetics is committed to accelerating improvements in health and well-being through food and nutrition. As part of its strategic plan, the Academy seeks to influence food and nutrition policies through advocacy and participation in the legislative process at local, state, federal, and global levels. The Academy advocates for policies that support prevention and well-being, elevating the role of nutrition status in quality health care throughout the life cycle, and increasing equitable access to and utilization of safe nutritious food and water.<sup>1</sup>

An increasingly important type of advocacy is grassroots advocacy—when ordinary members of an organization all across the country (not just those in leadership positions) advocate with lawmakers for public policy changes. The Academy represents the entire profession in its policy and advocacy efforts, but according to the results of the Fiscal Year 2017 Policy and Advocacy Strategic Measures, less than 3% percent of Academy members are engaged in action alerts.<sup>2</sup> Action alerts are important messages that mobilize Academy members to take action to influence public policy by contacting their members of Congress on a particular issue or vote.

Now is a great opportunity for Academy members to join these efforts. The Academy has been developing a set of best practices for grassroots advocacy to help more members participate effectively. This increasingly important form of advocacy can help produce effective

legislation and regulations that support the Academy's goals and priorities and enhances the value of registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs) and nutrition and dietetics technicians, registered (NDTRs). Working RDNs and NDTRs, in any area of practice, can be some of the most effective advocates. If dietetics is your profession, policy should be your passion!

## GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY 101

Grassroots advocacy refers to activities at the local and community level. Unlike direct lobbying, grassroots advocacy relies on the membership of an organization to volunteer their time to educate lawmakers and government officials on the issues that they care about.

Technology has made it easier than ever for the members of an organization to influence the debates at every level of government from state capitals to Capitol Hill. Elected representatives serve their constituents and most take this role seriously. Legislators are eager to hear from their constituents directly, including on critical nutrition and health issues. When members of their own district tell them an issue is important, it carries significant weight. Because nutrition and health are relevant issues in every district and every state, Academy members everywhere have an opportunity to be effective advocates for the RDN and nutrition profession, as well as for the health of the nation.

Grassroots advocacy has become one of the most common and effective forms of influencing public policy. According to the Congressional Management Foundation, direct constituent interactions have more influence on lawmakers' decisions than other advocacy strategies, and Congress values groups and citizens who have built relationships with the legislator and staff.<sup>3</sup>

The Academy increasingly seeks to mobilize its membership to increase the

leverage and momentum of our efforts to change public policy. When the Academy is able to combine our formal efforts in Washington, DC, with our members' persistent and widespread efforts throughout the country, the urgency and relevancy of an issue can be magnified in the eyes of policymakers.

Elected representatives in Congress and state legislatures routinely discuss legislation that is important to RDNs. Medicare and Medicaid coverage, child and older adult nutrition programs, agriculture and food access, licensure, and managed care mandates, for example, all impact the nutrition and dietetics profession. These are all areas where effective grassroots activity can make a difference.

The Academy, through its Policy Initiatives and Advocacy Team in Washington, DC, identifies opportunities and challenges in legislative and regulatory

## Lobbying vs Grassroots Advocacy

The Policy Initiatives and Advocacy team (PIA) at the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics engages in direct lobbying. Several PIA staff are professional federally-registered lobbyists who visit Congress regularly to advocate for the Academy's priorities. State legislatures also have registered lobbyists who engage directly with legislators.

Unlike direct lobbying, grassroots advocacy relies on volunteers—people who are simply passionate about their issues or occupation, and who want to help educate legislators and other government officials, and push for changes to policies they care about. Any RDN and NDTR can learn to become a very effective grassroots advocate.

