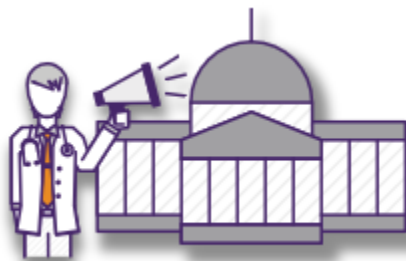


# American Medical Association



## Very Influential Physicians (VIP)



## 2023 August Recess Engagement Toolkit

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## Overview

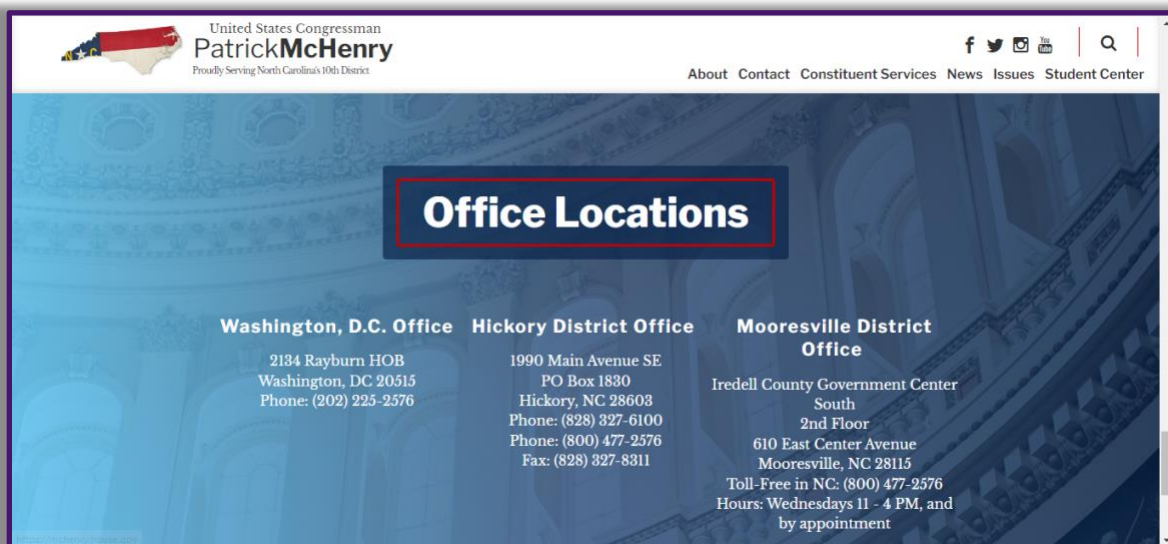
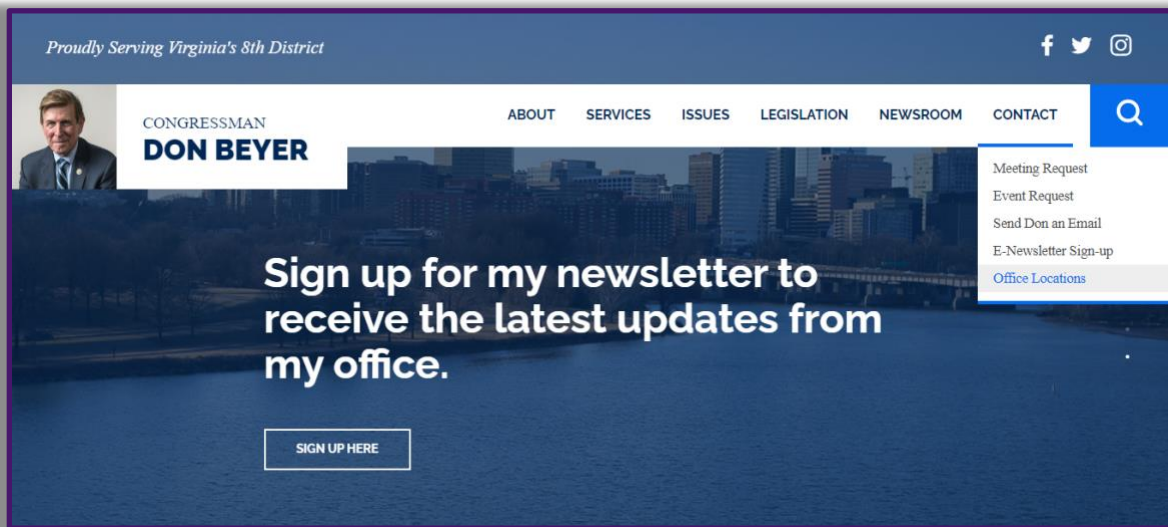
Engaging with members of Congress during the August congressional recess provides American Medical Association (AMA) physician advocates an excellent opportunity to meet with elected officials, begin or strengthen relationships with these legislators and staff, and focus your efforts on concerns about the growing financial instability of the Medicare physician payment system. This guide provides a blueprint for contacting congressional offices to schedule and conduct in-district office meetings and site visits back in the districts.

