#AUCD2021
VIRTUAL HILL VISIT TOOLKIT
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Introduction

About AUCD

The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) is a membership organization that supports and promotes a network of university-based interdisciplinary programs located in every United States’ state and territory. The mission of AUCD is to advance policies and practices that improve the health, education, social, and economic well-being of all people with developmental and other disabilities, their families, and their communities by supporting our members in research, education, health, and service activities that achieve our vision. AUCD includes three different types of network members: University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities Programs, and Intellectual and Developmental Disability Research Centers.

Figure 1. Graphic flow chart of AUCD with its three types of programs: UCEDDs, LENDs, and IDDRCs, including the funding source for each type of program.

AUCD 2021 Conference: Learning Together: Connecting Research and Lived Experience

Our virtual event, taking place November 15th through 17th. We are excited to have our AUCD community explore the connection between people with disabilities, their families, and the professionals who carry out research about disabilities. How we talk about research and the words we use make a big difference in how we think about research. We hope the conference will give us a chance to learn about ways to talk about research that everyone can understand.
About Congress

The Basics

Congress is made up of two chambers, or groups: the House of Representatives and the Senate. Both chambers are responsible for writing and passing federal, or national, laws, including laws that set the federal government’s budget. A bill, which is a potential law, must pass both chambers and be signed by the President before it can become a law.

The current Congress is called the 117th Congress because it is the 117th group of elected Representatives meeting together to make laws. It began on January 3, 2021, and will end on January 3, 2023. While each Congress meets for two years, they take breaks, called ‘recesses’, throughout that time. During a recess, Representatives and Senators do not meet in Washington, D.C., and do not vote on bills.

The AUCD 2021 Conference takes place in what is called the ‘lame duck session’ between the pre-Election Day recess and the start of the new Congress. It is called a ‘lame duck session’ because some lawmakers who return to Washington after the November election will not be in the next Congress because they were voted out or are retiring; these lawmakers are called ‘lame ducks’. Still, the work of the lame duck session matters in many ways. It is important to know that our advocacy this Hill Day has the opportunity to affect the federal budget for the next year, and will lay the groundwork for building relationships and advancing our priorities for the 117th Congress.

House of Representatives

The House of Representatives is one of the two chambers that make up Congress. Each of the 435 members represents a set number of people who live in a Congressional district, or part of a state. States have different numbers of Representatives based on their population. For example, Montana has a smaller population, so there is one Representative for the whole state; in comparison, New York has a larger population, so there are 27 New York Representatives.

Representatives are called ‘Congressman’ or ‘Congresswoman’ and are elected for two years at a time. Legislation introduced in the House begins with H.R. for ‘House of Representatives’. You have one member of the House (Representative) who represents you.

You can find your Representative with this easy tool.
Senate

The Senate is the other chamber that makes up Congress. Every state, no matter their size or population, has two Senators for a total of 100 Senators. Each Senator is elected for six years at a time. In addition to writing and passing federal bills, the Senate has the job of approving presidential nominees for positions in the Executive and Judicial branches. Legislation introduced in the Senate begins with S. for ‘Senate’. You have two Senators who represent you.

You can find your Senators with this easy tool.

Congress during COVID-19

Both the House of Representatives and the Senate have changed their rules during the COVID-19 pandemic to keep members safe. The House of Representatives has passed rule changes so that Representatives can vote on legislation remotely and can hold committee hearings remotely. In the Senate, Senators must still vote in-person but can do some committee work remotely. The majority of legislative staff for both chambers continue to work from home. No Representatives or Senators are taking in-person meetings.

How to use Congress.gov

Congress.gov is the official website for United States federal legislative information. You can use it to find information about your Representative or Senators and up-to-date information on legislative activity.

Find your members

You can use congress.gov to find your Representative and Senators by entering your address into this box on the right-hand column of the congress.gov home screen. The search will return your Senators’ and Representative’s names, photos, state, political party, years served, and links to more information.

