



Oakland Community
Health Network

Developmental Disabilities • Mental Health • Substance Recovery



Advocacy Toolkit

Oakland Community Health Network (OCHN)

Inspire Hope, Empower People, & Strengthen Communities

Updated 10/2024

What is advocacy and how does it impact you?

Advocacy is the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal - for something or someone. Advocating is an act of sharing your voice on issues that are important to you. Anyone can be an advocate for any cause or topic they are passionate about. Advocating can help to educate, empower, and makes change for yourself, as well as the others around you.

Advocating can look like informing a family member on why it is important to recycle or posting an informative article on social media. Other ways include staying involved in issues within your community by attending coffee hours with legislature, reading current bills in the State Level and Federal Government, writing, emailing, or calling legislature about the approval or disapproval of current Bills being reviewed.

Through participation in these actions, many changes can be made locally, within your state or country. Public policy, laws, and budgets are influenced through advocacy. Your voice matters and can be heard, listened to, and acknowledged.

Why do we need to advocate?

We need to advocate as new information comes out about things we care about and ways we can address those. Using facts to build relationships with and educate government officials and community members on important public issues. Advocating can dismiss negative perspectives, stereotypes, ideas, or misinformation out there that hold back others. Stigma is an important word related to this topic and is a reason to advocate. According to the American Psychiatric Association, stigma can be seen in three ways; public stigma, self-stigma and structural stigma.¹

- **Public stigma:** This involves the negative or discriminatory attitudes individuals may have regarding mental illness.
- **Self-stigma:** The negative attitudes that people with mental illness may have regarding their own condition.
- **Structural stigma:** Involves policies of government and private organizations that can intentionally or unintentionally constrain opportunities and / or resources for individuals with mental illness.

By advocating, we can help break these stigmas and bring about change for a better world around us all.

How to Advocate?

This guide will present an overview on how to advocate for issues that are important to you. Below you will find examples of topics that you might find important. We will identify what is important to you and then explore steps you can take to become more involved. Help empower yourself, others, and potentially find a new purpose for your recovery journey.

Causes you could advocate for:

- Substance Use Disorders
- Mental Health
- Veterans
- Endangered Animals
- Healthcare
- Education
- Maternal Health
- Suicide Prevention
- Funding Research
- Criminal Justice



¹Singhal, N. (2024, March). Stigma, prejudice and discrimination against people with mental illness. American Psychiatric Association. <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/stigma-and-discrimination>

Activity #1

Looking at this list of causes, what are causes you relate to? Why are these important to you?

Name 2-5 other issues or causes you would like to learn how to advocate for.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Now that you have identified areas of concern related to you that you would like to advocate more for, we will now identify how to advocate for those topics.

10 Ways You Can Advocate for Yourself and Your Community

1. Go to your local library and research a topic you care about
2. Sign up for emails from local organizations related to your cause
3. Attend local Coffee Hours with your House Representative or Senator
4. Have an open, assertive and informative conversation with your friends and family on the topic of concern
5. Write to your Legislatures
6. Vote
7. Participate in an anti-stigma campaign such as Love, Your Mind, Stop Stigma Together, etc.
8. Write a letter to the Editor at a local newspaper or news station
9. Attend local Board meetings (school, town, etc.)
10. Stay current with news outlets that are more neutral by reading articles of current affairs within your community and worldwide

Learn who your Representatives and Senators are:

Legislative Branch of Government for the United States

The Legislative Branch is one of three branches of the United States government. This is Congress. One of the roles of the Senators and House of Representatives is to create laws, and they get in their roles by your vote. To learn more about Congress, you can visit www.congress.gov.

In the United States, there are 100 Senators. Each State has 2 that are voted on every 6 years. To find who your Senators are, you can visit www.senate.gov/senators/senators-contact.htm.

In the United States, there are 435 Representatives that have the power to vote in the House of Representatives. Each State has their number based on their population. In Michigan, we have 13 districts with a Representative for each one and are voted on every 4 years. You can learn who your Representative is by visiting: www.house.gov/representatives.

Legislative Branch of Government for the State of Michigan

The State of Michigan Legislative Branch is set similarly to the Nation's. There is a Senate along with a House of Representatives. The State is divided into different districts. There are a set of districts for Michigan Senators and for Michigan House of Representatives based on the population sizes.

For the State of Michigan, there are 38 Senators that are elected by those who are the in their district every 4 years. To learn who your Senator is and how to contact them you can visit www.senate.michigan.gov.

In the House of Representatives for Michigan, there are 110 Representatives that are elected by members of their district. This is done every 2 years on even years. To learn who your Representative is and how to contact them, you can visit www.house.mi.gov.



Activity #2

Using the information on the previous page, please identify the following:

Senators (Federal)

Name:

Email:

Number:

Address:

Name:

Email:

Number:

Address:

House of Representatives (Federal)

District:

Name:

Email:

Number:

Address:

Senator (Michigan)

District:

Name:

Email:

Number:

Address:

House of Representative (Michigan)

District:

Name:

Email:

Number:

Address:

Other Important Members in Congress:

There are other congress people you may want to contact regarding your areas of concern and how they impact you, your family, your community and beyond. To see more of your local elected officials and their contact information, visit www.usa.gov/elected-officials.

