Working with State Legislatures
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National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)

National membership organization:

- 7,382 legislators
- 3 gazillion legislative staff
- Offices in Denver and Washington, D.C.

Goals:

- To improve the quality & effectiveness of state legislatures
- To promote policy innovation and communication among state legislatures
- To ensure states a strong, cohesive voice in the federal system
50 Examples of a State Legislature

- **If you’ve seen one legislature—you’ve seen one legislature!**
- **Variety of different powers, rules, political make-up, etc.**
  - California
    - Full-time job, members earn >$100,000 year
    - Large staff (non-partisan, partisan, personal)
  - Wyoming
    - 40-day general session, 20-day budget session
    - Members earn $150 day for short time
    - No personal staff; few full-time professional staff
What does Your State Legislature Look Like?

- 15 states have term limits
- Largest chamber: New Hampshire House--400 members
- Smallest chamber: Alaska Senate--20 members
- Nebraska has the nation's only bicameral, non-partisan legislature
Red, White and Blue Legislatures

- **RED**: Full-time, well-paid, large staff
- **WHITE**: Hybrid
- **BLUE**: Part-time, low pay, small staff
State Legislatures Post-Election 2008

- Republican-14
- Democrat-27
- Split-8
- Nonpartisan-1
Governor's Party Post-Election 2008

- Democrat: 29 states
- Republican: 21 states
State Government Post-Election 2008

- Red: Republican-9
- Blue: Democrat-17
- Orange: Split-24
Legislators Are Generalists

- Dozens of topics: A to Z
- Hundreds of bills
- Can’t be experts in all
- **Good News:** Most Legislators see themselves as **Students**

- Agriculture
- Corrections
- Education
- **Health**
- Housing
- Human Services
- Labor
- Transportation
- Zoning . . .
Health Issues by the Dozens
(… and dozens)

- Medicaid
- Insurance/mg’d care
- Pharmaceuticals
- Long-term Care
- Health disparities
- Uninsured
- Health professions
- Health Facilities
- Environmental
- Public health
- CHIP
- Prenatal Care
- Emergency services
- Nutrition
- Oral health
- Injury prevention
- Mental Health
- Disabilities
- Substance Abuse
- etc. ...
Overload!

“Going through all this information we have here is kind of like trying to drink from a fire hydrant.” Colo. Rep. Mark Paschall

“My seatmate told me this was a bad bill. I was going to vote no on it until I realized it was my own bill.” Colo. Sen. Ray Powers
2009 Legislative Update
Some Child/Teen Injury Prevention Issues Considered
(Current March 2009)

- Shaken Baby: 6 states (7 bills)
- Child Passenger Protection: 27 states (43 bills)
- Teen Driving: 33 states (131 bills)
- Suicide Prevention: 6 states (7 bills)
- Bullying/Intimidation/Harassment: 3 states (3 bills)
- Teen Dating Violence (prevention and intervention): 8 states (10 bills)
If That's Not Enough…Along Comes the Budget!

Edvard Munch: *The Scream* 1893 (National Gallery of Norway)
FY 2009 Highest Budget Gaps as a Percentage of General Fund Budget

Source: NCSL survey of state legislative fiscal offices, April 2009.

- Not applicable, n = 7
- 5% to 9.9%, n = 13
- 1% to 4.9%, n = 9
- Less than 1%, n = 2
- More than 10% = 20

Legend:
- Less than 1%, n = 2
- 1% to 4.9%, n = 9
- 5% to 9.9%, n = 13
- More than 10% = 20
- Not applicable, n = 7
Competing for Legislators' Attention

A BLIP ON THE POLITICAL RADAR SCREEN
Childhood Injury Prevention
Your Role: Be the "Blip" Enlarger!

Educate the Educators
Raise Awareness
Frame the Discussion
Provide Information & Resources
Network with Others
Educate the Educators

(Be the "blip" enlarger, not the advocate!)

- 15 states have term limits
- Approx. 20% of legislators are NEW each election
- New staff (or newly assigned committee duties)
- Being "green" affects:
  - Institutional memory
  - Complex program understanding
  - Depth of issue knowledge
- **Continually educating** legislators and their staff about adolescent health issues is crucial

**THEREFORE:**

- Befriend your agency's government relations person
- Prioritize!
- Make suggestions:
  - What are the "hot" issues?
  - New, important information
  - What do newbies need to know?
- Let them know what information you have and what you can get
- They'll start coming to you!
Raise Awareness

Make the information you have known to:

- Your agency
- Other agencies
- Professional membership groups
- Area or related non-profits
- Community organizations
- Media
Frame the Discussion

- **Craft message to the times**
  (did we mention the budget?!)  
  Example: preventing motor vehicle crashes offers huge cost savings to states

- **Make the message relevant**
  (did we mention the budget?!)  
  Example: strengthening GDL laws very inexpensive; preventing motor vehicle injuries/deaths offers huge cost savings

- **Appeal to the parent in people**

- **Humanize the issue**
Provide Information and Resources

- Give key info to people who CAN advocate
- K.I.S.S. (keep it simple stupid)
- Be responsive: when asked for information, respond quickly, make the info timely, easy to understand (no jargon!)
- Be accessible for follow-up questions
- Be the EXPERTS you are!
Network with Others

- Don't make political enemies
- Find common ground
  - See the “injury prevention” in everything!
- Make unusual friends, unlikely partners
  - E.g., Media
  - Take advantage of PR opportunities
  - Personal interest stories: focus on *success stories*
  - Release new data, evidence
You Tell Us

What are your success stories?
Why was it a successful method?
What barriers have you faced?
What information would still be helpful?
Thank You!

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