



## **State politics are more important than most people think**

**Tom Powers, VGM Government Relations**

Relationship building with state-level politicians can be valuable when it comes to monitoring policies that impact HME. In many states, state legislators are more accessible than the average member of Congress and are locally focused, as they represent a much smaller area of your community. Despite the increased spending in state-level politics, they are as grassroots as it gets.

Most state legislators do not have a budget to hire legislative staff, so they rely on steady-flowing communication from constituents to learn issues important to the community. So it's our role to remind them that access to a medical equipment provider is a personal, local issue and our policies should promote local care. In addition, major Medicaid policy issues will be determined at the state level. Keeping an eye on the changes will be meaningful for businesses that accept Medicaid-covered customers.

Here is a list of things you should know when it comes to advocating to your state legislators.

**1. Session Dates:** State legislative sessions normally run during just part of the year. To learn the start and end dates of your state's 2015 legislative session, [click here](#).

**2. State Legislators are Your Neighbors:** State legislators are members of your community who often hold another job to make ends meet. If you had the time for session and constituent outreach, you could be a state legislator! So remember this when entering conversations with them; they are community members just like you.

**3. Carry the Message that Health Care is Local:** Legislators focus on issues that have a direct impact on their neighbors. Our issue that deeply impacts senior citizens will be meaningful to all legislators worth their salt. Since they are so close to constituents, they are likely to take our message more seriously than the typical federal-level official.

**4. Attend Issue Lobby Days:** During each session, groups around the state host lobby days in which professionals and constituents go to the capitol building, are prepped on important legislative issues and then speak with their local representative. Example days in your state could be home health lobby day, brain injury day or a day focused on aging issues. Contact local organizations to see if they participate and join their lobbying efforts to experience what the day is like. By building this relationship, they may choose to adopt our issues in the future. Better yet, maybe you can make a medical equipment lobbying day in the future.

**5. Talk about Federal Issues, Too:** Your state legislators should be made aware of the federal issues that are impacting your business as well. They often have relationships with important federal-level decision-

makers and can pass your message or connect you with the right people for valuable conversations. Use our [one-page federal HME policy guide](#) to help you.

**6. Invite Them to Tour Your Facility:** Just like members of Congress, state legislators should know what your business activity looks like from day to day. Invite them to tour your facility to show them the local faces who work in your business and the customers you serve. Let them know how you and your staff play a big role in the community through volunteerism, boards, local church groups and other activities. Finally, ask the customers in attendance to speak about what your business means to them.

**7. Join the Campaign:** A few days of door knocking or preparing mailings can help you build a relationship. They rely on community member volunteers to make the campaign go. Show up at the parades or one evening after work to make yourself known. Before long, HME conversations will be flowing.

Let's talk! Have you met with your state legislators? What were the challenges? What went well? I want to know more about your experiences. Email me at [tom.powers@vgm.com](mailto:tom.powers@vgm.com).