This kit includes instructions on how to reach out to congressional offices and suggested scripts for requesting meetings and site visits. **Please focus on pursuing meetings and site visits with those legislators who represent your place of residence - your member of the US House of Representatives and two Senators based on your home address.** You are also welcome to seek meetings and site visits with the Member of the House (and possibly two Senators) whose district contains your practice or facility, but please prioritize those lawmakers of your home address.

**Begin conducting your outreach efforts to these offices right away, with a goal of completing these engagements during the August recess period, when members of Congress are scheduled to be in their districts and states.** Days when Congress is not in session, during such a congressional recess, are times when your lawmakers are most likely to be available to meet with you.

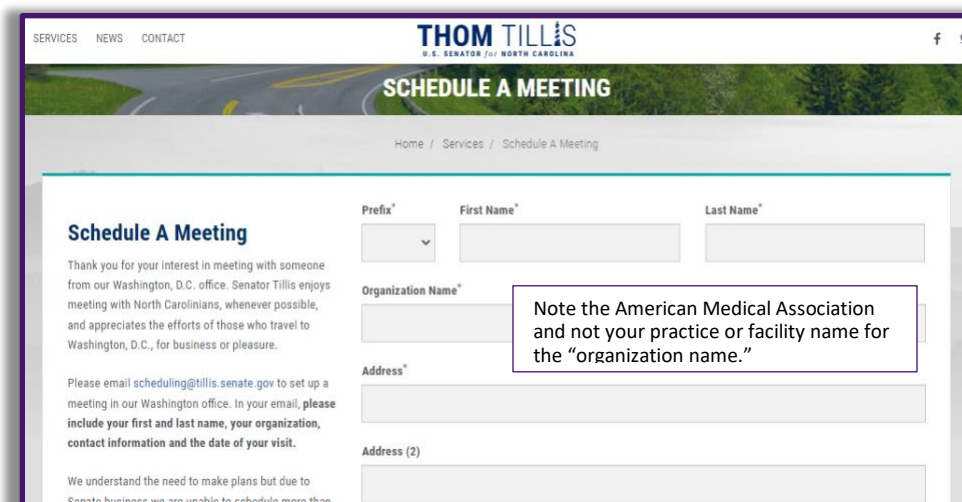
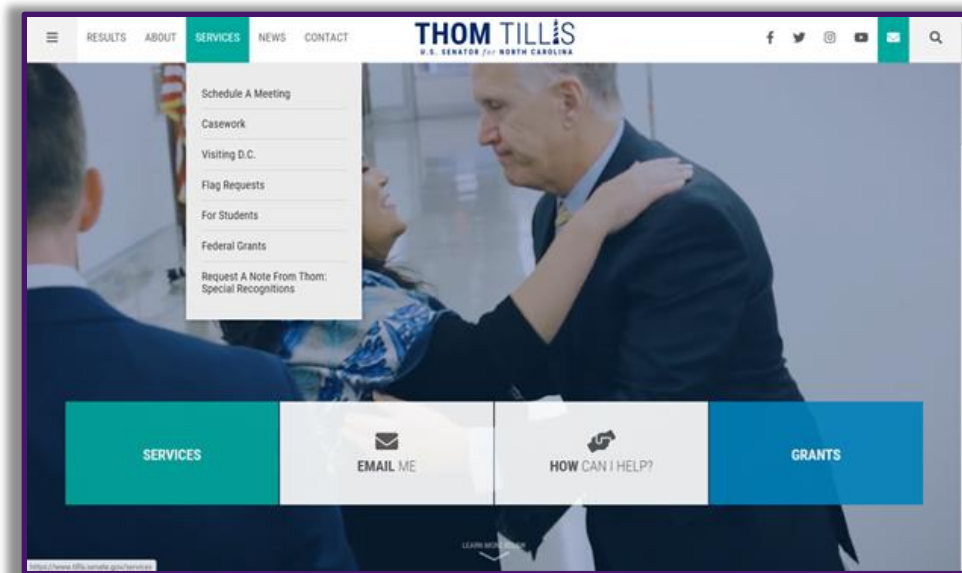
## Researching District Locations of Congressional Offices

