

Ambassador Talking Points: A Toolkit for Meeting with your Elected Officials

Welcome to the February edition of your *Ambassador Talking Points Toolkit*, a monthly resource from the National Council to help you schedule meetings with your elected officials about timely topics.

This month we focus on the need to ensure access to potentially lifesaving medications under Medicare's Prescription Drug benefit. We hope this toolkit will be helpful to you if you need a little extra inspiration on what to discuss with your legislators.

Don't forget: National Council Ambassadors have agreed to meet with legislators and/or staff at least three times per year. Get started today!

Questions? Contact Michael Petruzzelli at michaelp@thenationalcouncil.org

ISSUE OF THE MONTH: PRESERVING MEDICARE ENROLLEES' ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH MEDICATIONS

Background

You may remember that last year the Obama Administration attempted to restrict patients' access to several types of medications – including antidepressant and antipsychotic medications – by [stripping them of their protected status](#) in Medicare. Without protected status, Part D plans would have been free to remove these medications from their formularies, leaving millions of Americans without access to lifesaving medications used in the management of conditions like schizophrenia and clinical depression.

After a massive grassroots protest, the administration withdrew its proposal. But, the agency noted that [the reversal was only temporary](#), until such time as it could reexamine its proposal and issue new regulations. That means that history could repeat itself – and patients' access to these medications is still at risk.

Our Objective

To enlist cosponsors for a new, bipartisan bill that will permanently codify the Medicare “protected classes” policy that ensures patients have access to a full range of mental health medications.

Take Action!

- **Your task:** Schedule a meeting with your Senator(s) and urge them to support bipartisan legislation being introduced by Senators Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and Sherrod Brown (D-OH) to protect access to these medications
- **Your ask:** “Please cosponsor this bill when it is introduced.”
- **Your pre-meeting homework:** Click the link to find out whether your Senator voiced his or her support for preserving patients' access to these medications by signing on to a [joint letter to CMS](#) last year. If so, be sure to thank them and ask for their support again!

Your Toolkit

- [Fact sheet](#) with talking points on the Grassley/Brown bill that you can leave behind for Senators and staff to review. (*Hint: the talking points are in **bold!***)
- [A sample letter/e-mail](#) requesting an opportunity to meet with your legislator and/or staff.
- Additional background on why the CMS proposal will be harmful for patients is [available in this 2-page fact sheet](#) from the Partnership for Part D Access. If needed, you can leave this fact sheet behind with legislators and staff as well.
- Still looking for more info? Check out the Partnership for Part D Access [website](#) for detailed information on the medications and patient groups that would be affected, recent congressional activity, and much more. The National Council is a founding member of the Partnership.

A Word to the Wise (responding to common questions)

- You might get asked whether the bill has been introduced. As of right now, it has not yet been dropped; staff should contact the office of either Senator Grassley or Senator Brown to become an original cosponsor.
- You might get asked why we need this legislation, given that CMS has said it does not plan to finalize last year's proposed changes to the protected classes policy. CMS specifically noted that the reversal was only temporary, until such time as it could reexamine its proposal and issue new regulations. Legislation to permanently codify the protected classes policy is the only way to ensure that never happens.

Don't Forget to Tell Us How It Went!

Once you've met with your legislators and/or staff, please provide feedback to the National Council's policy team so we can close the loop with staff the next time we meet with them here in DC. This simple step helps increase your impact and helps us measure the results of our collective efforts. **Take a moment to complete the short feedback form [here](#).**