



HEALTHCARE ADVOCACY TOOLKIT:

Helping Individuals & Communities Engage in Activities to Improve the Health and Wellness of All Americans

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Introduction

At American Muslim Health Professionals (AMHP), it is our mission to bring together and strengthen the impact of Muslim health professionals to improve the health and wellness of all Americans. An important aspect of that work includes advocating on behalf of the underserved and underrepresented segments of our population. AMHP builds and strengthens alliances through its advocacy activities, particularly in areas that impact access to affordable and quality health insurance coverage. Since its work and dedication towards ensuring that Americans are aware of and connected to health insurance coverage under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), AMHP has become an invaluable leader in advocating for healthy communities.

As Muslims, faith is the foundation of our lives. Muslims should be at the forefront of creating positive change in the communities and institutions they serve by sharing their views, opinions, personal stories and raising their voices about issues that impact their health and wellbeing. As a diverse and multi-faceted segment of American society, it is important that we participate in advocacy efforts. Our participation will ensure that our voices are heard and that our narratives are represented in discussions surrounding policy issues that impact marginalized communities. In the Quran, we are commanded to stand firm in justice as indicated in the following verse: O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives. Whether one is rich or poor, Allah is more worthy of both. So follow not [personal] inclination, lest you not be just. And if you distort [your testimony] or refuse [to give it], then indeed Allah is ever, with what you do, Acquainted [Quran, 4:135]

“Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world...would do this, it would change the earth.”

William Faulkner

Advocacy is an incredible tool that can be used to raise awareness and influence decisions around issues of concern to you and your communities. One definition of advocacy is the application of pressure to “ensure that people, particularly those who are most vulnerable in society, are able to have their voice heard on issues that are important to them” [1]. “Being an advocate” or “advocating” means that you can influence people on topics that matter to you.

In the area of public health, advocacy plays a key role in ensuring that the environments in which we live, work and play are healthy and safe for all members of the community. From tobacco control to soda taxes, there have been a variety of evidence-based policies that have been proposed by federal, state and local public health authorities. A few current public health issues that have garnered recent advocacy and policy attention include gun violence, the opioid epidemic and efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Public health advocates help communities become places that nurture health and wellbeing for all people and assist hospitals in achieving a high standard of healthcare. We can all be public health advocates.





There are many ways to deliver messages or “raise your voice,” about issues that impact you and your community. These ways can range from calling your legislator’s office or writing a letter to the editor to meeting with your Senators or Representative or attending a town hall meeting. The resources contained in this toolkit provide a set of practical tools and actions you can use to communicate with your elected officials. These resources are meant to inspire and empower you to take action on issues that you care about. In this Toolkit, you will find specific guidance and tangible examples of how to clarify your stance and elevate your voice around a health policy issue. To demonstrate the application of these tools, we included real-life examples of how AMHP and other organizations have exemplified these tactics and best practices in their advocacy work.

To further complement this Toolkit, we recommend signing up for our newsletter and national advocacy listserv. To be added to the listserv, please send a blank email to AMHPAdvocacy+subscribe@googlegroups.com.

Date: _____

Please excuse _____ for being absent from class to advocate for **ending gun violence**, a public health crisis in America.

Join me in thanking this student for courageously **taking action to save lives!**