To contact your federal lawmakers' district offices, begin with their official US House or Senate websites. While the layouts of each legislator's online presence may vary, *every* lawmaker lists the address and contact information for any district office they have, typically under the "Contact" section (it may sometimes be found by scrolling to the bottom of their website):



## Requesting Meetings and Site Visits with Members of Congress

Each congressional office has its own protocols regarding how to request a meeting or site visit. Many lawmakers have sections on their official websites dedicated to submitting these requests, but not all do. If unfamiliar with the preferences of your own representative and senators, call the nearest district office for guidance. Below you will find sample scripts to use when calling or writing to request a meeting.



## Sample Scripts for Contacting Congressional Offices

Please call your legislator’s nearest district office to verify their specific protocol for submitting meeting and site visit requests. AMA staff can provide you with the names of congressional schedulers and any relevant contact information.

### Sample Scripts: Requesting a Meeting at Your Legislator’s Office

#### ***For calling the office to determine meeting request protocol:***

Hi, my name is [YOUR NAME]. I am a physician and member of the American Medical Association living in your district/state. I’m calling to request a meeting with [SENATOR/REPRESENTATIVE] [LAST NAME] at your [CITY OF MEMBER’S OFFICE] office to discuss Medicare physician payment reform.

What is the preferred method for sending a formal request to the office, and should it be to the attention of [SCHEDULER’S NAME]?

#### ***For submitting your meeting request in writing:***

Dear [SENATOR/REPRESENTATIVE] [LAST NAME]:

As a physician living in your community and a member of the American Medical Association, I am writing to request a meeting with you to discuss the urgent need for Medicare physician payment reform.

I will be available to meet with you at your [CITY OF MEMBER’S OFFICE] office on [DATES & TIMES AVAILABLE] and would welcome the opportunity to speak with you about how these issues impact my patients and their families. I may be reached via email or as noted below and look forward to hearing from you regarding a time we can meet.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

[NAME & TITLE]

[PREFERRED ADDRESS]

M: [MOBILE PHONE]

O: [OFFICE PHONE]

H: [HOME PHONE]

## Sample Scripts: Requesting a Site Visit to Your Facility

### ***For calling the office to determine site visit request protocol:***

Hi, my name is [YOUR NAME]. I am a physician and member of the American Medical Association living in your district/state and I'd like to invite [SENATOR/REPRESENTATIVE] [LAST NAME] to tour my facility. [FACILITY/HOSPITAL/PRACTICE NAME] is located in [CITY] and many of the patients we serve are constituents of [SENATOR/REPRESENTATIVE] [LAST NAME].

