

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF CHILD & ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRY

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Advocacy Check List for Regional Organizations of AACAP

For AACAP regional organizations (ROCAPs) of any size and strength, including those who are just getting off the ground, or those that have had access to a professional lobbyist for years, there is always more that can be done to effectuate positive change. To proactively engage in any lobbying or advocacy activities, it is essential to create ROCAP policy priorities, have an already established line of communication to engage members, when necessary, strengthen working relationships with key state partners, and develop relationships with lawmakers. The suggested steps below were developed with input from the seasoned physician advocates of AACAP's Advocacy Committee.

Where to Start: Join AACAP's Advocacy Liaison Network

- Select at least one member to serve as an Advocacy Liaison (AL) from your ROCAP;
- Inform AACAP's Government Affairs Department (govaffairs@aacap.org) of any newly selected ALs from your ROCAP and list these people on the Assembly Roll Calls forms distributed by AACAP's Executive Department;
- Integrate the selected AL(s) into the executive committee of your RO, which for some, may take a change to the ROCAP bylaws; and
- Ensure the AL(s) participates in monthly Advocacy Liaison calls to learn advocacy strategies, and about policy trends from other members, which can then be reported back to the full ROCAP membership.

The Basics on Advocacy

- Advocacy is an easy way to engage members in ROCAP activities, use advocacy engagement as an important recruitment tool to attract new or younger members;
- Ensure ROCAP leaders understand the legislative process and why advocating to strengthen child and adolescent psychiatry is so critical to increase visibility, improve public image and the mental health care system in your state;
- Establish ROCAP policy priorities and platforms that inform advocacy efforts and can serve as the basis of developing talking points specific to issues in your state;
- Familiarize yourself with the legislative calendar of the state legislature; know when bills are typically introduced, and how many weeks or months legislation is debated by the legislature and relevant legislative committees in your state;
- Communicate with members on policy matters so your ROCAP is viewed as an engaged ally working to improve mental health care in your state; and
- Educate members about the key state lawmakers who sit on committees with jurisdiction related to health care, physician and non-physician licensure, and any other policy issues important to your ROCAP.

Developed January, 2017

Improve Communication with Members

- Establish a system of regular communication (emails, conference calls, newsletters, etc.) with other ROCAP members to update them on advocacy activities and have an open line of communication easily available when attention is given in your state capital to key legislative priorities that need grassroots response from physicians;
- Hold regular meetings/teleconferences/videoconferences in various settings or regions to encourage broad member participation in regional organization meetings; and
- Ensure a recap of meetings are sent to members with action items to keep members engaged.

Coalition Building

- If not already happening, collaborate with your state psychiatric society, who often have similar legislative priorities—some ROCAPs have an official position on their executive committee for a representative from their state psychiatric society, which the state psychiatric society reciprocates;
- Establish a positive working relationship with your state medical society and ensure CAPs are involved with their legislative activities so issues important to psychiatrists are on their legislative agenda;
- Collaborate with other allied physician organizations (i.e., pediatrics, family physicians, state medical society);
- Establish working relationships with patient advocacy groups in your state or other workgroups that care about children’s mental health;
- Invite leaders from other groups to attend your ROCAP meetings and have a ROCAP representative attend the other group’s meetings; and
- Share information and discuss opportunities to collaborate with coalition partners.

Advocacy Training

- Increase your ROCAP’s effectiveness in advocacy by training members to become strong advocates;
- Establish annual advocacy training to ensure all members are familiar with priority legislative and regulatory activities, key lawmakers, and how to ensure the voices of CAPs are at the table;
- Think about new ways to educate lawmakers about the expertise and unique role of CAPs;
- Organize an advocacy activity to bring members to the state capitol to meet with legislators; and
- Encourage ROCAP members to attend AACAP’s annual Legislative Conference, held each Spring in Washington, DC, where advocacy training is provided.

Strengthening Advocacy Resources

- In addition to establishing policy priorities, ROCAPs are well-situated to write position papers on key state legislative priorities that CAPs have a unique voice to shape;
- Create concise, relevant one-page briefing sheets on any hot topics in your state that members or legislative staff could use;
- Offer to write a letter in support of, or opposition to, introduced or draft legislation;
- Apply for an AACAP Advocacy Collaboration Grant to help fund new advocacy activities within a regional organization (applications are typically due in January of each year);
- Utilize AACAP Government Affairs staff who can assist with establishing legislative priorities and responding to state legislative needs and share with them what resources you use in your state;
- Familiarize yourself with AACAP resources;

- Draft hearing testimony to have on hand to quickly respond to legislative priorities and identify a willing and able CAP that could testify before your state legislator; and
- Members who work at a University should introduce him or herself to the school's government affairs department and inform them about your involvement with your ROCAP and AACAP, and your policy priorities.

Educating Lawmakers

- Educating lawmakers about the role of CAPs is an important function of a ROCAP;
- On behalf of his/her ROCAP, CAPs should meet formally with state elected officials to share policy priorities and talk about the expertise and unique training of CAPs;
- Keep meetings with lawmakers and his or her staff to the relevant points and offer policy solutions, when you have one;
- Remember to follow-up after any meeting to help grow the working relationship with your lawmakers and serve as a resource;
- Formal meetings are not the only way to connect with your lawmakers (i.e. one ROCAP sends annual holiday cards to all state lawmakers to ensure they know the ROCAP welcomes the opportunity to serve as a resource and collaborate on anything related to children's mental health);
- Establish a roundtable with lawmakers to discuss policy priorities, or invite them to site visits to discuss children's mental health;
- State lawmakers are not the only people impacting legislative and regulatory change in your state. It is important to also understand how state agencies, insurance commissioners, boards of medicine, etc., can play a role in the legislative priorities of your ROCAP and develop relationships with key stakeholders in state agencies;
- Work with AACAP's Government Affairs Department to utilize AACAP's grassroots advocacy program that makes writing state lawmakers on any issue incredibly easy; and
- When time is short to have your message heard, AACAP's grassroots advocacy program can also help promote a phone call campaign that includes calling directions and talking points. AACAP's Government Affairs Department can assist with this.

Responding to Efforts to Allow Psychologists to Prescribe

Efforts to grant psychologists prescribing rights have been seen in more than half of all states and are real legislative threats in many states.

- Reach out to AACAP's Government Affairs Department if you think a bill allowing psychologists to prescribe may be introduced in your state;
- Understand who your allies are, and are not, in opposing efforts to allow psychologists to prescribe;
- Make sure there is an organized coalition opposing psychology prescribing legislation that can be contacted if legislation is introduced or advances in your state;
- Become familiar with AACAP's talking points on the dangers to patients of unsafe prescribing;
- Familiarize yourself with the legislative history in your state on any effort around psychology prescribing, as many states have successfully prevented previous psychology prescribing bills from becoming law—which does not guarantee the issue will never reappear;
- Focusing on the training of CAPs and the difference in training of psychologists and psychiatrist is key;
- Explaining the proven solutions to increasing access to quality mental health care is important to debunk the myth that allowing psychologists to prescribe will improve access to quality care;

- Ensure other allied physician groups in your state are aware of your efforts opposing psychologists prescribe rights. All organize medicine should help in this scope of practice debate;
- Have prepared draft testimony that a trained advocate could present, if a hearing is called on a psychology prescribing bill; and
- Implement a strategic media strategy to ensure the voice of CAPs is heard opposing psychology prescribing in your state—with AACAP’s talking points in hand, combined with a CAP’s clinical experiences, a letter to the editor is not difficult to write.