 **DOCTORS FOR AMERICA**

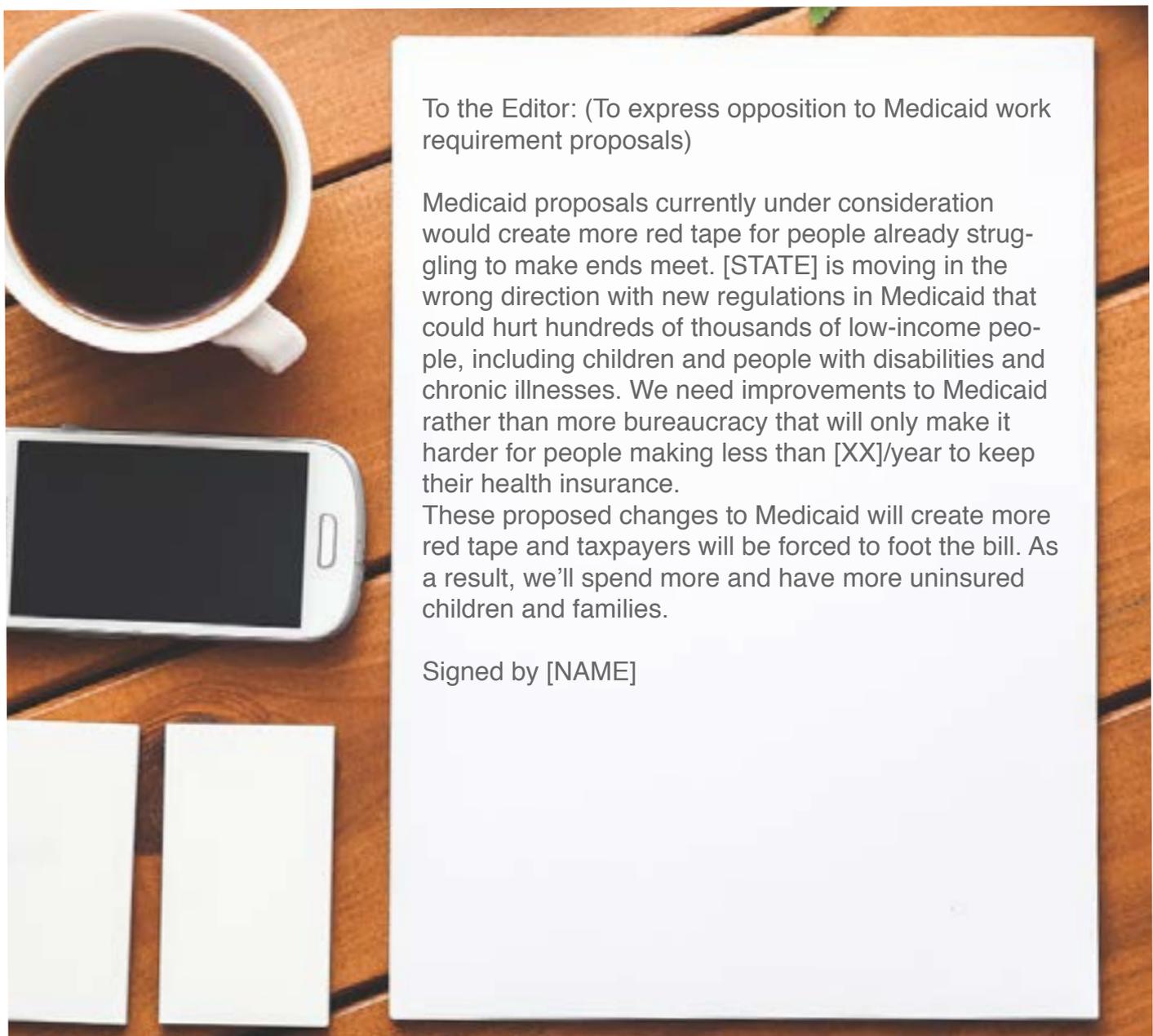
Sincerely,



Write a Letter to the Editor

- Letters to the Editor are a great way to engage in public health and healthcare advocacy.
- Letters can be submitted online through email, a specific form provided by a newspaper website or through the mail. Be sure to look on your local newspaper's site to find out the specific process.
- Letters often need to be 250 words or less so make sure every word counts and that your points are succinct. In your first sentence, make sure your health issue and stance are known to the reader.
- Include a call to action for the broader community to engage in the issue. For example, "I urge your readers to contact their State Representative and voice their opposition to Medicaid cut-backs"

Example: Letter to the Editor



Write an Op-Ed

If you are more inclined to write a lengthier piece, Op-Eds are a great alternative to Letters to the Editor. Op-Eds are written opinion pieces that are usually published opposite the editorial page in a newspaper. They can be written by columnists, leaders of organizations, advocates and public officials or community members [2]. While an Op-Ed is considerably longer than a Letter to the Editor, you will want to employ similar tips in your writing.