What is the preferred method to submit a formal invitation to your office and should it be to the attention of [SCHEDULER'S NAME]?

### ***For submitting your site visit request in writing:***

Dear [SENATOR/REPRESENTATIVE] [LAST NAME]:

As a physician living in your community and a member of American Medical Association, I am writing to invite [SENATOR/REPRESENTATIVE] [LAST NAME] to tour my facility/hospital/practice.

[FACILITY/HOSPITAL/PRACTICE NAME] is located in [CITY] and many of the patients we serve are constituents of [SENATOR/REPRESENTATIVE] [LAST NAME]. With your permission, I would like to include [FACILITY OR HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATORS/PATIENTS/MEMBERS OF THE MEDIA] in addition to walking [SENATOR/REPRESENTATIVE] [LAST NAME] around the facility. OPTIONAL SENTENCE: We are also happy to consider inviting other members of the community that [SENATOR/REPRESENTATIVE] [LAST NAME] prefers to have in attendance. Please let me know the names and contact information for anyone you would like us to include.

We have availability to host the [SENATOR/REPRESENTATIVE] on any of the following possible dates and times:

[DATES & TIMES AVAILABLE].

I may be reached via email or as noted below and look forward to hearing from you regarding a time we can host [SENATOR/REPRESENTATIVE] [LAST NAME].

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

[NAME & TITLE]

[PREFERRED ADDRESS]

M: [MOBILE PHONE]

O: [OFFICE PHONE]

H: [HOME PHONE]

## Capitalizing on Informal Interactions Throughout the District

Building a relationship with your federal lawmakers (or strengthening existing bonds) does not have to be limited to more formal settings, such as office meetings or hosting them for a facility tour. Members of Congress are members of your local community. As such they often make appearances at various neighborhood and public events held in the cities and towns throughout the area they represent, providing a chance for you to interact and engage a legislator.

Opportunities to see your representatives in and around the community are plentiful. They are sought-after attendees at many public forums. Breakfasts held by local Chambers of Commerce or other civic groups are popular venues for legislators. So are community days, festivals, parades and picnics. Partaking in these events may provide an opportune time to briefly say hello and engage them. By checking your lawmaker's event page on their website or reviewing their monthly constituent email or newsletter, you can find out ahead of time when and where your members of Congress might be. The calendar found in your local newspaper is another useful resource. It often notes when a legislator is serving as a parade grand marshal, lists picnics where they are a featured speaker or notes their upcoming town hall meetings.



August's calendar is often filled with social functions held by various veterans and fraternal organizations where your federal representatives might be seen. And, the August congressional recess also coincides with other well-known community events, county and state agricultural fairs, where prudent senators and representatives make an appearance and shake hands with constituents and voters.

While not an ideal time to conduct a policy discussion about the need for Medicare physician payment reform, such in-district interactions offer you a chance to introduce yourself to the lawmaker or follow up on a prior conversation while also noting that you would like to schedule a more formal time to talk about this issue. Do your homework ahead of time to know where your legislators might make an appearance, be sure to show up, and leverage the 12 tips on the next page to engage them, capitalizing on any interaction that does occur.



## 12 Tips for Creating Meaningful In-District Engagements



Learn about upcoming events hosted by your member of Congress by joining their email/ mailing list and reviewing multiple calendar/event sources, such as those for municipalities, libraries, civic organizations, etc.



Participate in legislator-hosted events. (in-person & virtual town halls, women's conferences, breakfasts, etc.)



Attend community events known for lawmaker attendance. (Chambers of Commerce breakfasts, county and state agricultural fairs, Labor Day picnics, etc.)



Engage your lawmaker by introducing yourself and noting you are an AMA physician advocate active in their district. Seek to make a positive connection by thanking them for a recent vote, action they have taken, or comment they made.



Be mindful of your goal – creating visibility in the legislator's community that fosters rapport building. Expect your interaction to be brief, lasting just a few moments.



