



ONE VOICE, ONE VISION

Stay on Message:

Advocacy Toolkit for Busy Working Women
Rheumatologists

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MISSION

To promote the science and practice of rheumatology, foster the advancement and education of women in rheumatology, and advocate access to the highest quality health care, and management of patients with rheumatic diseases.

INTRODUCTION

“The challenging health care environment is affecting the way we as rheumatologists manage our practices, interfering with patient access to care and forcing us to make difficult decisions.

State and Federal legislators are considering an increasing amount of legislation of impact to our community. In response, we must be engaged at both the state and federal levels to protect our patients and their livelihood.

To help empower you and your patients, AWIR is providing rheumatologists with resources to proactively increase patient access to rheumatologic care and medication, and to improve the practice environment for our physicians.

In this endeavor, AWIR is pleased to offer a wide range of materials to our members and its advocates.”

-Dr. Gwenesta Melton & Dr. Stephanie Ott
AWIR Advocacy Committee

The Association of Women in Rheumatology is comprised of women working in all sectors of rheumatology to promote the science and practice of rheumatology and foster the advancement and education of women in rheumatology. AWIR advocates for access to the highest quality health care and management of patients with rheumatic diseases. We believe in creating a strong network of women advocates that will support AWIR policy priorities at both the state and federal level.

AWIR advocates are working on the frontline of health care and have firsthand knowledge of the struggles our patients endure. As a means of support for our advocates, we have devised this toolkit to provide you with the resources necessary to actively engage with legislators and regulators around the country. **Together, we can make a positive impact on your life and the lives of your patients.**

ADVOCACY

“What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.”

- Jane Goodall

The key to changing government policy is through advocacy. Most people think advocacy is complicated, time consuming, and intimidating. However, simply defined, advocacy is supporting a cause or policy. Just by reading this guide you will be considered an advocate. Being informed and educated is the first step.

As physicians, you are part of a community that holds real power to change health care policies that affect patients and practices. The challenging health care environment is affecting the way we as rheumatologists manage our practices, interfering with patient access to care and forcing us to make difficult decisions. Furthermore, state legislatures are considering an increasing amount of new legislation that will have a real impact on our community. In response, we must be engaged at both the state and federal levels to protect our patients and their health.

HOW TO BEGIN ADVOCATING

1. Identify your issues

Identify the issues for which you would like to advocate. What issues are most important to you?

2. Build a plan

Outline your advocacy goals. Developing an advocacy strategy is key to achieving these goals.

3. Take Action

Once you have a plan in place, you are ready to take action and begin advocating.

1. IDENTIFYING YOUR ISSUES



What is motivating you to advocate with AWIR? What change do you want to see in government? Use these questions to help narrow down the issues most important to you.

- ✓ Do your patients suffer as a result of step therapy or fail first protocol?
- ✓ Do your patients struggle to afford their medication?
- ✓ Are your patients being switched off their medications due to formulary changes?
- ✓ Are you negatively affected by MACRA?

Answering these questions can help determine which issues are affecting you and your patients. **Once you have worked through these questions, prioritize your responses to determine where you would like to focus your efforts.**

2. BUILDING YOUR ADVOCACY PLAN



Once you have determined which issues you want to advocate for, you need to develop a plan. Your plan should include your final policy goal and list steps you can take to help achieve this goal. Remember that influencing policy takes time, so your plan should reflect this.

EXAMPLE ADVOCACY PLAN

Issue: Step Therapy Protocols

Goal: Allow physicians to bypass step therapy if it will be harmful for a patient.

Action: Advocate for legislation that requires health plans that employ step therapy to provide a process by which physicians can request an exception if the patient is currently stable on a prescription drug.

