

How to tailor my health care key messages

An important part of mastering the art of the public forum is to create key messages that are clear and succinct. Key messages are most effective when they are well-thought-out, logical and crafted to respectfully stand up to dissenting views. Your personal key messages for the health care topics you choose will be most potent when they reflect your unique perspective and your personality and passion.

It's likely that you have access to resources for overall key messages and policy positions about important health care issues. For instance, the American Medical Association publishes its policy positions on the AMA website. To build your own personal library of key messages, you can tailor AMA and other general messages for when you are speaking in public on your own behalf.

The following tips will help you tailor your health care key messages:

- Know the information you want to impart and the policy positions you support so well that you can speak authoritatively with few or no notes and your messages are consistent.
- Know your audience well so that when you convey your most important messages you will choose words and examples that they understand and that resonate with them.
- If you wish, you can review AMA position papers to understand AMA's policy positions and speak on your own behalf, from your own perspective.
- Write key messages so they are complete; however, be judicious about the amount of information you plan to present on one occasion.
- Craft your key messages with short sentences so audiences can follow you.
- Organize your key messages in groups of five to eight messages, according to sub-topics. This will help you keep your place in a presentation, conversation or interview.
- Cite well-respected sources of information.
- Simplify information without "dumbing down."
- Craft short sound bites that crystallize your top one to three most important messages in memorable ways.
- Use well-chosen statistics that turn information into insights and "aha" moments for the audience. At the same time, do not inundate the audience with so many statistics that they cannot digest the information.
- Illustrate major policy points – such as about health system reform or the Affordable Care Act – with personal experience and anecdotes from your practice.
- Find local facts and figures to illustrate a national or global trend.
- Ensure that your public comments and key messages stay consistent over time.
- Let your passion shine through.