Note that you have an issue(s) of importance to physicians about which you would like to meet. Ask who to contact for scheduling a more extensive policy discussion.



*Do not* plan to engage the public official in an extensive policy review, but *do* continue discussing the issue *if* the legislator engages in conversation on the topic.



Thank them for their time and if it seems appropriate, request a photo with the legislator.



Post the picture to social media, tag the lawmaker and thank them for their time. Also tag the AMA's Physicians Grassroots Network (@PhysGrassroots) on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, and use the hashtags #FixPriorAuth, #Telehealth, #FixMedicareNow or #TruthinRx depending on the issues you discussed.



Follow up by contacting the relevant staffer during the next business day to schedule your meeting.



Plan how you will frame your messaging in advance, then conduct your meeting. Be sure to bring one-pagers relevant to the issue discussed, accessible on the AMA website.



Don't forget to follow up by thanking the Member of Congress for their time afterward.

## Medicare Physician Payment Reform Issue Brief

The American Medical Association continues to be deeply alarmed about the growing financial instability of the Medicare physician payment system due to a confluence of fiscal uncertainties physician practices face related to the ongoing pandemic, statutory payment cuts, lack of inflationary updates, and significant administrative barriers. The payment system remains on an unsustainable path threatening beneficiaries' access to physicians.

- According to an AMA analysis of Medicare Trustees data, Medicare physician payment has been reduced 26% adjusted for inflation from 2001–2023. The Medicare physician payment system lacks an adequate annual physician payment update, unlike those that apply to other Medicare provider payments. A continuing statutory freeze in annual Medicare physician payments is scheduled to last until 2026, when updates resume at a rate of 0.25% per year indefinitely, well below inflation rates.
- A May 2021 JAMA Health Forum study found that it costs an estimated \$12,811 and more than 200 hours per physician, per year to comply with the Medicare Merit-Based Incentive Payment (MIPS) system and, to date, there have been very limited options for physicians to move towards value-based Medicare Advanced Alternative Payment Models (APM).
- The discrepancy between what it costs to run a physician practice and actual payment combined with the administrative and financial burden of participating in Medicare is incentivizing market consolidation and driving physicians out of rural and underserved areas.
- In addition to being asked to do more with fewer resources each year, physicians continue to face significant clinical and financial disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, according to an AMA study, there was a \$13.9 billion decrease (equating to a 14% reduction) in Medicare physician fee schedule spending as patients delayed treatments. Burnout, stress, workload, and fear of COVID-19 infection are leading one in five physicians to consider leaving their current practice within two years.

**Therefore, it is urgent that Congress work with the physician community to develop long-term solutions to the systematic problems with the Medicare physician payment system and preserve patient access:**

- Congress needs to establish a permanent, annual inflationary Medicare physician payment update that keeps up with the cost of practicing medicine and encourages practice innovation.
- Budget neutrality policies need to be revised to: (a) prevent erroneous utilization estimates from causing inappropriate cuts; (b) clarify the types of services that should and should not be subject to budget neutrality adjustments; and (c) raise the projected expenditure threshold that triggers the budget neutrality adjustment, which has been in place since 1992.
- The performance and reporting programs in Medicare's Merit-based Incentive Payment System (MIPS) are based on outdated legacy programs and the four components largely function independently and are non-cohesive. They are burdensome and often lack clinical relevance. Policymakers should work with the physician community and other stakeholders to develop ways to reduce the administrative and financial burden of MIPS participation and revise reporting programs to ensure its clinical relevance to patient care.

## Advocacy Dos & Don'ts

Sending an email, making a phone call, or meeting face-to-face with your members of Congress on behalf of the American Medical Association's legislative priorities can be effective ways of educating them on a public policy issue. These tactics can provide an excellent opportunity to convey and receive information, and they help you develop relationships with that office, making future communications more influential. Simplify the process by following the tips and guidelines outlined below.

