

General Tips for State Chapter Advocacy



ASAM American Society of
Addiction Medicine

1. Identify Priority Areas & Set Clear Goals

When conducting state advocacy, it is helpful to set clear and attainable goals. Engagement on all state policies, proposals, and programs that may impact the practice of addiction medicine/psychiatry is simply impossible. Instead, chapters should consider **narrowing their focus and prioritize their advocacy areas in order of importance.**



It can be useful to **identify 3-5 priority areas prior to a new, state legislative session.** ASAM Advocacy staff is available to help chapters as they establish their policy priorities and monitor relevant policy that falls into those areas.



Additionally, **ASAM's strategic plan and national advocacy page** reflect priority areas at the national level. While state priorities may differ from national ones, these resources can serve as a guide.

2. Review ASAM's Public Policy Statements



To determine if ASAM has a public position on an issue, chapters can review [ASAM's public policy statements](#). These policy statements can serve as a reference and are available to be cited in state advocacy materials. It is strongly recommended that members **consult with ASAM Advocacy staff** if they have any questions or concerns about the content of these statements.

3. Structure Your Advocacy Work



Chapters should consider **creating state advocacy committees** for the purpose of sharing policy updates and developing advocacy strategies.



Members with a demonstrated interest in public policy and building consistent engagement are ideal for serving on such committees.

4. Collaborate with Others

External advocacy groups represent individuals who share a common interest or policy agenda.

EXTERNAL ADVOCACY GROUPS INCLUDE:



state
medical
associations



business
groups



patient
advocacy
groups



public health and
harm reduction
organizations



other
issue-based
organizations

These groups are highly engaged and well positioned to influence policy change. Some may even employ a professional lobbyist to represent their interests. External stakeholder groups may lack **(1) deep familiarity with addiction medicine, (2) the specifics of treatment systems, and (3) barriers to accessing addiction care.** As a result, ASAM member expertise can serve as an incredible resource to these groups.

Working with other like-minded organizations can be beneficial to shaping state policy and programs. Consider teaming up with external advocacy groups in your state when the opportunity presents itself. It can be particularly helpful for a chapter to **develop a strong working relationship with its state medical association.** This collaboration can be critical as state medical associations are often powerful allies.

5. Keep Members Informed and Engaged



To keep members informed and engaged on state advocacy matters, chapters can **consider holding quarterly advocacy committee meetings and ensuring that advocacy updates are placed on full chapter meeting agendas**. Upon request, ASAM Advocacy staff can attend these events or help chapters assemble policy reports. Holding other advocacy events that include external stakeholders can also be useful to increasing member engagement.

6. Attend ASAM National Events



ASAM hosts national events with a state advocacy component, such as the annual [State Advocacy Summit](#) and [Addiction Medicine Advocacy Conference \(AMAC\)](#). ASAM's monthly Chapters Council meetings typically include advocacy-related presentations or materials. Additionally, in the new year, ASAM will be pursuing other new and exciting opportunities with an exclusive focus on state advocacy. These events will convene leaders from state chapters, allowing for the exchange of information and strategies.

7. Prepare for Meetings with State Legislators & Regulators

Forming constructive working relationships with state legislators and regulators can be incredibly helpful in state advocacy. However, these types of relationships are not formed overnight. Rather, they are the result of a **long-term engagement**.

Before meeting with a state official, it is important to research their profile. For example, **review their policy and leadership positions, any committee assignments, and personal biography**. This information provides useful background and can be referenced during meetings.

State legislators typically work on a part-time basis with limited staff and resources. They may have a handful of focus areas (usually tied to their professional experience and committee assignments) but lean on outside perspectives. State legislators are deeply rooted in their communities. In turn, they are often approachable and very responsive to constituent input. Further, there is a high chance that they have a personal connection with addiction, whether through their personal life or community interaction. Thus, they can be especially receptive to discussions with addiction specialists.

Regulators are generally more specialized than legislators. They work within various state-level regulatory agencies to implement legislative directives. Often, regulatory agencies issue formal comment periods before initiating policy changes. These comment periods provide an opportunity for the public to share their perspective and serve as a starting point for advocacy.



Meeting with state legislators and regulators can help state chapters establish their presence in statehouses and build name recognition.

8. Comply with Applicable Lobbying Rules and Limitations

According to the Internal Revenue Service:

- 501(c)(3) organizations may engage in some lobbying, but [too much lobbying activity risks loss of tax-exempt status](#).

501(c)(3) organizations are [prohibited from participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of \(or in opposition to\) any candidate for elective public office](#).

Chapters with questions on how to comply with applicable federal and state lobbying rules and limitations should seek qualified professional counsel.