What is a Bill and How to find them?

When a member of congress, either at the State or Federal level, want to propose a new law or change one, they create a Bill. There are many steps a Bill needs to go through before it becomes law. This means there is time for you to advocate to encourage this Bill to be passed into law OR advocate for it to not.

To learn more about what is currently being reviewed by the Federal Congress you can go to www.congress.gov. Here you can research specific Bills, Committees, and items you may want to know how your Legislature supports or does not. You can see live streams of Congressional Sessions, reports, budgets, etc.

To learn more about what is currently being reviewed by the State of Michigan's Congress you can go to www.legislature.mi.gov. Here you can research specific Bills, Committees, and items you may want to know how your Legislature supports or does not. You can even sign up to receive emails from Committees that interest you to stay current on topics you care about.

Activity #3

What are 1-3 Committees that interest you and why?

What are 1-3 Bills that interest you and why?

How to write a letter/email to your Congressperson

It is important to know what a Bill is and how to find them as they can become laws that impact your community. To advocate for/against a Bill, many people call, email or write letters to their Congresspeople. It is important to personalize all letters, emails or calls to show WHY this issue is important to you, how it impacts you, your family and/or community and how you would like your Congressperson to make a difference.

TEMPLATE Letter Or Email

Your name

Address

Date

The Honorable [Name of Congress Person]

Their Address

Their Email

Subject: Bill Name and Number or Topic of Concern

Dear [Congress Person Name],

Introduce yourself and how you are a member of their voting district. Maybe the district you are from, address, etc.

Why are you writing to them? Identify the issue that is of concern, how you learned of it and if there is a Bill related, the name and number of the bill. Identify if you support or do not support and why. What impact would this have on you and your community?

Ask for a return response. What do they plan to do or how do they plan to address the concern you have?

End the letter with a thank you

Signature

Activity #4

Write a draft letter, email or script for a phone call to one of your identified Congresspeople either at a Federal or State level.

How to register to vote

To register to vote in Michigan, you must be:

- A Michigan resident (at the time you register) and a resident of your current city / township for at least 30 days at election time
- A United States citizen
- At least 18 years old (at the time you vote)
- Not currently serving a sentence in jail or prison.

To register to vote you can complete the form online, in person or by mail if it is 15 days or more before the election. If you register in 14 days or less, you have to go to your local Clerk's office with proof of residency. To find the form you can go to your local Clerk's office, complete the registry when you renew or obtain your license or ID at your local Secretary of State's office or go online to www.mvic.sos.state.mi.us.

How to vote

In person:

Once you register to vote, you will receive a voter's registration card in the mail. This will tell you where to vote in person. Voting polls open at 7am and if you are in line by 8pm on election day, you still hold the right to vote. If you are unsure where to vote, you can call your local Clerk's office or visit their website.

On the day of an election, you will go to your identified poll and follow the signs on where to sign in to vote. Standing in line is common. It is asked when you arrive at your polling location to have your ID when you sign in. If you do not, you will be asked to complete an attestation form. You will then wait in line and receive your ballot. You will complete your ballot in space where there is privacy, so your responses are not seen. Once completed, a poll worker will show you where to submit your ballot. Each city/county's voting system can be different, but this is a general overview of what to expect.

Note: If you have a disability or disabilities, and need assistance with voting, help is available. The Voter Assist Terminal is used for the privacy and accessibility of voters with a disability or disabilities. Please tell an election worker if you need to use the Voter Assist Terminal.

Another thing to expect is there may be people out front of the polling location with information on topics trying to convince you to vote one way or another. There are rules where they are allowed to be within so many feet of a polling location. You do not have to interact with these people and can continue to walk into your polling location.

Absentee ballot:

You can apply in person or online for an absentee ballot. You do not have to have a reason to complete an absentee ballot. It is recommended if applying online to do so at least 2 weeks before the election. For election year 2024, online applications begin in August 2024. These need to be completed the Friday before the election date.

Once the application is completed, your absentee ballot needs to be delivered in person or by mail by 8pm on election day.

By using the resources mentioned, identify your polling location.

My polling location is:



Michigan Voting Resources:

The State of Michigan Website: www.michigan.gov/vote

Find your local clerk and polling location, as well as watch a video about voting equipment, how to register, and much more.

The League of Women Voters of Michigan: www.lwvmi.org

Educate yourself about the important of voting issues and learn more about voting.

Oakland County Clerk: www.oakgov.com/clerkrod

Register to vote and find your polling location. The Oakland County Clerk's office is located at 1200 N Telegraph Road, Building 32 E, Pontiac, MI (888) 350-0900.

Advocate TODAY

Throughout each section you have learned different what advocacy is, how to advocate and who you can advocate to and what you can advocate about. We more specifically about advocating within our system of democracy by learning about elected officials in our State and Nation, how to contact them and how to vote.

Reviewing everything you have learned in this toolkit, and the causes you have found to be important, what are 1-3 ways you can begin to advocate today?

1.

2.

3.