Advocacy Ideas:

- o Contact AWIR for list of step therapy legislation in my state
- o Write to cosponsors of step therapy bill thanking them for support
- o Call state legislators who are not sponsors and ask their stance on step therapy
- o Talk to my patients and see if any are willing to share their stories about step therapy
- o Ask AWIR for help placing an op-ed in the local paper
- o Donate to RheumPac

3. TAKING ACTION



Now that you have a plan in place, you are ready to begin advocating! Our next section outlines easy ways to engage with elected officials. Before you start advocating, make sure to do plenty of research on your issue. When considering policy, elected officials tend to ask themselves seven basic questions. If you can answer these questions while educating them on the issue, you are more likely to succeed in gaining their support.

- o Does this make for good public policy?
- o Does this make sense?
- o How does this affect my district?
- o Will it help or hurt me politically?
- o Does anyone back home know or care about this issue?
- o Who supports or opposes this issue?
- o Will it cost or save money?

ENGAGE

“It took me quite a long time to develop a voice, and now that I have it, I am not going to be silent.”

- Madeleine Albright

Advocacy doesn't need to be hard or time-consuming. Try some of these easy ways to engage yourself in advocacy:

- o Calling elected officials
- o Writing elected officials
- o Meeting with elected officials
- o Publishing op-eds/letters to the editor
- o Using social media

CALLING ELECTED OFFICIALS



Calling your elected official can be a useful and important tool. Whether you are calling in support or in opposition to an issue or piece of legislation, your legislator wants to hear what you have to say. Calling your elected official is crucial when there is an impending vote on a piece of legislation you care about.

PREPARING FOR THE CALL

Before you make the call to your legislator's office, it is important to prepare so you are confident and organized. Your phone call should only last around 3-5 minutes, so you need to have all your information and talking points ready before you start. You won't have time to look up additional information or answers to questions you don't know during the call. Quickly do some research before contacting the office and find out what their position on your issue is. Once you know their position, you can thank them for their support or encourage them to change their position on the call. Use the script below as a guide for your phone call.

CALL SCRIPT

Hello, my name is _____ and I am a constituent of Senator/ Representative _____. I am calling about (your issue)_. What is the Senator/Representative's stance on this issue? (Wait for answer)

If they support your position...

Thank you for the information. I am happy to hear Senator/ Representative _____ supports/opposes this issue. Would you like my contact information? (Wait for answer) Have a nice day.

If they do not support your position...

Thank you for the information. Why does Senator/ Representative _____ take that position? (wait for answer) Thank for you explaining. I would like to encourage Senator/ Representative _____ to support/oppose this issue because _____. (Briefly explain the issue and why you support/oppose it. Explain how it affects the community and your elected official's constituents. Use personal stories or data to make your point). I appreciate you taking the time to talk today. May I have an email for the staffer who works on these issues so I can provide additional information in writing? Thanks for your time. Have a nice day!

FOLLOW UP

After calling, it is a good idea to follow up with a written correspondence. If you asked for a staffer's email, send an email briefly restating your issue and explaining what action you would like to elected official to take on it. You can also write a short letter and mail it to their office if you did not receive an email. If you offered to provide additional information during your call, don't forget to do so.

WRITING ELECTED OFFICIALS



Just like calling, writing to your elected official's office is another important tool. Email is the easiest and fastest way to write to your elected official. Sending a letter to your elected official's office is a bit more time consuming, but may help you stand out among the hundreds of emails that are received.

Tips for Writing a Letter:

Write to your own elected official: Legislators want to hear from their constituents. Write to your own elected official and let them know in the beginning of the letter that you are constituent.

Keep it short: Limit your letter to one page and focus on one topic only.

Be respectful: Do not use harsh language, swears, or make personal attacks. Write in a respectful and formal tone.

Introduce yourself: Start your letter with a few sentences explaining who you are. State whether you are writing as a constituent or on behalf of an organization like AWIR (or both).

State your purpose: Clearly state your reason for writing to them. If you are writing about a specific piece of legislation, include the bill number and name.

Make it personal: Share how this issue has affected you or your patients personally.

Include specific "asks": End your letter by asking your elected official to support or oppose a specific piece of legislation. For example, "I urge you to support S.B. XXXX" or "I urge you to support legislation that would prohibit a patient's drug from being removed from the formulary or moved to a more restrictive or costly tier."

