



ACTIVISM FOR **ALL**

BREAST CANCER **ACTION'S**
LEGISLATIVE
TOOLKIT

CONNECTING WITH BREAST CANCER ACTION

As a grassroots organization, Breast Cancer Action's strength is in our members. We exist because of the tens of thousands of people who take action, in ways big and small, to create a world where lives and communities are not threatened by breast cancer.

We thank you for using this toolkit to engage with your legislators and hold them accountable for standing up for women affected by the disease.

We want to work with you to achieve health justice for all women at risk of and living with breast cancer. So we hope you reach out to us before and after you engage with your legislator. Communicating with each other will help us effectively coordinate to ensure meaningful protections are in place for women's health.

Please reach out to us by emailing us at info@bcaction.org or by calling 1-877-2STOPBC / 1-877-278-6722.

Together, we can make a difference in the lives of women at risk or living with breast cancer.

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➤ ABOUT BREAST CANCER ACTION

Breast Cancer Action (BCAction) is not your average breast cancer organization. We're fiercely independent and refuse corporate funding from any company that profits from or contributes to breast cancer. That means we can always put women's health first. We're focused on achieving health justice for all women living with and at risk of breast cancer. Radical and compassionate, we never shy away from the hard truths. We tell it like it is about breast cancer: 40,000 women die of this devastating disease every year, and we don't have nearly enough to show for the billions of dollars raised in the name of breast cancer.

BCAction was founded in 1990 by a handful of women who were living with and dying from breast cancer and who demanded answers about their disease. Today, BCAction is a national grassroots organization with members across the country. Together, we're challenging the status quo and working to address and end the breast cancer epidemic. Our mission is to achieve health justice for all women at risk of and living with breast cancer. We do this work in these ways:

We work to ensure breast cancer screening, diagnostics, and treatment are evidence-based and responsive to women affected by breast cancer—as well as more affordable, more effective, and less toxic than the current status quo.

We work to eliminate root causes of breast cancer—the toxic chemicals in our environment that increase our risk of breast cancer and that may interfere with common breast cancer treatments.

We cut through the noise of pink ribbon culture with our award-winning Think Before You Pink® campaign to tell the hard truths about breast cancer and challenge pinkwashing and hypocrisy in the breast cancer industry.

While the mainstream breast cancer movement remains squarely focused on emphasizing individual risk and individual solutions—such as mammography screening and other “awareness” campaigns—we focus on systemic solutions to address and end the breast cancer epidemic. One of the most important ways we do that is to advocate for people-centered legislative regulations.

To successfully advocate for these regulations, we believe it is necessary to empower people to hold their legislators accountable. This toolkit will guide you through various ways to effectively contact your legislators.



HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

- **The Goal:** This toolkit contains practical guides that can help anyone engage with their federal legislators (Senators and national Representatives) on any topic. But we envision growing a movement of our members who use this toolkit to demand their representatives take a stand for the health of women at risk of and living with breast cancer. The goal of this toolkit is to inspire you and equip you with the tools you need to engage with your legislators about vital breast cancer issues.
- **The Tools:** You can find quick and easy tools to take action on our website that allow you to write, call, and contact your legislators on social media. But this toolkit can help you produce the personal correspondence that will take your activism to the next level.
- **The Order:** We have laid out the toolkit in an escalating order of tactics—from writing a letter to your legislator to calling them out in the media. You do not have to follow this order to effectively engage your legislator. Once you get familiar with your legislator and the tools you can use to contact them, you can make a well-informed decision on the best tactics for you.
- **Working with BCAction:** If you want to contact your legislator about a breast cancer issue we work on as a representative of BCAction, please reach out to us by emailing us at info@bcaction.org or by calling 1-877-2STOPBC / 1-877-278-6722—we want to work with you! We will provide you with specific talking points and other educational materials for the issue. We can also connect you with Community Leaders or other BCAction members in your area who you can work with to contact your legislators.

We are stronger when we raise our voices together.

FIRST STEPS TO CONTACTING YOUR LEGISLATORS



- 1 Find Your Legislators:** The first step to contacting your legislators is finding out who they are! At the national level in the United States, you have two Senators and one Representative. **Click these links¹** to find your federal Senators and Representatives. You also have state and local legislators, and can use this toolkit to help contact them. We advise that you focus on contacting *your* legislators because it is their job to represent you as one of their constituents, and they are more likely to be responsive.
- 2 Learn More about Your Legislator:** Once you know who your legislators are, search for their websites on the internet, which end in .gov. There, you can find a lot of important information, from simple contact information to where they stand on issues. You can also find out if your legislator sits on a committee that is working on an issue you care about.
- 3 Prepare Your "Ask" to Your Legislator:** Articulate a clear "ask," or request, for your legislator. It is important to be specific when requesting action from legislators so that you can hold them accountable if they do not do what you ask, and thank them when they do. Typically, people ask their legislators to support or oppose a bill. But you can also ask your legislator to take other actions, like co-sponsor a bill, author a bill, introduce a bill, sign a pledge, and sign a letter. You can find bill information using **this search tool²**. Use the bill number in your communications whenever possible. BCAction articulates clear asks on the legislative issues we work on, so contact us for them!