Tips for Writing an Op-Ed:

- Check the editorial page or the paper's website for instructions on submitting an Op-Ed. The preferred length is usually in the range of 500-800 words.
- State your thoughts, opinions and ideas succinctly
- Research your healthcare advocacy topic so that your ideas and opinions convey a well-supported argument that is both current and relevant
- Include an opening paragraph to engage the reader, three paragraphs of content that includes a statement and description of the problem and a closing paragraph that includes a strong call to action
- Relate your message to your own experience or personal story to make an impactful case
- Go through at least two rounds of edits and share your piece with other writers and advocates for feedback
- Send copies of the published Op-Ed to your members of Congress or other relevant policy-makers.

Below are a few news outlets where you can submit your Op-Ed:

- The Washington Post
- The Huffington Post
- The New York Times

Op-Ed Example

The Great American Healthcare Debate: What the Obamacare Repeal Could Mean for All

Published on September 20, 2017 in the Huffington Post

A few years ago, I was visiting family in a country with no health care regulations, and my uncle presented to the emergency room for severe shortness of breath. The triage nurse would not place a simple device on his finger to check his oxygenation until he presented a lump sum of cash that would ensure his ability to pay. A family member had to rush to his home, procure the cash, and bring it to the ER before an evaluation was initiated. As a physician familiar with the classic presentation of a heart attack, it was horrifying to witness every precious moment that slipped by. Thankfully my uncle was stabilized. To this day, I wonder what the outcome would have been if he did not have access to that cash. Unfortunately, in such countries, thousands of people are turned away from emergency care if they don't have the financial means and potentially face catastrophic outcomes.

Even at its worst, our healthcare system has protections like the Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act (EMTALA), which is a federal law that requires anyone coming to an emergency department to be stabilized and treated, regardless of their insurance status or ability to pay. Laws and regulations protect people, maintain a certain standard of care, and ultimately save lives.

Much of today's healthcare debate centers around saving costs and reducing the financial burden for some. Proponents of an Obamacare repeal argue that doing so would help Americans in the long run. As a family physician who works to keep patients out of the emergency room by proactively managing their diseases and risk factors, I worry about how taking insurance away from over 20 million Americans can accomplish this objective.

Aside from the argument that access to preventive care keeps Americans healthy, I fail to see the long term financial benefits of denying health care coverage. Unless we as a nation are willing to maintain and protect the provisions in the EMTALA, we will start turning people away from emergency rooms based upon insurance or financial statuses. This is not how we come out ahead. Who will absorb the costs of the millions of uninsured Americans who show up in ER's for sore throats, UTI's, and pneumonias (many of which could have been treated at much lower costs in a primary care's office)? Ultimately, it will become the taxpayers' burden.

The disastrous plan that was passed in the House, then narrowly defeated in the Senate, may now be up for vote again with the Graham-Cassidy bill. This legislation, like its predecessors, helps the wealthy, already healthy, and well insured. Everyone else suffers just to hand over a political victory.

If Congress truly cares about the health of this country, it needs to live up to its intentions. We need to not only maintain the Affordable Care Act, we need to properly fund legislation to continue providing care to so many constituents.

Repealing the Affordable Care Act, or sabotaging its funding, symbolically presents the same message - you deserve medical treatment if you can pay for it.

Samina Sohail, MD, is a family physician in Cincinnati, OH. As a primary care provider to Ohioans since 2003, she has seen firsthand the benefits of providing health care access through the ACA to so many previously underinsured.