Say thank you: Remember to end the letter by thanking your elected official for taking the time to read your letter.



MEETING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

One of the most important aspects of advocacy is establishing a relationship with your elected official and their staff. An effective way of starting this relationship is by meeting face-to-face.

Scheduling the Meeting

Each office schedules meetings differently. Many offices allow you to submit meeting requests on their website. If your elected official does not let you schedule meetings online, call the office and ask to speak with the scheduler. They may ask you to fax or email your meeting request. If you are not able to travel to DC, you can schedule a meeting at your elected official's district office. There are usually multiple offices throughout your state.

Let the scheduler know your name and the names of all of the meeting attendees. Also remember to let the scheduler know where you live and if you are a constituent. The scheduler will ask the topic of the meeting so the elected official is prepared to discuss your issues. If you want to discuss specific bills in your meeting, mention the bill numbers and names.

Often, you will be scheduled to meet with a staffer instead of your elected official. Elected officials are very busy and cannot always find time to meet with constituents, especially during session. However, staffers are experts in their field and work very closely with your elected official, so do not feel snubbed.

Before the Meeting

Practice: Practice what you will say before your meeting a few times. You should be well rehearsed and confident.

Talking Points: Create talking points that you can reference during the meeting if needed.

Research: Research your elected official before the meeting. Learn if they support or oppose your issue, what their voting record on your issue is, and if they are on any key committees.

Leave-behind packets: Create a packet of “leave-behind” information for your elected official and their staff. The packet can include a fact sheet about your issue, a summary of any bills you discussed, and your contact information. AWIR is happy to help you create leave behind packets for legislators.

During the Meeting

Be on Time: Plan to arrive with plenty of time to spare in case you get lost or cannot find their office. If you are early, hang out for a few minutes before heading into their office.

Dress to Impress: Dress professionally when meeting with an elected official or their staff.

Be Confident: Don't become scared or intimidated when talking to your elected official. Look back on your talking points if you lose your train of thought.

Take Pictures: Snap a few pictures with the elected official or their staff. You can use these photos to publicize your meeting on social media.

Listen Carefully: Take notes so you can follow up with specific points from your discussion. If you are confused about something that is said, don't be afraid to ask for clarification.

Be Respectful: Don't use harsh language or make personal attacks. Even if an elected official does not agree with your position, do not argue. Always act in a respectful manner.

What to Say

Briefly introduce yourself and whoever else is in the meeting: Let the elected official know if you are a part of a group like AWIR, and give a quick explanation of what AWIR is.

Explain the issue and your position on the issue.

Describe how this issue affects the elected official's constituents: Use personal stories or data to strengthen your position.

After the Meeting

Following up after the meeting is essential. Reach out to the elected official and their staff by sending a thank you email. Thank them for taking the time to meet with you and reemphasize your issue and your position.

Keep calling and writing to your elected official after your meeting. You took the first step in building a relationship with your elected official by meeting face-to-face with them. Keep building this relationship with regular communication. Regular communication can be as easy as calling their office to thank them for voting favorably on a bill.

PUBLISHING OP-EDS/LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Not all advocacy involves directly communicating with elected officials. A significant part of advocacy is raising awareness about an issue in your community. A great way to raise awareness is by publishing an op-ed in your local newspaper. Anyone can write and submit an op-ed and writing one allows you to share your opinion and expertise on an issue with your local community. Below are tips for writing an op-ed:

- Check your newspaper’s guidelines for submitting an op-ed. This information can usually be found on the newspapers website, in the opinion section.
- When submitting, include all your contact information. Also explain why you are an expert on the topic and share any relevant degrees you have.
- Most op-eds are around 500-800 words.
- Most readers will not have the knowledge or expertise on a topic that you do. Do not use terms or acronyms only people in your field will understand.
- End you piece by asking your readers to contact their elected officials in support or opposition of a piece of legislation.
- Ask someone else to review your op-ed to ensure it is clear and understandable. AWIR staff is happy to review your writing.