¹ <http://whoismyrepresentative.com>

² <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/browse>

WRITING TO YOUR LEGISLATORS

Writing to your legislator is a great first way to begin communicating with them about the issue you want them to take action on. A letter is an accessible tool that allows you to educate your legislator on the issue and explain to them why it is important to you. You can also write your legislator via email using the information you found in step 2 on the previous page. The format of the letter is the same.

● **Date Your Letter:** Date your letter at the top and address your legislator by using “The Honorable” in front of their full name.

For example:

*Today's date
The Honorable [legislator's full name]
Street Address
City, State, Zip*

Note that national legislators have offices in Washington, D.C., as well as in the states/districts they represent. You can find these addresses on their website. It is best to send your letter to your legislator’s office nearest you first, but consider sending your letter to several of their offices.

● **Write Your Letter:** Briefly begin with who you are, that you are their constituent, and what you are asking them to do. Then explain why they should do what you’re asking, making sure to talk about your personal experiences. End by restating what you are asking them to do and then also ask for a response. Keep your letter to one page.

Here is an example:

My name is Mary Moore and I am your constituent. I am writing to urge you to oppose the American Health Care Act (H.R. 1628). As someone who was recently diagnosed with breast cancer, I need access to affordable life-saving healthcare. But this bill would strip healthcare away from millions of people, including me. ... Again, I urge you to oppose the American Health Care Act and I am looking forward to your response.

● **Write Your Contact Info:** Write your return address at the bottom of the letter, along with any other way you would like to be reached.

● **Receiving a Response:** Be prepared for your legislator’s office to respond with a generalized letter. This does not mean that it was not worth it to write, but be sure to follow up until you get a commitment. This might mean reaching out in another way.



CALLING YOUR LEGISLATORS

Calling your legislator is an effective way to reach them and pressure them on urgent matters—for example, if a bill you oppose is up for a vote in a few days. It is also a good follow-up after you write a letter because it continues to put pressure on the legislator's office to respond to your concerns—especially if you reach someone in the office.

Find Your Legislator's Number: You can reach your federal Senators' and Representatives' offices by calling the U.S. Capitol switchboard at (202)-224-3121 or (202)-225-3121. When you call this number, an operator will pick up the line and wait for you to say the legislator's office you want to be connected to. You can also find the phone numbers for specific legislators' offices on their website.

Prepare for the Call: Before calling, you may want to write a sample script, or just practice what you plan to say out loud. Be prepared to say who you are, that you are their constituent, and what you are asking them to do. Briefly explain why they should do what you ask, making sure to talk about your personal experiences. Plan to ask for a response.

Here is an example:

My name is Ellen Thompson and I am a constituent of Representative Lee. I am calling to urge Representative Lee to oppose the American Health Care Act (H.R. 1628). As someone whose sister was diagnosed with breast cancer this year, this issue is really important to me because she needs access to affordable life-saving healthcare. But this bill would strip healthcare away from millions of people, including me. Will Representative Lee vote "no" on the American Health Care Act, bill number H.R. 1628?

Call Your Legislator: Once you are connected to their office, know that you will not be speaking directly to your legislator. Instead, ask if you can speak to the staffer for the subject about which you're calling, for example, healthcare or environment. You may speak with a legislative staffer or leave a voicemail. The staffer will likely listen and note what you are saying, but will rarely engage in conversation. Their job is to report to the legislator their constituents' views. They may, however, be able to provide insight into the legislator's position and feedback they are receiving from other constituents.

Get a Response: If you don't hear back from your legislator's office with a response, follow up with another call—especially if your first call went to voicemail—or consider calling the legislator's other offices.



CONTACTING YOUR LEGISLATORS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a good public platform to use to hold legislators accountable because their response, or lack thereof, is visible to everyone. If your legislator has not responded to you or are dragging their feet, you can use social media to amplify your pressure. All 100 Senators and nearly all Representatives have a Twitter account, and many also have a Facebook page.

