

# Answer 4 key questions to jumpstart your health care advocacy

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Making change at a grassroots level on behalf of patients and physicians must start with an idea. And putting that idea in action requires a game plan.

The man who directs the AMA Office of Political and Legislative Grassroots recently offered medical students some pointers on how to implement a successful campaign to improve public health.

It starts with asking the right questions, the AMA's Rob Jordan said during a presentation during Medical Student National Advocacy Week 2021.

## **Do you understand the issue?**

If you are beginning a grassroots campaign in health care, you naturally have enough of a grasp of the issue at hand to have a passion to persuade policymakers. Your level of understanding, however, should be deep enough that you can explain it to others, Jordan said.

"If somebody you are talking to—whether it's a supporter or a decision-maker—has the sense that you don't understand the issue that well, if they are asking questions that you don't know the answer to, I would be concerned about that," Jordan said.

Learn how to get involved in advocacy work as a medical student.

## **Is your ask reasonable?**

Change is largely incremental. Considering that, you may need to calibrate your policy goals with

what is realistic.

“When we think grassroots, we think big social change and big policy change” Jordan said. “But oftentimes ... it’s not realistic to think that everything is going to change overnight because of the grassroots effort you are organizing. It’s perfectly reasonable to take smaller steps toward a larger goal.”

Get four tips for effectively communicating with lawmakers.

## Who is your key decision-maker?

When you are attempting to make a change, you need to know the people who can facilitate that change. It could be as simple as advocating at the medical school level or carried all the way up to the federal government.

“Define your larger target,” Jordan said. “Ask yourself: What’s the landscape? Along with that, determine the battlefield. Are you trying to pass something, or are you trying to stop something? Stopping things is a little easier. Passing something is harder because you have to create a critical mass.”

The AMA is advocating at the federal and state levels on key health care issues affecting patients and physicians.

As a health care advocacy organization made up of dedicated and engaged physicians, the AMA works to inform lawmakers, guide decision-making and generate support for policies on critical issues that impact physicians, patients and the health care environment at both the national and state levels.

## What motivates key decision-makers?

It’s always helpful, Jordan said, if an issue is popular. But, in the end, you have to speak to a legislator’s motivation.

“Understanding your target’s incentives is helpful. With elected officials, it’s pretty simple: to get reelected,” Jordan said. “Your issue has to factor into that. You are seeking to communicate that a significant number of people in their constituency—who are going to determine whether or not they are going to get reelected—that they are going to consider the lawmaker’s action on your issue in a positive or negative light.”