Share Your Story



Storytelling is a crucial way to gain the interest of constituents and decision makers. Sharing a personal story raises awareness and personalizes an issue that people may be unaware of or overlook. Many advocacy organizations such as Families USA have “Story Collection” efforts and campaigns and welcome stories from constituents. These stories are then shared with the media or policymakers to highlight a specific health policy issue and its impact. We would encourage you to contribute to these efforts by sharing your or a patient’s story.

Sharing a Patient’s Story

Sharing a patient’s story is a powerful way to remind people that an issue is not just about financial or other resources but about families, children, the elderly; real people with stories and struggles. When possible, ask a patient or client if he/she is okay with you sharing his/her story in a news piece or meeting with an elected official. You can always change a name or use only a first name to respect the privacy of an individual. To increase their reach and impact, stories can be uploaded and shared on social media outlets including facebook and YouTube.

Below are a few questions to craft your story:

- When did you first meet him/her?
- What are some of the details of his/her situation that brought him/her to your organization or agency?
- What is something unique about this person?
- How does this person’s story relate to what you want to ask the elected official to do?

Storytelling Example

Minha Husaini, an AMHP Community Liaison shared the story below in the Huffington Post article, “Faith Communities Unite to Organize a National Interfaith Enrollment Campaign.” The story personalizes the need for affordable healthcare coverage, particularly for individuals suffering from chronic conditions.



“A Muslim woman from northern California had to take a leave of absence from work due to severe complications associated with her lupus condition. As a result, her employer cancelled her insurance. Lupus is a chronic, debilitating disease often resulting in fatigue and pain. Distressed by her situation and concerned that her pre-existing condition would disqualify her from obtaining much needed insurance, she did not know where to turn. Luckily, Minha Husaini, a community liaison working for the Connecting Americans to Coverage program with AMHP was there to guide her through next steps. ‘I was so lost and terrified. Minha helped me with the process of enrolling in an affordable health plan.’”

Create a Petition



Petitions are a great advocacy tool that can be used to raise awareness and encourage action around a specific public health issue or campaign. Creating a petition is a very straightforward process and once finalized, the petition can be disseminated immediately in order to mobilize support and garner attention around an issue. Both individuals and organizations can create petitions but it can be more impactful to collaborate with other individuals and/or organizations to maximize impact and support. The impact of a petition is primarily predicated upon its reach - both in terms of breadth (number of people) and depth (type of people; e.g. decision makers).

Below are few websites where you can create and submit your petition:

- Avaaz.org
- Moveon.org
- Change.org

Step by Step Instructions and Tips:

1. Decide on a strategic petition title: similar to a news headline, this is the first thing people will see about your petition. To gain attention, use a short title that focuses on the change you would like them to support [3]

Tips:

- Keep it short and to the point
- Focus on the solution
- Communicate urgency

2. Choose a decision maker: this is the person, organization, or group that can make a decision about your petition.

Tips:

- Choose an individual who can deliver on your “ask” (this may require some research to find the person of influence around your issue)
- Think practically (don’t go straight to the top); “you might see faster results if you choose a more junior person who is petitioned less often than more recognizable figures”[3].

3. Describe the problem you would like to solve: people are more likely to support your petition if you have a clear and logical “ask.” It also might be helpful to explain how this change will impact you, your family, or your community.

Tips:

- Describe the individuals or communities that are impacted by the issue: readers are more likely to action and support a decision when they understand who is affected.
- Describe the solution: clarify the action that needs to happen and who can make the change. Make it clear what happens if you win or lose.
- Make it personal - as demonstrated in the “Storytelling” section, a personal story can be included in a petition to strengthen and personalize an issue.
- Use facts and statistics where applicable - this may be the first time that a person is reading about the issue so be sure to include a few compelling facts and figures that support your position.

4. Disseminate your petition: there is no limit on the ways in which you can share your petition and the best strategy is to use multiple platforms including social media (facebook and twitter), email blasts and in-person communication.

Tips:

- To maximize reach, choose strategic partners and collaborators who are willing to disseminate your petition on their listservs, websites and social media outlets.