- **Find Your Legislator on Social Media:** To find your legislator on social media, it is easiest to search for them in the search bar on your chosen social media site. Social media contact information is also usually available on the homepages of legislators' websites. Look for social media icons and click on them to go directly to the corresponding social media page of that legislator.
- **Tweet at Your Legislator:** Using Twitter to contact your legislator is the most effective way to reach them on social media. Some legislators even manage their own pages and will see your message themselves. Here are some tips for effective tweets:

Use their "Twitter handle" in your post, which you could find under the legislator's name on their Twitter page. It begins with the "@" symbol. When you use their handle in your tweet, a notification will appear on your legislator's page. If you are starting your tweet with their Twitter handle, use a period before the Twitter handle so your message shows up in your followers' feed.

Say that you are a constituent in your post. Consider citing your district number.

Make your ask, and include a bill number if there is one.

Include a popular hashtag, so it shows up in a search for that hashtag.

Tag other people or organizations that care about the issue.

Tell your legislators you have been in contact with them, if applicable.

When possible, include links or photos.

CONTACTING YOUR LEGISLATORS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

- **Post on Your Legislator's Facebook Page:** You can also follow your legislators on Facebook, and post a comment on their posts or tag them in yours. Here are some tips for effective Facebook posts:

If you can find a post on your legislator's Facebook page relevant to your issue, comment on that post.

You can also write your own post and tag them on Facebook by typing "@" and then start typing their name. Click on their official Facebook page. *

Facebook is a great platform for links, so be sure to link to more information if possible.

* Unless your privacy settings are set to public, legislators and others outside of your network will not be able to see these posts.

Here are some examples:





U.S. SENATOR
BARBARA MYERS



BREAST
CANCER
ACTION





U.S. SENATOR
BARBARA BOXER

MEETING WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS

Meeting with your legislator or a member of their staff is perhaps the best way to ensure that your legislator hears your concerns. Amidst the numerous emails and calls legislators receive, a face-to-face connection gives you the time you need to have a thorough conversation with your legislator about your issue and answer any questions they may have. Consider meeting with your legislator whenever there is an issue very important to you or to keep up the pressure after having already contacted your legislator another way.

BEFORE THE MEETING

SCHEDULING

- **Find Out Where Your Legislator Is:** Check the legislative calendar to know where your legislator will be and make it easier to schedule a meeting before, after or during relevant legislative events. As a constituent, you have the option of meeting with your legislator in your district or in Washington, D.C. Different legislators have different preferences, but as a general rule they have more time to devote to constituent visits when they are in their hometown.
- **Learn About the Legislative Process:** If you are meeting with your legislator about a bill, get familiar with the legislative process to make your visit more impactful. Every bill needs to be introduced in the House and the Senate, go through a committee, and then have both a full House and Senate vote before going to the president's desk. If possible, tailor your ask to your legislator's position on committees. For example, if your legislator is a chair of a committee, asking them to place a bill before the committee for a markup might determine whether or not it ever even makes it to a floor. Once a bill has moved out of committee and to the floor for a vote, every legislator's vote matters so target your legislator to vote yes or no.

MEETING WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS

- **Make the Appointment:** Some legislators have an online meeting request form on their website that you can fill out or, better yet, you can call the office of your legislator where you would like to meet and ask to speak to the scheduler. Legislators have limited time to meet with constituents, so scheduling about two to six weeks in advance is crucial. Be clear about the topics you would like to address and how much time you will need to do it. Do not ask for more than 30 minutes and be prepared to only get 10 minutes.

Here is an example:

Hello, my name is Linda Gonzalez and I am a constituent of Representative Smith. I am calling to schedule a meeting with him while he is in town to discuss the American Health Care Act. As a breast cancer patient, this issue is very important to me because I need access to affordable health care, and I would like to talk with Representative Smith in-person about how the American Health Care Act would negatively affect me and other women with breast cancer. I am available to meet when he is scheduled to be in this office, between the times of 9am-5pm Monday through Wednesday during the week of April 10.

- **Confirm Your Visit:** A week before your visit, call to confirm.

PREPARING

- **Research:** Make sure you do your homework on the issue you are meeting with your legislator or their aides about. While your personal story is the most important tool in your toolkit, it is more powerful when supported with additional information, such as facts, statistics and news articles.
- **Prepare Answers to Anticipated Questions:** Your legislator or their staffer will likely have questions, and they might not be familiar with your issue. While you don't have to be an expert on the subject, try to anticipate questions and have answers ready. It's okay to admit when you don't know the answer to something, but promise to follow up with more information. Feel free to refer them to Breast Cancer Action.
- **Connect the Issue to Your Community:** If applicable, think about the local angle and how your issue will impact your community (and therefore your legislator's district and voters).
- **Prepare Materials to Leave Behind:** Look on BCAction's website for our educational materials and contact us for additional materials we may have.

