MISSION

The Iowa Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council) will work to create change with and for persons with developmental disabilities so they can live, work, learn and play in the community of their choosing.

Our purpose is to assure that individuals with developmental disabilities and their families participate in the design of and have access to needed community services, individualized supports and other forms of assistance that promote self-determination, independence, productivity and integration and inclusion in all parts of community life. We achieve this through engaging in advocacy, capacity building and system change activities.

We envision an Iowa where all people with developmental disabilities and their families are fully included in communities they choose.

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ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit provides helpful information to prepare you to be an effective advocate. It will assist you in making your voice heard in your community and with local, state and federal officials.

Remember, the best time to start advocating is when your legislators are in their hometowns. The information and tools in this book can be used regardless of where you meet with your legislators.

WHEN ADVOCATING FOR ISSUES YOU FEEL STRONGLY ABOUT:

- **Your opinion matters.** This is your government, and the process is better because you are involved.

- **You can do it.** When you are at the Capitol, you can be impressed by the building and the history but you do not need to be nervous when speaking to your elected official. Their job is to represent you. The only way they can do that is if you tell them what’s on your mind.

- **Voters and citizens can have a voice and make a difference.** Lobbying isn’t just for professionals and insiders.

- **Advocacy makes sure that important issues are not forgotten.** Your representatives are making decisions on hundreds of issues.

- **There are endless ways to advocate.** In addition to face-to-face meetings, use mail, email, social media and your local newspaper to be heard.

- **Relationships are very important.** Follow up your face-to-face meetings with continued contact, like personal notes or emails. Have a goal of building a long-term relationship.

- **Elected officials need you!** Each day they are pressured to make important decisions, and they could use your encouragement and support.

Your elected official’s job is to represent **YOU**.

The only way they can do that is if you tell them what’s on **YOUR MIND**.
GUIDE TO THE IOWA LEGISLATURE

The Guide to the Iowa Legislature combines the information advocates need into a single, user-friendly resource. This guide is available at no cost to people receiving infoNET. To subscribe, register with the DD Council network at infonetiowa.org.
6 STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY

It is important to prepare before you talk to your legislators.

1. KNOW YOUR LEGISLATORS
   - Visit the legislative website at legis.iowa.gov or ask the DD Council for help.
   - Contact your county auditor and/or the Secretary of State’s office at sos.iowa.gov.
   - Connect on social media.
   - Sign up for your legislators’ newsletters.
   - Attend your legislators’ local events, listed here: infonetiowa.org/events/#category-3.

2. IDENTIFY YOUR ISSUE
   - What do you want? Define the problem and focus on the solution.
   - Be willing to compromise.
   - Know the issue and gather facts.
   - Learn the legislative process.

3. DEVELOP YOUR MESSAGE
   - Use the message worksheet included on page 8 to help develop your message before talking to legislators.
   - You should:
     ◦ State the issue and offer a solution.
     ◦ Share a personal story on the issue.
     ◦ Ask for help.
     ◦ Don’t make it political.
     ◦ Keep it short and simple.
     ◦ Be polite. Say thank you!
     ◦ Always follow up.

Contact the Iowa DD Council for more ideas and grant opportunities.
6 STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY

It is important to prepare before you talk to your legislators.

4 BUILD SUPPORT FOR YOUR ISSUE

- Who else supports your issue?
- Determine who can help you (for example, city/county officials, businesses, community organizations, other elected officials, media).
  - Work as a group — strength in numbers.
  - Consider town halls and other public events to get your message out.
  - Join organizations friendly to your cause.
  - Support candidates or elected officials who support you.
  - Don’t make enemies, you may need them in the future.

5 GET YOUR MESSAGE OUT

- Invite your legislators to a community event or a fundraiser.
- Write letters, emails and social media messages. Make calls.
- Attend city council and county supervisor board meetings.
- Make appointments to visit with your elected officials.
- Visit your state capitol.
- Write a letter to the editor in your local or state newspaper.
  - To submit a letter to the Des Moines Register, go to: static.desmoinesregister.com/submit-a-letter/.

6 DON’T GIVE UP!

- Be persistent but patient.
- Remember, it is not personal.
- Celebrate small wins.
- Stay committed, keep going until you accomplish your goal.
- Change takes a long time, but keep advocating.
HOW TO TELL YOUR STORY

Follow these tips when talking or writing to your elected officials.

1. **Be polite.** Treat policymakers with respect, even if they don't agree with you.

2. **Be persistent but patient.** Policy change takes time. Don't give up.

3. **Practice and prepare.** Practice talking to your elected officials — it really does help. Think about what you want to say before you meet with, write or call them. Use the Message Worksheet below.

4. **Be clear.** Stick to a simple and clear message. Get to the point quickly, and don't forget to let them know what you want them to do.