USING SOCIAL MEDIA



Social media has become an integral part of our lives. Nowadays, people are using social media to chat with friends, advertise products, and even advocate. Social media is one of the fastest ways to connect with elected officials and to spread your message.



Twitter
[@AWIRgroup](https://twitter.com/AWIRgroup)

On Twitter, it is fast and simple to reach elected officials. Most elected officials have a Twitter account run by themselves or staffers.

- Follow AWIR and other advocacy groups on Twitter
- Retweet and like tweets about your issues
- Tweet out important information or relevant news articles to your followers
- Tweet @ your elected officials



Facebook
Facebook.com/AWIRgroup.org

It is not as easy to reach elected officials on Facebook as it is on Twitter. However, Facebook is a great platform for spreading awareness and educating friends and family on a topic.

- Like the AWIR Facebook page and other advocacy groups
- Post about important topics on your own page for your friends to see
- “Share” relevant articles and posts on your page
- Like your elected officials page to stay updated

STATE

“A strong woman is a woman determined to do something others are determined not to be done.”

- Marge Piercy

To advocate at the state level, you should contact your state legislators. Every state, with the exception of Nebraska, has a bicameral legislator. A bicameral legislator means there is both a House and a Senate. You can also contact the Governor, who is the head of the Executive Branch of in your state. To find your local state legislators, go to “Become an Advocate” on the AWIR website and enter your zip code.

THE ISSUES:

Step Therapy/Fail First

This utilization management tool prohibits patients from accessing a drug prescribed by their doctor until they fail on the preferred drug or set of drugs covered by their health plan. Unfortunately, a lot of states do not have exceptions in place to bypass this process if there is medical evidence proving the patient has already failed those drugs or they have a medical issue where it would be harmful for them to take that medication.

Our stance:

AWIR supports step therapy/fail first legislation that is regulated by nationally recognized clinical practice guidelines, provides physicians the authority to override step therapy protocols based on a patient’s medical history and the override protocols should be clear and abbreviated. The State Access to Innovative Medicine (SAIM) Coalition has produced model language that AWIR supports as the national standard for step therapy/fail first legislation.

Non-Medical Switching/Continuity of Care

Each year patients are affected by formulary driven switching for non-medical reasons. This issue has become such a common practice among insurer’s and Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBMs) that there is now legislation aiming to help patients affected by this harmful practice.

Our stance:

AWIR believes that medically stable patients should not be switched off of their medication for non-medical reasons at any point during their plan year and that the patient should be grandfathered with year over year protections. Legislation that AWIR supports would prohibit a patients drug from being removed from the formulary or moved to a more restrictive or costly tier unless the drug was to be deemed unsafe by the FDA.

Uniform Prior Authorization

Prior authorization refers to an insurance company policy requiring medical providers to obtain the insurer’s approval before it provides coverage for certain medications and treatments. In some states, insurers are allowed to set their own prior authorization processes, which may vary from insurer to insurer, creating confusion. Each different insurer may have dozens of different prior authorization forms depending on the insurance plan.

The national time cost to practices of interactions with health insurers is estimated between \$23 billion to \$31 billion annually. Studies of medical practices’ interactions with health insurers show that to administer insurance each year, the average provider’s office requires 3 weeks of the provider’s time, 23 weeks of nursing staff time, and 44 weeks of clerical staff time.

Our stance:

AWIR supports uniformed prior authorization legislation that (1) requires insurers to use the uniform prior authorization form, adopted by the Department of Insurance, for prescription medications, medical treatments and procedures (2)The form should be electronically accessible and able to be submitted electronically (3) Deem authorization granted if an insurer fails to respond to or accept the uniform prior authorization form within 5 business days or, for urgent requests, 1 business day upon receipt of a request.

Biologic Substitution Laws

As biosimilars come to market along with the ability to be deemed interchangeable, states around the country will need to update their state substitution laws to include these new and innovative drugs.