MEETING WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS

- **Consider Organizing a Group to Meet with your Legislator:** Going with a group increases the chances that you will meet with the actual legislator. At least one of you must reside in that legislator's district. A diverse group sends the message that the issue is relevant to several sections of the voting population. For example, if you were advocating for a ban on a certain chemical linked to breast cancer, having an activist, scientist and nurse at the legislative meeting would make for an exceptionally strong group. But going with friends and colleagues who also care about the issue also makes your visit stronger. After all, there is power in numbers. Coordinate with your group to designate point people for the different angles of the issue.
- **Practice:** Do a dry run to make sure you have time to tell your legislator how this issue personally affects you, discuss key points of the issue, answer questions, and directly ask your legislator to commit to taking action on your issue by doing whatever you are asking them to do (support a bill, introduce a bill, etc.). Practice being concise and covering everything in no more than 10 minutes. Make a friend listen to your pitch, and then ask them what they remember from it. They should remember your key points!

DURING THE MEETING

- **Prepare to Meet with a Staffer:** More often than not you will be meeting with a legislative staffer, not the legislator themselves. Staffers have the ears of their legislators and they can prioritize your concerns on the legislator's agenda. They may even be more familiar with your issue than the legislators themselves.
- **Start with Small Talk:** Try to engage with your legislator or their staffer on a personal level as you are getting settled in the meeting, but keep it very short to avoid wasting your meeting time. Consider thanking them for their work on another issue you care about.
- **Talk about Your Issue:** Briefly talk about your issue's importance to you personally, and the impact it has on your state or district. If your legislator or their staffer steers the conversation off-topic, redirect the conversation gently, but firmly.
- **Take Questions:** Answer questions when you are able to, but remember it is also okay to say you do not know. Promise to follow up with the requested information.

MEETING WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS

- **Ask for a Commitment:** Formally ask your legislator to support your policy position and do not leave without a commitment (even if it is a commitment not to do what you asked).
- **Exchange Contact Information:** Before you leave, hand them the prepared materials on your issue and reiterate your intention to send them any other requested materials or answers to questions you did not know. Leave them your contact information and ask them for theirs. Thank them for their time.

○ AFTER THE MEETING

- **Document the Meeting:** Take time right after the meeting to write down your impressions and new information you gained about your legislator's position or concerns.
- **Follow Up:** Contact the legislator or staffer you met with to thank them for their time. Make sure to send them any additional information you promised.
- **Post about It on Social Media:** Spread the word about your legislator's promise to you (including if they said they were not going to do what you want them to!)
- **Fostering Relationships:** Do not let it end there. Fostering relationships with legislators and their staff is a vital tool for an activist. Consider occasionally sending them any new information about your issue that you encounter to start a dialogue.





ENGAGING YOUR LEGISLATOR AT A TOWN HALL

Town halls are public events that legislators hold in cities or states they represent to hear from constituents. Engaging with your legislator at a town hall is great for ensuring you get to speak with your actual legislator about your issue. Attending a town hall also takes less preparation time than trying to schedule and set up a meeting at your legislator's office. While you will not have as much time to discuss your issue with your legislator as you would in a meeting, the benefit to a town hall event is that it is public. This means your legislator is being held accountable by you, fellow constituents, and the media.

ENGAGING YOUR LEGISLATORS AT A TOWNHALL

- **Find Out When Your Legislator Will Be Holding their Next Town Hall Meeting:** You can do this by looking on their website (some have a calendar of events), visiting the Town Hall Project's website, or calling your legislator's office directly. Ask if there is a way you can get notified of your legislator's upcoming public events. Some legislators send out email notifications if you sign up for their email list.
- **Prepare a Question:** Knowing if your legislator has a stance on the issue you care about will help tailor your question. State how the issue at hand affects you and your community, and then ask your legislator to commit themselves to taking action in support of you.

Here is an example:

As someone with breast cancer, I know that I and other women with the disease need access to affordable healthcare. But the American Health Care Act would strip healthcare away from millions of people. You have not gone on record opposing this legislation. Will you commit right now to voting no on the American Health Care Act, bill number H.R. 1628, to protect me and other breast cancer patients like me?