5. **Be personal.** Your story means a lot to decision-makers. It helps them look at issues differently and see issues from your perspective.

6. **Be honest.** Never lie. Be a reliable source of information to your policymakers.

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MESSAGE WORKSHEET

Before you talk to legislators, use this worksheet to develop your message.

Your issue/story (in 50 words or less):

What you want them to do (in 50 words or less):

Three key points to make:

1.

2.

3.
WHICH LEGISLATORS TO VISIT

Start by talking with your legislators. If you don’t know who your legislators are, don’t worry, you can look them up. Visit legis.iowa.gov/legislators/find and enter your address. Or, go to infonetiowa.org/take-action to search for legislation by keyword or elected officials by zip code.

Once you have talked to your legislators, try talking to legislators who serve on committees that handle issues of interest to you. For example, if you are interested in transportation issues, talk to a legislator who serves on the Transportation Committee. If you are interested in HCBS waiver waiting lists, talk with a legislator from the Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee. A list of committee members can be found in the Guide to the Iowa Legislature at infonetiowa.org.

YOU MAY WANT TO TALK TO:

House Human Resources Committee
House Transportation Committee
House Education Committee
House Appropriations Committee
Senate Human Resources Committee
Senate Transportation Committee
Senate Education Committee
Senate Appropriations Committee
Joint Health & Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee
TIPS FOR MEETING WITH LEGISLATORS AT THE CAPITOL

LEGISLATORS HAVE MANY RESPONSIBILITIES.

A normal day for legislators begins at around 8:30 a.m. Their days are filled with debate in the House or Senate chambers, caucuses (which are not open to the public) and committee meetings (which are open to the public). You will need to be patient when trying to meet with your legislators.

The schedules for each day are listed on boards in front of each chamber on the second floor of the Capitol or online at legis.iowa.gov/chambers/current. The House Lobby Lounge includes television sets with scrolling subcommittee and committee meetings. Subcommittees are taped to a bulletin board in the Senate Lobby Lounge.

Legislators do not have staff or offices. They each have a desk on the floor of the House or Senate, and each legislator has a clerk that helps them keep up with daily paperwork. The clerks are often friends or family members of the legislators. They can help you locate your legislators if they are not available when you send in your notes.

FIRST, GO TO THE HOUSE OR SENATE CHAMBER

Both are located on the second floor of the Capitol. The House is on the north side and the Senate is on the south side. If you look at the Law Library in the middle of the second floor, the House is on your right and the Senate is on your left.

NEXT, SEND A MESSAGE TO YOUR LEGISLATOR THROUGH THE DOORKEEPER

- DO NOT try to walk into the chambers to locate your legislator. The public is only allowed in the chambers when they are with a legislator, and only after they get permission from leadership. There is a doorkeeper system that requires you to fill out a “message slip” and send it in to your legislator.

- The slip is yellow for the House, pink for the Senate. They are located at tables directly in front of the chamber entrance.

- The slip requires you to fill in your name, the name of the legislator you wish to contact and their SEAT NUMBER (not to be confused with their district number). Legislators are listed alphabetically on a sheet of paper located on the board above the table, which also lists legislator seat numbers.

* If you come with a group, only fill out one slip for the group. Instead of listing all the names of people there, just say “a group from _____” or “17 people from _____.”
TIPS FOR MEETING WITH LEGISLATORS AT THE CAPITOL

SEND A MESSAGE TO YOUR LEGISLATOR THROUGH THE DOORKEEPER (CONTINUED...)

• Circle the option called “waiting to see you.” It is also good to write on the note where you are from (for example, Jane Doe of Belmont, Iowa). Include your cell phone number so they can call or text you when available.

• Hand the message slip to the doorkeeper and wait for a response. Sometimes it may take your legislator 10-15 minutes to come out. (They may be finishing up a call before coming out to talk to you.)

• If your legislator is not available or not in their seat, a page or doorkeeper will come back out and call your name. Listen closely. It is loud at the Capitol. If your note does not come back out it means your legislator was there and will be out soon to talk to you.

• Sometimes a staff person will come out to speak to you if the legislator is busy. Be polite and treat this staff person as you would the legislator — often the staff person is a friend, relative, child or spouse of the legislator.

• Be prepared and be patient. The Capitol can be noisy and crowded.

SAMPLE MESSAGE SLIPS:

**THE SENATE**

DATE: ___________ TIME: ___________

TO: ____________________________

SEAT NO: ________________________

MESSAGE: ________________________

Name: ____________________________

Cell Phone#: ______________________

☐ LEAVE

**House of Representatives**

Seat Number: ______________________

Representative: ____________________

☐ Or Clerk: ________________________

Of: _________ (Name)

(Town, Company, Organization)

1. Is waiting to see you  
2. Has left literature  
3. Has left the following message:

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________

Date: ___________ Time: ___________

☐ FRONT DOOR
TIPS FOR MEETING WITH LEGISLATORS AT THE CAPITOL

WHEN YOU ARE ABLE TO MEET WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR:

• DON’T BE NERVOUS
  Be yourself. Remember your legislators represent you!