Dave Karpf, a professor at George Washington University and author of *The MoveOn Effect: The Unexpected Transformation of American Political Advocacy*, says petitions are an early-stage political tactic that help build a broader campaign that can send a signal of public opinion to a decision maker [4].

Meet With an Elected Official



Meeting with Members of Congress, state legislators, other elected officials, or their staff is a great way for individuals to communicate with policymakers on public health issues. Through these visits, you can let a policymaker know about your concerns and make yourself available as a resource on a specific issue. Find out who represents you in congress and in your state legislature and coordinate a visit either alone or with other members in your community who care about the issue. These meetings can be conducted at congressional offices in Washington, DC or in your state capitol, or at district “home” offices that may be closer to you [5].

General Tips

- Be respectful of people’s time and use a polite and respectful tone at all times
- The most effective way of securing an appointment is to be specific about the purpose of the meeting - for example, a bill number or policy issue
- One of the best times to plan an in-district meeting with a member of Congress is during a Senate or House recess. This time is designated for legislators to meet with their constituents in their home states or districts
- Take pictures outside the office or during the meeting (if allowed). These pictures can be shared on social media
- Share your story - personalize your comments and provide local context that will illustrate why the legislator should care about your issue

Requesting the Visit

- Locate the scheduler's email address on the legislator's website or by calling the district office. Make your request in writing by sending an e-mail to the scheduler and follow-up with a call. Be sure to let the scheduler know that you are a constituent [5]

Preparing for the Visit

- Will you attend the meeting alone or with other constituents? Consider bringing people who are affected by the issue you are discussing
- Do your homework - learn about your elected officials' voting record and familiarize yourself with their views and arguments.
- Practice talking points in order to make your position and ask clear and focused
- Bring materials that you can share with the elected official or staff

Sequence of Meeting (can be used during a phone, email or in-person meeting)

1. Thank him/her for taking the time to meet with you
2. Introduce yourself (be sure to review their bio to see if you have something in common)
3. What do you and your agency/organization do? Bring along marketing material such as organizational brochures or pamphlets
4. What issue do you want to discuss? Bring a specific bill number, info sheet or somewhere you can point them with more information
5. Illustrate your need with a patient story (or a personal one)
6. What do you want the elected official to do? Make sure you have a specific ask and that you follow-up with them to make sure that they do it.
7. If you created or signed a petition, be sure to bring the petition and signatures with you to the meeting
8. Thank him/her and follow-up with any requested materials and information

After the Meeting

- Compare notes as a group
- Send personal thank you notes to the legislator
- Follow up and be persistent - legislators are busy people so following-up on your specific "ask" post-meeting is often necessary.

Example: Script to Use When Meeting with Elected Official

Below is a short script that was shared by the Network Lobby for Catholic Social Justice in their effort to oppose the Better Care Reconciliation Act:

*"Hi, my name is [NAME] and I am a constituent from [CITY/TOWN]. As a person of faith, I'm calling to oppose the Better Care Reconciliation Act. I oppose any efforts to cut or cap Medicaid, and no one should lose coverage as a result of any healthcare replacement. Please protect the human dignity of the millions of Americans who would lose coverage and oppose the Better Care Reconciliation Act."**

**Also add your personal story!*

AMHP Advocacy in Practice

Below are a few highlights from AMHP's advocacy activities and events:

Letters:

- Between July 2017 and May 2018, AMHP has signed on to over a dozen letters on issues ranging from gun violence, Medicaid work requirements and early childhood mental health.
- To fight efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act, AMHP drafted the sign on letter below in September 2017.

National Muslim Organization Letter in Opposition of Senate Health Care Bill

Dear Senator:

As representatives of the Muslim American community - its nationwide organizations and institutions - we are writing this letter in order to express our unified voice and unequivocal opposition to the health care bill currently under consideration.

Similar to the previous proposals that were defeated earlier this year in the Senate, the Graham-Cassidy proposal, would cut health coverage and out-of-pocket expenses for millions. Most importantly, it will significantly undermine health care for the most vulnerable members of our community - the very individuals, families and children we take a responsibility for and care so deeply about serving. Therefore, we call on you to oppose this bill when it comes to a vote.