- **Contact Your Local Press:** Alert them to the town hall. You can also explain why you are attending so they know there will be a good story to tell.
- **Consider Organizing a Group:** This will help show a collective consensus about your concerns. Prepare a list of possible questions to ask on the issue that you will give the group before the meeting and plan to support each other when one of you is asking a question.
- **Find Out How to Ask a Question:** Arrive to the meeting early and find out how they are taking questions. For example, they may call on people who raise their hand, have people stand in a line, or ask people to submit cards with their names, addresses, and other contact information. Be sure to plan accordingly to get called on for a question.
- **Ask a Question:** If you get called on to ask a question, and your legislator fails to answer it, persistently press until you get an answer.
- **Document the Conversation:** It is best to have someone video-record your entire exchange with your legislator. Some legislators restrict video and audio recordings at their town halls, so take notes for your records.

The New Mammogram Guidelines

The Washington Post

Breast cancer walks are a terrible way to fight breast cancer

theguardian

Why are makeup companies able to give breast cancer patients toxic products?

HUFFPOST

THE BLOG 10/30/2015 09:39 am ET | Updated Nov 03, 2015

Why the American Cancer Society Must Take a Stronger Stand on Cancer Prevention



PRESSURING YOUR LEGISLATOR IN THE MEDIA

Just because you have been contacting your legislator about your issue, it does not mean they will act in the way you want them to—or act at all. Sometimes, you may need to increase public pressure on them. Writing in the media is a great tactic for making sure your legislator really understands how important the issue is. Legislators truly care about what the media publishes about them because it can easily influence many of their constituents—the people who vote to keep them in a job!

PRESSURING YOUR LEGISLATOR IN THE MEDIA

- **Decide on Whether You Want to Write a Letter to the Editor or an Op-Ed:** Letters to the editor are typically 150 to 300 words long and often address a controversial issue, challenge a commonly held belief or, most commonly, refute an opinion presented in another letter or recently published article in the same newspaper. If you want to write something longer that gives you the space to lay out a persuasive argument, choose an op-ed.
- **If Possible, Strategically Time Your Submission:** Media submissions that are likely to get published usually address a current or controversial issue. For example, a submission about a specific legislation is more likely to be published right before a big vote than two weeks after one. If you are writing in response to an article or letter, it is important to submit your piece no more than two or three days after that piece was published.
- **Pick Your Publication:** Think about which local, state, or national publications would effectively put pressure on your legislator. While you are more likely to get published in a local publication than a national one, that does not mean you should not try to get your piece in larger outlets. But remember, even publishing a piece in the local paper is powerful.
- **Review Guidelines Before Writing:** Review the guidelines for the publication or publications you selected for your submission. Guidelines for length, form and content will vary from paper to paper, and can usually be found on the publication's website.
- **Clearly State Your Point in the First Sentence:** If you are writing a letter to the editor and responding to a piece, say so.

Here is an example of an opening sentence:

As a woman living with breast cancer, I was disappointed by the editorial ("Rep. Ryan's Bill Allows More Healthcare Choice," April 28) which praised him for introducing the American Health Care Act, which would ultimately take millions of people's healthcare away.

- **Explain the Reasons for Your Position:** Remember, you are expressing your opinion, so the best evidence to include is the same evidence that convinced you to have that opinion. Personal stories, statistics, surveys, research and recent events are all evidence you can use to support your position.

PRESSURING YOUR LEGISLATOR IN THE MEDIA

- **Acknowledge the Other Side:** Include a “concession statement” or paragraph, especially if you are writing an op-ed, to preempt your potential critics by acknowledging counter-arguments.

Here is an example:

Proponents of the American Health Care Act say that the bill would give people more freedom by allowing them to decide if they want to purchase health insurance or not. But the reality is, health insurance only works when everyone pays their part to keep insurance affordable for everyone. And every one of us is going to need healthcare at some point in our lives. Access to affordable healthcare can truly mean life or death for patients.

- **Put Your “Ask” in the Last Sentence of What You Are Writing:**

Here is an example:

If Congressman Ryan truly cares about breast cancer patients, he should champion universal healthcare, so that everyone has access to affordable, life-saving care.

- **Edit Your Letter:** Make sure you are not over your word limit. Consider having another person read over your letter for grammar and clarity.
- **Submit Your Letter:** Send your letter in via the publication’s preferred method (usually email). If your letter is selected to be published, the paper may edit it for space, clarity, civility and accuracy. Do not be discouraged if your letter is not published. Follow up with the publication. Note that for op-eds, most papers request that you only submit to one publication at a time. If possible, consider re-working it and sending it to another publication.



The Breast Cancer Action staff would like to thank everyone who worked on this toolkit and all of the BCAction Community Leaders, Board members, and volunteers who provided invaluable feedback along the way.

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