Follow their actions

You can view the legislative actions of your Representative and Senators by going to their congress.gov profile. Type their last name into the search box at the top of the home page and select ‘Members’ from the dropdown box to the left of the search box.

Press enter and click on the name. The profile will include information on the legislation that the Representative or Senator has sponsored, cosponsored, and voted on.
Follow legislation that interests you

You can follow specific pieces of legislation that interest you by typing in the name or reference number of the legislation into the search box at the top of the home page. Press enter and click on the name of the legislation to find information, such as a summary, text, actions taken, amendments, and cosponsors. Bills that have become laws begin with P.L. for ‘Public Law’.

Requesting a Virtual Hill Meeting

Virtual Request

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency, the majority of Congressional offices are working remotely, and none are taking in-person meetings. This means that you will be meeting with the Members’ offices, either on a video platform (i.e., Zoom) or with a conference phone call.

Contacting Congress

We recommend you contact your congressional offices as soon as possible to set up a meeting. The best way to schedule a virtual meeting is via email. You can send your email requesting a meeting to:

- the general Member office email
- the office staff scheduler
- the office staffer(s) who works on issues related to disability policy

You can find the general office email and sometimes the office scheduler email on the members’ websites. You may contact either Denise Rozell (drozell@aucd.org) or Sara Bovat (sbovat@aucd.org) to get the contact information for specific office staff.

To learn more about how to contact Congress, see AUCD’s fact sheet.

Scheduling

We recommend you offer 2-5 dates and time slots at which you are available. Staff of congressional offices meet with many constituents and have busy schedules. We also suggest you confirm that the dates and times you offer do not conflict with Congressional recesses.
What to Write

We have provided a sample script that you may individualize to set up a meeting with Members' offices. Every email to request a meeting should include:

▪ Your name and contact information
▪ Center name and other center participants on the call
▪ Your availability to meet
▪ Your reason(s) for the meeting
▪ Thank them for taking the meeting

Find the sample email script here. Note: you will need to fill in the editable fields and delete the highlighted text before sending.

Follow-Up

With the Congressional offices

You may not receive an immediate response to your email request. Congressional staffers are busy, and it is normal to need to follow up on emails. If you do not receive a response after one week, you can send a follow-up email. We have included a template for a follow-up email here. Note: you will need to fill in the editable fields and delete the highlighted text before sending.

If you continue to have trouble scheduling a meeting, please contact either Denise Rozell (drozell@aucd.org) or Sara Bovat (sbovat@aucd.org).

With AUCD

The AUCD Public Policy Team requests that once you have successfully scheduled your meeting, you share the following information with us:

▪ Network center and Congressional office
▪ Date and time of meeting
▪ Names of network attendees
▪ If you would like someone from the AUCD Policy Team to attend

You can share all of this information with us via survey here.
Preparing for Hill meetings
Learn about the issues

AUCD is committed to supporting public policies that advance the rights of individuals with disabilities across the lifespan. Policy issues that impact people with disabilities and their families include, but are not limited to, civil rights, education, employment, healthcare, transportation, and voting. AUCD has several tools and resources you can use to stay up-to-date on disability policy:

- **Disability Policy News**
  AUCD Disability Policy News is sent out each Monday and includes public policy updates that affect the disability community. You can subscribe to the newsletter [here](#).

- **AUCD Policy Talk**
  AUCD Policy Talk features writing by both established and emerging leaders in the AUCD network and disability community about the complexities of disability policy. Storytelling about policy allows us to lift up real-life stories to connect individuals to AUCD’s mission. Learn more about contributing to AUCD Policy Talk [here](#).

- **Tuesdays with Liz**
  ‘Tuesdays with Liz’ is a weekly video series highlighting current issues in disability policy. It is hosted by Liz Weintraub, a long-time disability advocate and AUCD Senior Advocacy Specialist, and produced by AUCD.

