

AWMIR

Association
of Women in
Rheumatology



**Advocacy Toolkit for the
Busy Working Rheumatologist
2025-2026**



AWIR

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The Mission

The Association of Women in Rheumatology (AWIR) is dedicated to promoting equitable healthcare for patients with rheumatologic conditions, particularly for women. Through advocacy for legislative changes, AWIR addresses crucial issues that impact both patients and healthcare providers. This toolkit is designed to help AWIR members engage effectively in advocacy efforts.

Why Advocacy Matters

“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.”



Advocacy Co-Chair
Gwenesta Melton, MD



Advocacy Co-Chair
Stephanie Ott, MD



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AWIR's advocacy focuses on the following key policy priorities for 2025-2026:

Accumulator Adjustment Programs (APPs): Support legislation to ban AAPs to ensure copay assistance applies towards deductibles and out-of-pocket maximums.

Prescription Drug Affordability Boards (PDABS): Oppose regulations that set Upper Payment Limits (UPLs), which create access challenges for patients and negatively impact providers that buy-and-bill.

PBM Reform: Advocate for transparency in drug pricing and mandates to require PBMs and insurers to pass-through rebates to patients and de-link compensation from the price of the drug.

Health Equity: Promote fair access to treatment and care irrespective of race, gender, or socioeconomic status.

Gender Pay Gap: Address wage disparities affecting female healthcare providers in rheumatology.

Workforce Shortage: Advocate for federal solutions to address the shortage of healthcare professionals in rheumatology.

Medicare Reimbursement: Support changes to improve patient access to care by ensuring fair reimbursement rates based on inflation.

Step Therapy: Promote policies that provide exceptions to step therapy protocols.

Non-Medical Switching: Advocate for legislation that impacts continuity of care for patients during their plan year.

Prior Authorization: Support measures to address the burdens and delays caused by prior authorization requirements.

**Have an issue you are interested in not listed? Email
Evalanos@hhs.com or Kdaley@hhs.com**



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Your Advocacy Journey

- **Learn About Your Elected Officials:** Research your state and federal representatives. Understand their positions on healthcare issues. Visit the [AWIR Action Center](#) to help you find your officials. Just type in your ZIP Code under the “election center”.
- **Build Relationships with you Elected Officials:**
 - **In-Person Meetings:** Schedule meetings or invite officials to your facility for a tour. Explain how policies impact patient care directly.
 - **Zoom Meetings:** If an in-person is not feasible, arrange virtual meetings to present your concerns.
- **Utilize AWIR Resources:** Leverage AWIR's advocacy resources available on the website and engage with their [VoterVoice program](#) to send letters to your elected officials about relevant issues.

View Your Election Center

Enter your address to view voting resources and your officials & candidates

 

We urgently need your support to ask Virginia Governor Youngkin to veto Virginia House Bill 1724, which seeks to establish a Prescription Drug Affordability Board (PDAB). AWIR opposes this legislation because PDABs can create significant patient access issues by potentially limiting the availability of essential medications, particularly impacting providers who rely on the buy-and-bill system for administering treatments. If the Upper Payment Limit set by the PDAB is lower than the acquisition cost of a drug,

Compose Your Message

• Governor

Subject

Protect Patient Access and Veto HB 1724

Message Body

Please add your own story about this issue to personalize your message

I am writing to urge you to veto House Bill 1724, which seeks to establish a Prescription Drug Affordability Board (PDAB) in Virginia.

These are what the VoterVoice action alert looks like. All you have to do is put in your mailing address in and it automatically sends the letter to your state elected officials. We highly recommend editing the letter with your personal story related to the issue before hitting send.



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Ready for Meetings!

- **Best Practices for Meetings**

- **Be Prepared:** Know your talking points thoroughly. Familiarize yourself with AWIR's priorities and recent legislative developments.
- **Be Respectful and Professional:** Establish a rapport by being courteous to officials and staff.
- **Follow Up:** After a meeting, send a thank-you note and provide any additional information promised.



- **Conversation Strategies:**

- **Do's:**
 - **Listen Actively:** Understand their perspectives on issues and respond with empathy.
 - **Use Data:** Share statistics or personal stories that illustrate the importance of the issues.
 - **Engage on Social Media:** Share relevant content from AWIR and tag your representatives to increase visibility. Take a picture and post it!
- **Don'ts:**
 - **Avoid Medical Jargon:** Use clear, accessible language to ensure your message is understood.
 - **Don't Overwhelm:** Stick to a few key points rather than overwhelming with too much information.



Ready for Meetings!

- **Sample Talking Script**

- “Hello [Official’s Name], I’m [Your Name] from the Association of Women in Rheumatology. Thank you for meeting with us today. I want to discuss how accumulator adjustment programs are impacting patient access to necessary medications. These policies often prevent patients from applying copay assistance towards their deductibles, creating financial barriers. I believe we can work together to support legislation that bans these programs for the benefit of our patients.”



- **Engaging Through Social Media**

- **Share Advocacy Efforts:** Tweet about AWIR initiatives using the hashtags #AWIRAdvocacy and #WomenInRheumatology.
- **Post Informative Content:** Create posts regarding the issues you advocate for and how they affect your community, tagging your officials.
- **Join Online Campaigns:** Participate in AWIR's campaigns, sharing information and encouraging others to engage.



@AWIRgroup



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You are Ready to Advocate!

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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