*This article was written by **Tenáša Ebrahimkhel**, MPA, senior manager, Grassroots and State Advocacy, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, Washington, DC.*

2212-2672/Copyright © 2018 by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2018.06.003>

## Call To Action — How To Get Involved

If you are ready to join the Academy's efforts, there are a number of ways to be more engaged:

- Read *Eat Right Weekly* for the latest news about public policies and opportunities to get involved.
- Sign up for the Academy's annual Public Policy Workshop (PPW). PPW will immediately follow the 2018 Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo (FNCE 2018). PPW at FNCE 2018 will feature pre-event training webinars; a face-to-face training session on Tuesday, October 23; and a visit to Capitol Hill on Wednesday, October 24. PPW will be an ideal opportunity for members to advance advocacy skills, gain policy experience, and be proficient in the Academy's key policy messages to present during visits to the Hill.
- Attend the Academy's quarterly advocacy days, which are opportunities for Academy members to meet with congressional offices to advocate on food and nutrition policies.
- Connect with policy leaders in your affiliate. Interact with policy leaders on the Academy's website ([www.eatrightpro.org/leadershipdirectory](http://www.eatrightpro.org/leadershipdirectory)) in the leadership directory. Many affiliates (if not all) have their own websites where members can contact local members, attend in-person meetings, and learn about state-specific policy issues, news, and upcoming events.
- Take action by completing an action alert in the Academy's Advocacy Action Center. The action alerts allow you to communicate directly with your congressional offices and share your opinions on certain legislation.

activity, builds effective alliances and partnerships with other organizations, and maintains relationships with elected officials. Grassroots participation can build upon this work by educating state and federal legislators and sharing with them personal experiences in practice, which in turn extends the reach of the Academy.

## THE ACADEMY'S PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITIES

Public policy and advocacy are core functions of the Academy and are critical to achieving the mission, vision, goals, and strategies outlined in the Strategic Plan.

Advocacy within the Academy involves coordinating action by member leaders of the Legislative and Public Policy Committee (LPPC) and the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Political Action Committee, affiliates, Dietetic Practice Groups, and thousands of grassroots members to achieve advocacy goals. Academy members work on a broad range of issues to improve the nutritional and health status of Americans. Many members are recognized for their contributions and influence in food,

nutrition, and health policy. To help focus and guide our policy efforts, the following priority areas and issues have been identified<sup>1</sup>:

### Prevention and Well-Being

1. Develop and advocate for policies that support prevention and well-being initiatives.
2. Increase equitable access to nutrition and lifestyle services.
3. Reduce prevalence of overweight and obesity and associated chronic diseases.
4. Reduce all forms of malnutrition.

### Health Care and Health Systems

1. Elevate the role of nutrition status in quality health care throughout the lifecycle.
2. Identify and treat all forms of malnutrition.
3. Leverage data to demonstrate effectiveness of dietetic and nutrition interventions.
4. Improve health equity through access to medical nutrition therapy services.

## Food and Nutrition Safety and Security

1. Increase equitable access to and utilization of safe and nutritious food and water.
2. Advance sustainable nutrition and resilient food systems.
3. Leverage innovations in the reduction of food waste and loss.
4. Champion legislation and regulations that increase food and nutrition security throughout the lifecycle.

Supportive research has been identified for each of these priority areas, including current Position Papers and topics addressed in the Evidence Analysis Library ([www.anddeal.org](http://www.anddeal.org)). The Academy's public policy stances are developed by the LPPC and approved by the Academy Board of Directors. Input is solicited from member experts in the practice area.

Academy Position Papers are statements based on scientific evidence published in the *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*. Position Papers are periodically reviewed, revised, and, in certain cases, retired by the Academy Position Committee. Public policy stances are developed by the LPPC and approved by the Board of Directors when a formal position has not been published by the Academy on an issue that is relevant to the public policy priority areas. Academy Position Papers can be found online at [www.eatrightpro.org/practice/position-and-practice-papers/position-papers](http://www.eatrightpro.org/practice/position-and-practice-papers/position-papers).

## Working with Elected Officials

Representatives in Washington, DC, and state capitals are continuously seeking information about what their voters want. After all, these are the people whose support and votes they need to win and remain in office. Consider some of the key ways in which elected officials gather information:

- town hall meetings and public events in their districts;
- meetings with constituents in their district or capital offices;
- phone calls, letters, and e-mails to their office;
- meetings, events, and fundraisers with political allies;

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/8571448>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/8571448>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)