**AUCD Legislative Priorities**

We recommend that you prepare for your virtual Hill Meeting(s) by familiarizing yourself with policy issues affecting the disability community. We have included here further information and resources on policy topics that will be relevant to your visit and AUCD’s legislative priorities for the 117th Congress.
Budget and Appropriations

The U.S. federal budget is the amount of spending and revenue planned for the next fiscal year of the U.S. government. Fiscal Year 2022 began on October 1, 2021, and will continue until September 30, 2022. An appropriation is the act of setting aside a part of the federal budget to a specific program or use. AUCD programs receive yearly appropriations that are based on past years’ appropriations and funding requests that define how the money will be used.

The federal government is currently funded through December 3, 2021, based on the current Continuing Resolution which means the same amount of funding from the previous year carries on through December 3, 2021. Congress has to pass new funding by that date or the government will shut down. Because Congress will still be working on budget and appropriations for Fiscal Year 2022 at the time of our Hill Meetings, we have a unique opportunity to educate Congressional members on the needs of our network and community.

**Budget and Appropriations Resources:**

- The Federal Budget Process
- UCEDD Appropriations Asks Fiscal Year 2022
- LEND Appropriations Asks Fiscal Year 2022
- IDDRC Appropriations Asks Fiscal Year 2022
- Projects of National Significance (PNS) Asks Fiscal Year 2022
- National Center for Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities Fiscal Year 2022
- Transition Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities Fiscal Year 2022

Employment

AUCD supports the passage of the Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act ([H.R.2373](#)), which aims to phase out sub-minimum wages for individuals with disabilities nationally and assist employers in the transition to competitive, integrated employment for employees with disabilities.

**Employment Resources:**

- Transformation to Competitive Employment Act fact sheet
- A Path toward Real Jobs for Real Pay
- AUCD’s recommendations addressing barriers to employment

Education

AUCD supports federal funding for postsecondary education for students with intellectual disabilities through the Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSIs) funded by the Higher Education Opportunity Act.
AUCD also supports the passage of the Keeping All Students Safe Act (S.1858, H.R.3474), which would require school faculty and staff to manage student behavior through positive behavior supports rather than seclusion or physical restraint.

**Education resources:**
- Keeping All Students Safe Act fact sheet
- Postsecondary Education for Students with Intellectual Disabilities
- TPSIDs Appropriations Asks Fiscal Year 2022
- Equitable Access to Remote Learning Is Paramount

**Home- and Community-Based Services**

Home- and Community-Based Services (HCBS) refer to programs funded through Medicaid that allow individuals with disabilities to live and receive support services in their communities. AUCD supports significantly increased dedicated funding for HCBS within the federal budget for Medicaid services. At the time of our Hill meetings, Congress will likely still be working on the Budget Reconciliation Bill, which may include billions of new dollars for HCBS services to address the HCBS waiting lists in states and the Direct Support Professionals (DSP) shortage. This is a unique opportunity to educate Members and staff on the importance of home and community based services to people with disabilities.

**Home-and Community-Based Services Resources:**
- Liz Weintraub’s Op/Ed: The Better Care Better Jobs Act would allow people like me to thrive
- Better Care Better Jobs Act: State-by-State Fact Sheets
- The Arc’s tool to Share Your Story: Why Home and Community-Based Care Matters.
- The HCBS Access Act: A Chance to Improve a Critical System
- Keep Building: Better Care Better Jobs Act

**Learn about members**

In addition to learning about policy topics, we suggest you learn about the Members with whose offices you will be meeting. For many Senators and Representatives, some issues are more important to them than others based on the needs of their state, personal beliefs, or committee assignments. Learning which issues are important to your Member will help you tailor your conversation to what the Member values and is most likely to support. Some resources to learn about the priorities of your Representative and Senators include:

- **Search** for your Representatives on congress.gov
- Read about their policy stances on their official websites
  - Find your Senators’ websites
  - Find your Representative’s website
- Listen to Members’ recent comments on C-SPAN by typing their name into the search box on the homepage

Learn more about how to get to know your Members with this AUCD fact sheet.
Meeting with Elected Officials

The Purpose

Meeting with Members of Congress is a great way for individuals to communicate with policymakers on the important value and needs of the AUCD network and the disability community at-large. Through these visits, you can share your concerns and establish yourself as a resource on issues affecting people with disabilities.