• GREET YOUR LEGISLATOR WITH A SMILE

• BE BRIEF
  Legislators are often very busy. Use our message worksheet on page 8 to help you get started.

• CALL YOUR ELECTED OFFICIAL BY THEIR TITLE (SENATOR, REPRESENTATIVE, MAYOR, COUNCIL MEMBER, ETC.)
  Think of it as their first name. It is a sign of respect.

• CLEARLY IDENTIFY YOURSELF
  State your name, where you are from and if you represent a group.

“Hello, I’m Jane Doe from Belmont, Iowa, with the Disability Action Network.”

• FOCUS ON ONE OR TWO ISSUES
  Don’t overwhelm them. Tell them what is important to you and how they can help.

• BE COURTEOUS AND THANK THEM
  Thank them for their support or consideration if they’re not ready to commit to a position.
TIPS FOR MEETING WITH LEGISLATORS AT THE CAPITOL

WHEN YOU ARE ABLE TO MEET WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR AT THE CAPITOL (CONTINUED)

• DON’T BURN BRIDGES
  You may not agree with your legislator on this issue, but they might be there for you on the next one. You don’t need to let them off the hook — tell them you’ll keep trying to get them information that will help them reconsider their position. Remember that advocacy is about building a relationship — and trust — with your elected officials.

• SEND THEM A FOLLOW-UP NOTE
  A short note or email from you to follow up on your conversation is an excellent way to become a great resource, and it serves as a reminder of your visit.

IF YOUR MESSAGE SLIP COMES BACK AND YOUR LEGISLATOR IS NOT AVAILABLE

Take the time to write a short “sorry I missed you” note that states very briefly the issue you wanted to talk to them about.

• Circle the option “has left the following message” and send the note back.
• Be sure to mark the time of day and date that you left the note.

If you are not able to talk to your legislator, send the note back in and ask to have it left on their desk. Write something like this:

“I was here today with a group from Belmont and would like to take a few minutes today to talk to you about the Home and Community-Based Services. I will be here until [time] should you want to call me on my cell phone [555-555-5555].”

OR

“I will email you more information about the issues I came to discuss.”
TIPS FOR MEETING ELECTED OFFICIALS

There are several ways to let your legislators know how you feel about your issues. You can call them, write letters or emails, meet with them face-to-face, organize others to advocate or all of the above. Use the method you like best and are most comfortable doing.

PHONE

• Call your legislators at the Capitol.
  
  **Senators:** 515-281-3371  
  **Representatives:** 515-281-3221

• Call your legislators at home when the session is done. Ask your legislators how to call them after session ends.

• Call and encourage the governor to help solve the problem.
  
  **Governor:** 515.281.5211

• Encourage friends, family and other advocates to call.

FACE-TO-FACE

• Go to local forums hosted by your legislator. A list of forums can be found at [infonetiowa.org](http://infonetiowa.org).

• Invite legislators to local events and open houses, or plan a discussion with friends.

• Ask your legislator to meet and talk about issues over a cup of coffee, or schedule a virtual meeting.

• Visit the Capitol!

Contact the Iowa DD Council for more ideas and grant opportunities.
TIPS FOR MEETING ELECTED OFFICIALS

WRITE

• Write to your legislators. The address is:
  Sen. _______ or Rep. _______
  State Capitol
  Des Moines, Iowa 50319

• Email legislators by using our Take Action Center at infonetiowa.org.

• Ask legislators how to stay in contact after session ends. (Then do it!)

• Write to the governor. The address is:
  1007 East Grand Ave.
  Des Moines, Iowa 50319

• Emails can be sent through the governor’s website at governor.iowa.gov/contact.

• Write a letter to the editor to the Des Moines Register or your local newspaper.
  The Des Moines Register
  400 Locust Street, Suite 500
  Des Moines, IA 50309

ORGANIZE OTHERS

• Talk to your friends, family and other advocates to build support. Ask them to call, write or contact their legislators.

• Speak to community and civic groups.

• Organize and host town hall meetings and invite others.

• Get others to attend local forums, or plan your own.

• Plan your own visit to the Capitol with a group of advocates.
The Iowa Developmental Disabilities Council works to create change with and for persons with developmental disabilities so they can live, work, learn and play in the community of their choosing.

1-800-452-1936 • IOWAADDCCOUNCIL.ORG

PROJECT OF THE DD COUNCIL

infoNET

infoNET is a free service available to people of all abilities who want to become more informed and effective advocates.

CONTACTUS@IDACTION.ORG

INFONETIOWA.ORG