Below is a list of reasons stating why this bill will have deleterious impacts on our communities:

- Eliminate the Prevention and Public Health Fund
- Allow states to weaken protections for people with preexisting conditions
- Medicaid cuts over the next 10 years means millions of low-income Americans, including children, will lose their health coverage
- Medicaid kept 2.6 million Americans out of poverty in 2010, making it the third-largest anti-poverty program in the U.S.
- Many healthcare providers – especially rural hospitals – will be forced to close as a result of these cuts and rural communities will have less access to the care they need
- 32 million more Americans will be uninsured by 2027
- A lack of healthcare coverage impacts absenteeism and the productivity and profitability of companies large and small

As Muslims we believe that we are united as a single body and “if one part of it feels pain, the rest of the body will join in it staying awake and suffering fever.” Taking care of one's own health and the health of others is deeply emphasized in the Islamic tradition and having access to quality and affordable health care is fundamental to achieving that goal. Providing for the health, dignity and wellbeing of people is one of the most important social justice obligations of a Muslim and therefore we urge you to give thoughtful consideration to our letter and our plea.

Advocacy Groups



Coalition building is an ongoing process; AMHP's advocacy work is contingent upon the strength and establishment of its partnerships and collaboration with other healthcare advocacy organizations. In order for grassroots advocacy efforts to be successful, there needs to be strategic collaboration and representation across groups so that a focused and unified voice is heard among decision makers. Healthcare access is an issue that impacts each one of us and our collective experiences can enable us to work in solidarity to have the greatest impact on issues that concern the betterment of our communities. AMHP has identified and worked with a number of organizations committed to healthcare advocacy and empowering American Muslims.

Healthy Policy Advocacy Groups

Organization	Mission	Website
Doctors for America	A national movement of physicians and medical students working together to improve the health of the nation and to ensure that everyone has access to affordable, high quality health care	http://www.dr sforamerica.org/#
Health Care for All	A group of advocates, policy experts and consumers that work to fix health care in Massachusetts	https://www.hcfama.org/what-we-do
American Public Health Association (APHA)	APHA champions the health of all people and all communities and is the only organization that influences federal policy by bringing together members from all fields of public health	https://www.apha.org/
Families USA	A leading national voice for health care consumers, is dedicated to the achievement of high-quality, affordable health care and improved health for all	http://familiesusa.org/about
National Health Law Program (NHeLP)	NHeLP protects and advances the health rights of low-income and underserved individuals and families. NHeLP advocates, educates and litigates at the federal and state levels.	http://www.healthlaw.org

Muslim Advocacy Groups

Organization	Mission	Website
Poligon	Poligon was founded by motivated leaders that were passionate about amplifying Muslim American voices in Congress and educating the community about the policy making process. Their broad range of expertise includes government advocacy, research, law, foreign policy, social policy, and business	http://www.poligonnational.org/
CAIR	The Council of American Islamic Relations (CAIR) is a leading advocate for justice and mutual understanding	https://www.cair.com/
Emgage USA	Emgage USA strives to educate and mobilize the Muslim American community to become a force for positive change and to build the next generation of civic leaders	https://www.emgageusa.org/

Taking Charge of Your Health

You can take charge of your health by signing up for healthcare coverage and using it for both preventive and treatment-related services. It is important to know your healthcare options through your workplace and otherwise. Since the passing of the Affordable Care Act, an important source of information is:

<https://www.healthcare.gov/>

In the circumstance that you (or a loved one) become a patient, it is important to advocate for yourself and the same goes for being an advocate for family and friends. In order to achieve that it is important to know your rights as a patient and have access to resources that can help you navigate the system.