Policy Education vs. Advocacy

All AUCD Network members have some responsibility to be engaged in policy education and systems change. As a representative of a federally-funded program, you can engage in policy education with your Members of Congress in the #AUCD2021 Virtual Hill Day meetings, including:

- Educating offices on the impact of current or proposed policies and laws
- Sharing research, publications, and policy analysis
- Responding to information requests from policymakers

You cannot use this opportunity to advocate that a specific law be passed or defeated, support a specific political candidate or party in your meetings, nor engage in civil disobedience.

Education vs. Advocacy Resources:

- Education and Advocacy: Know the Difference: A Plain Language fact sheet.
- Your Role in Policy Advocacy as a Federally-Funded Program: An in-depth guide to policy education.

What To Say

You will most likely be meeting with a staff member rather than the Member of Congress. Staff are knowledgeable about the issues and policy positions of their boss and will relay the information and stories you share to the Member of Congress. Think of this meeting as a chance to build a relationship with your Member’s office, rather than just the Member him/herself.
We recommend you follow these basic steps in your meetings:

1. **Describe Your Center**
   
The staff or Member with whom you meet may not know about the AUCD network or your specific center. We recommend you begin your Hill meeting by describing the AUCD network, your center, and any key projects on which your center is working.

2. **Educate Your Members**
   
   Educate the staff or Member by expanding upon the 2-3 topics you highlighted in your meeting request email. This is a great opportunity to discuss the challenges and barriers faced by members of the disability community in your state and the important work your center is doing to address these challenges. This is also a time to share what your center and community need in terms of appropriations and other legislation.

3. **Share Your Stories**
   
   If you are comfortable, share your personal stories with disability. Connecting policies to people helps policymakers understand the real-world effects of policies in their own states. Read a sample format for sharing your story [here](#).

**Meeting with Members resources:**

- [Guide to Meeting With Your Members](#): a Plain Language fact sheet on what to say in a meeting with your Members of Congress
- [Top 10 Relationship Building Tips](#): a Plain Language fact sheet on how to form relationships with your Members of Congress
- [Make the Most Out of Your Visit](#): an in-depth fact sheet for trainees on how to get the most out of a meeting with your Members of Congress

**Tips**

- If several members of your center are attending the meeting together, we recommend you plan in advance who will say which pieces during the meeting. This will reduce confusion in the meeting and allow you to make the most of your time.
- Confirm if your virtual meeting will take place via video platform or conference call. Make sure every attendee has the meeting id number and password, if applicable.
- Have everyone on the call introduce themselves by saying their name, position, and relationship to AUCD.
- When referencing the Member of Congress in conversation, use ‘Senator/Representative’ and their last name. For example, ‘Senator Duckworth’ or ‘Representative Young’.
▪ The staffer may refer to the Member of Congress as ‘my boss’.
▪ Thank the staff member for meeting with you at the end of the call.

Post-meeting

Follow-up with Congressional office

Send a ‘thank you’ email to the staffer(s) with whom you met after your meeting, ideally on the same day or the next day. In addition to thanking the staff, you can attach links and materials, and expand upon the topics you discussed. Your follow-up email can be an important part of the policy education process!

Follow-Up with AUCD

The AUCD Public Policy Team requests that you share the following information with us after your meeting(s):

▪ Congressional office(s) and names of Congressional staff members present
▪ Number of AUCD network attendees present
▪ Brief list of what you discussed

You can share all of this information with us via survey here.
Social Media

Follow us on social media to stay up to date with the AUCD network and ways to get involved in AUCD policy activities!

#AUCD2021

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