

HELPFUL TIPS FOR MAKING CONGRESSIONAL VISITS

The North American Brain Tumor Coalition (NABTC) encourages brain tumor advocates to remain active in public policy matters year round and to stay in touch with Members of Congress by phone, email, and fax, as well as to make visits to district and state offices of Members of Congress. However, the collective advocacy effort during Brain Tumor Action Week brings the community to D.C. for a full day of Hill visits. Through this coordinated effort, we are able to direct significant attention to brain tumor issues.

The following tips may be useful to you as you embark on Hill visits.

1. ***Make an appointment and honor the time of your appointment.*** If you are making visits with others in the NABTC, appointments will have been scheduled for you and your group. If you are making your own appointment, you must be in touch with the appointments secretary in the Member's office. It is probably most efficient to email a letter requesting an appointment, unless the office directs you to follow a different protocol.
2. ***Be prompt.*** Even though Members of Congress often find their schedules interrupted by unexpected meetings, committee hearings, or floor votes, you should honor your appointment time. If the NABTC assists you in scheduling appointments, every effort will be made to provide you adequate time between appointments, so you can easily make it from appointment to appointment as well as have some time cushion for unanticipated developments.
3. ***Select a spokesperson and/or develop an order of speaking.*** Because time will be short, it is best to select a spokesperson to make the case for the group. If each of you wants to speak, assign speaking responsibilities and honor time limits.
4. ***Be prepared.*** Be sure to attend the NABTC training program and to utilize the materials that are provided to you by NABTC. Because appointment time will be limited, you need to use that time effectively to get your points across. Advance preparation will be key to your success.
5. ***Be brief.*** You need to be prepared for a brief meeting and for the possibility that your meeting could be interrupted in the middle of your presentation. Map out your meeting strategy, and if the unexpected happens, be sure to hand your leave-behind advocacy materials to the Member or staff person.
6. ***Leave behind your materials.*** The NABTC will provide advocates a leave-behind package that includes background materials on brain tumors and position papers that outline the NABTC policy priorities. Be sure to get those documents in the hands of the Member of Congress or the staff person.
7. ***Do not ignore staff.*** Although you want to convey your policy priorities in the meeting, you also want to develop a relationship with the Member or the staffer. You need to be sure to find out which staffer handles your issues and foster a relationship with that staffer. You can do this by follow-up emails and calls. Congressional staffers are the eyes and ears of their bosses, and you should know that the information you share with a staffer will be passed along to the Member.
8. ***Accentuate the positive but be specific about your "ask."*** Because the facts about brain tumor research and brain tumor research advances can be sobering, Members and staffers may find themselves somewhat overwhelmed and unsure they can have an impact on brain tumor issues. You will be going into your meetings with specific action items for the Members, and you need to be sure that you convey those. You will be asking Members to cosponsor legislation and support brain tumor funding requests, and there should be no question or confusion about your "ask" when you leave the office.
9. ***Follow-up with the Member and/or staffer.*** Write a thank you letter immediately after your visit. Within days, you should check to see if the Members you visited have acted in response to your requests. You should thank them if they have or ask, "why not?" if they haven't.