### Dos

- 1) Please make certain to report any electronic communications or discussions with an elected official or their office requesting AMA staff follow up to enable the association to provide immediate assistance when needed.
- 2) Only contact or meet with the Representatives and Senators who represent the state or legislative district in which you live or practice.
- 3) Do your homework ahead of time. Research the legislator's voting record and know whether she/he sits on key committees that affect your issue. Review the member's website and search online for useful background information on their interests and stances on policy. Note that a lawmaker's committee assignments are often reflective of their personal interests or those of the constituents they serve.
- 4) Research the AMA's policy stance on an issue you wish to discuss before contacting or meeting with a legislative office. Legislative issue briefs and other materials are provided by AMA government affairs staff for your use during in-office meetings and site visits. Contact the AMA if you have questions or are uncertain about any aspects of an issue.
- 5) Be clear and concise in any interactions by phone, email, or when meeting face-to-face with a legislator or their staff. They should understand what issue(s) you are addressing, the AMA's position, and always include an action request (even if you only asking them to be aware of something). Remember your advantages: you are the expert; you deal with these issues on a daily basis, and more importantly, realize their real-world implications; and, you can speak to how these issues affect the delivery of care for your patients, their constituents, based on your everyday experiences.
- 6) When calling an office or conducting an in-person meeting, listen to the legislator or legislative aide. Ask them to indicate the legislator's position on the issue(s), then listen for cues to see if their party's leadership or a special interest is pressuring the legislator to take one position over another.
- 7) Share a story or experience that involves constituents from the lawmaker's state or legislative district. Be certain to note specifically how a policy will impact their constituents.

- 8) Always be accurate with information you share. If you do not know the answer to a question, don't be afraid to say so. Promise to follow up after the meeting. This allows an opportunity to build rapport with the office as you are following up with information at their request. Then, contact the AMA's government affairs staff immediately so you can provide the office with the accurate information right away.
- 9) Anticipate questions or an opposing stance the legislator or staff may make, even if they traditionally are an ally of medicine's position. Prepare in advance your responses to any pushback from that office.
- 10) Offer yourself as a resource in the local community represented by that office and provide your contact information (phone, email and mailing address). This is particularly helpful to the office of new legislators or offices whose districts have been redistricted (when constituent boundaries are redrawn and they are representing some constituents for the first time). Periodically provide new information about issues you have discussed with that office to demonstrate your willingness to help them. Always remember to thank the legislator or aide for her/his time.

## Don'ts

- 1) Never become confrontational, argumentative, or threaten a lawmaker or legislative aide, and never use inappropriate language.
- 2) Don't confuse the reason for your call, email or meeting by discussing multiple issues or issues unrelated to the AMA's concerns when contacting an office on behalf of the association.
- 3) Never provide an answer or information you are uncertain about, information you know to be false, or lie in any communications or meetings with a legislative office.
- 4) Don't reference your personal views and beliefs on controversial topics unrelated to the AMA's legislative priorities.
- 5) Never fail to follow up with the policymaker or their staff, especially when you have promised to provide them additional information.
- 6) Don't inundate legislative offices with mail, emails or phone calls. If an office needs additional information, they'll contact you.
- 7) Never forget that you are representing the voice of medicine and creating an impression of the profession, often a first-impression, when contacting or meeting with a legislative office.
- 8) Your contribution to the electoral campaign for a legislator, AMPAC, or your vote in November should NEVER be discussed in a communication or meeting with a lawmaker or

their staff. Most legislative staff are trained to immediately end any meetings or discussions when one of those items are referenced.

- 9) Never offer anyone in a legislator's office gifts of any kind. Ethics rules governing allowable gifts to legislative offices can be quite complicated. Our goal is to build rapport with offices rather than "buy influence."
- 10) Don't ever disregard the staff that answer the phone or greet you when visiting a lawmaker's office. Today's administrative assistant could become tomorrow's legislative director, district director or chief of staff (and sometimes, tomorrow's legislator).