Important sources of information for patients are:

- The Patient Advocate Foundation (PAF): provides professional case management services to Americans with chronic, life threatening and debilitating illnesses.
- The Institute for Healthcare Improvement: helpful resources that patients and families can use when they see a doctor or other healthcare provider or when they are admitted to the hospital for care.

In engaging with healthcare providers (HCP) it is important to follow key steps:

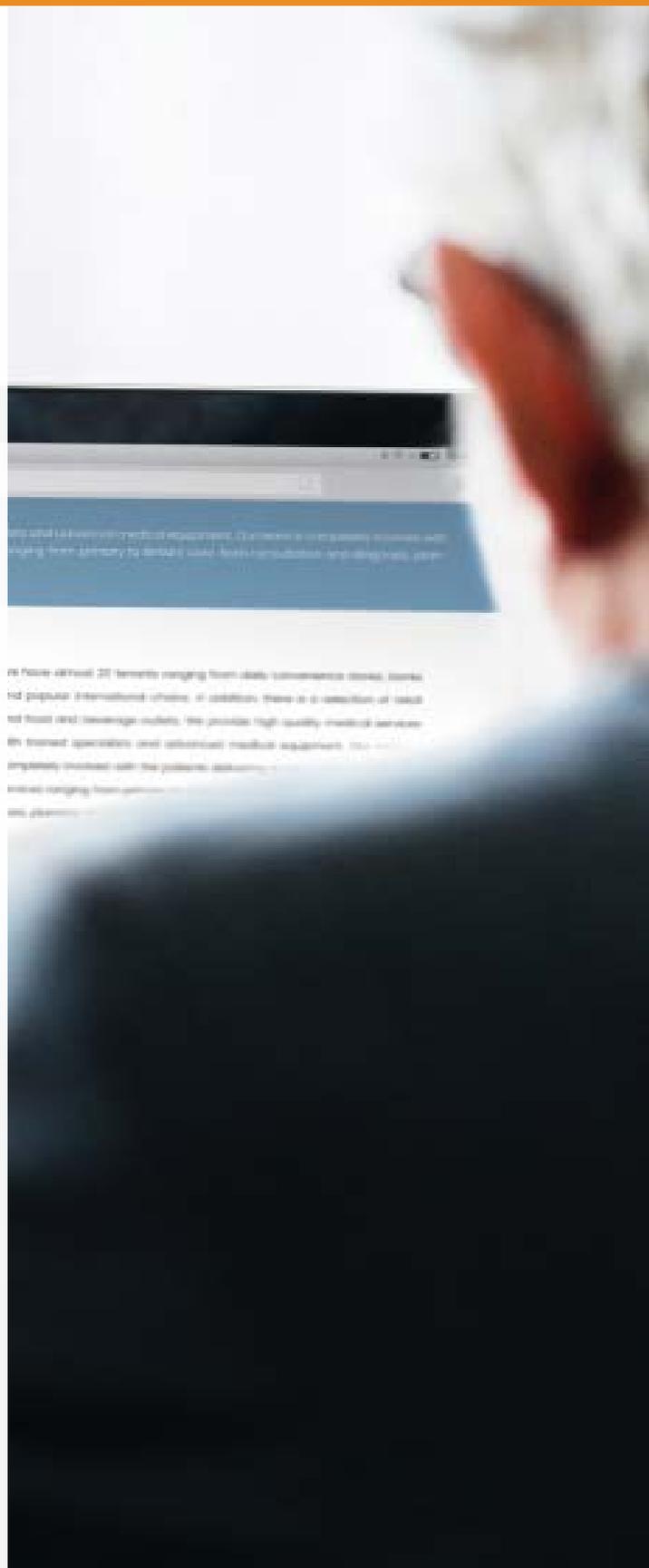
Communicate your concerns

Ask questions

Explore your options, e.g., second opinions

Understand your problem and the subsequent plan of care

Engagement with HCPs and taking charge of your own health is part of advocating for an optimal healthcare system. One of the contributing factors to errors in the healthcare system is lack of communication therefore ensuring proper communication is important for proper healthcare provision.



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