Our stance:

AWIR supports legislation that would allow a pharmacist to substitute an FDA approved interchangeable biosimilar for a prescribed originator biologic as long as the prescriber is notified through some means of communication that the substitution has occurred within 5 business days. The product must be deemed interchangeable by the FDA and the prescriber must have the ability to write “dispense as written” (DAW).

FEDERAL

“When the whole world
is silent, even one voice
becomes powerful.”

- Malala Yousafzai

To advocate at the federal level, you should contact your US Representative and your US Senators. You can also contact the President of the United States, who is head of the Executive Branch. You can find your legislators by going to www.house.gov or www.senate.gov.

THE ISSUES:

Implementation of MACRA

In 2015, Congress enacted the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act (MACRA) with bipartisan support, and backing from physicians, to promote and incentivize both quality and value in the delivery of health care services for Medicare beneficiaries.

Under MACRA, most physicians will initially fall under the Merit-based Incentive Payment System (MIPS) program for the Medicare payments they receive for physician services. MACRA consolidated the multiple previous reporting requirements into MIPS as a single program. Based on aggregate scores that physicians receive each year under MIPS they may receive either a bonus or a penalty in their reimbursement. Congress specified in the statute that payment adjustments are budget neutral and is set at plus or minus 4% in 2019 and rise to plus or minus 9% from 2022 onward.

Our stance:

AWIR is closely monitoring this new program and is providing feedback to CMS that best represents our specialty.

Workforce Shortages

According to a 2017 report by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), the United States will face an overall shortage between 40,000-104,000 physicians by 2030. Specialty shortages will be particularly large, including rheumatology.

The American College of Rheumatology (ACR) conducted a study in 2005 that examined the number of adult practicing rheumatologists in the United States and estimated there to be roughly 1.7 adult rheumatologists per 100,000 persons. As the number of rheumatologists has continued to decline since then and the population ages, many believe the shortage could grow as high as 2,500 by 2025.

Our stance:

Growth in future demand for physicians will be the highest among specialties that predominantly serve the elderly. AWIR understands the need to address this issue and is supporting legislation, such as H.R. 2276 and D. 1301, that promotes the development of rheumatologists in the United States.

Drug Pricing and Transparency

Drug pricing has been a major issue in recent years that has continued to affect our patient's ability to obtain their specialty medication. To confront this issue AWIR has joined the Alliance for Transparent and Affordable Prescriptions (ATAP) who has been tasked to contest transparency in drug pricing on the state and federal level on behalf of patients and providers.

Our stance:

The goal of ATAP is two-fold: one, to educate physicians, patients, legislators, and the general public about PBMs and their role in the prescription drug market, with the goal of bringing awareness to the impact PBMs have on drug costs and access to treatment; and two, to ensure patients have access to effective and affordable medication therapies by developing and implementing a comprehensive advocacy plan that seeks to increase transparency and further regulate PBM practices through legislation and public policy at both the state and federal levels.

Gender Disparity

Among physicians involved in a broad range of practice settings, income is unequal for men and women. Male physicians earn more than female physicians, even after differences in work time, specialty, practice setting, and other characteristics are taken into account. According to a 2017 survey, male rheumatologists earn 21% more than female colleagues (Medscape Rheumatologist Compensation Report 2017). A report on a similar study concluded, "...women should lobby for more transparency in income data and engage in peer networking, which could reduce the pay gap" (Are female physicians leaving money on the (operating room) table? Medical Economics. Published March 2016).

Our stance:

AWIR advocates for equal pay among female and male rheumatologists. The gap between the two is significant in that we support legislation at both the state and federal level that advocates for equal pay.

Conclusion

By reading this toolkit, you've taken an important first step in becoming an advocate for yourself and your patients. AWIR needs your help to change public policy. There is strength in numbers. The future of your practice and specialty can be shaped through advocacy and if we're not at the negotiating table, we leave ourselves and our patients open to unwanted change.

AWIR is happy to assist you in your advocacy efforts. Contact AWIR government relations staff with any questions or ask how to get involved. AWIR staff will notify you of any legislation in your state that requires immediate action. You can also go to our website to learn more about our policy priorities and advocacy opportunities.

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