

American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) National Primer

Purpose of this primer

This primer is a guide for organizing and advocacy within the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP). The AAFP is the largest specialty national medical organization in the United States, with more than 120,000 members in 50 states, D.C., Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Guam. The AAFP offers itself as a resource and representative of the views of Family Medicine to the media, local and national governments, colleague medical and public health organizations, and to the public at large. When existing AAFP policy does not reflect the opinions of today's Family Physicians, members have the opportunity to work for change within the organization's own democratic, governance process. This primer serves as a guide through the AAFP, detailing pathways for change and involvement.

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Governance

The AAFP is governed by a Congress of Delegates (COD) composed of two delegates from each of the 55 constituent chapters, two delegates from the residents and student group, as well as eight delegates from the National Conference of Constituency Leaders (NCCL). NCCL is comprised of women, minority, international medical graduate, LGBT, and new physician constituencies. NCCL's eight delegates to COD breakdown as follows: six represent the NCCL member constituencies and two specifically represent the new physician constituency.

The COD meets annually just prior to the AAFP's Family Medicine Experience (FMX) conference to establish policies and define programs. These policies and programs are carried out between annual meetings by the Board of Directors and a number of standing and special commissions and committees. Delegates to the Congress of Delegates elect the Board, which in turn appoints commission and committee members. Constituent chapters are independently organized with their own bylaws and various forms of elected leadership and employed executive directors.

National Commissions

<https://www.aafp.org/about/governance/commissions.html>

The Board of Directors appoints members to seven working commissions. These groups meet to discuss and strategize around issues within the AAFP related to their scope of work. Commissions make recommendations to the Board regarding the AAFP's policy and programmatic efforts, including implementation of passed resolutions and development of new programs and projects.

The Commissions are as follows:

1. Membership and Member Services
2. Continuing Professional Development
3. Education
4. Finance and Insurance
5. Quality and Practice
6. Governmental Advocacy

7. Health of the Public and Science.

The Board may appoint additional workgroups to address any immediate needs not met by the standing commissions.

To serve on a commission, members must be nominated by their State Academy. For nomination, interested members may reach out directly to their chapter executive for consideration.

Paths to Policy Change

Authoring and presenting resolutions are one of the main avenues by which you can change AAFP policies at the national level. Advocates can send resolutions to the AAFP Congress of Delegates through one of three paths. They are:

1. Resolutions passed at the State Academy level, which can also go to the national COD if there is a Resolved clause for this
2. Resolutions passed at the National Conference of Constituency Leaders (NCCL) which are then forwarded to the Board of Directors.
3. Resolutions passed at the National Conference of Residents & Students, which are then forwarded to the Commission on Education where they are recommended to the appropriate body.

Writing Resolutions for National Implementation

Once resolutions are passed, their implementation is controlled by commissions, committees, and the AAFP Board of Directors. These commissions, committees, and the Board decide how the resolution will be acted upon. **It is important, therefore, to write the resolution in language that is very specific regarding the desired action.** Otherwise, resolutions can end up tabled by the Board, sent to the 're-affirmation calendar' (which indicates the Board believes existing policy covers the requested change), or into some other committee that may not move the policy forward.

Other tips for proposing resolutions:

1. Financial feasibility as high-cost resolutions tend not to be passed. We often try to ask for policy statement changes, as these are reflected in writing and made available to the public.
2. Other strategies are to ask for a public letter of support or a letter to Congress or lobbying support.

3. It is useful to ask that a task force be started, or specific resources be distributed to ensure successful implementation of the passed resolution.

Setting State Policy

There are 55 affiliated constituent chapters, one for every state, Washington DC, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, and the Uniformed Services. Each constituent chapter is an independent organization and has its own system of organization. Most have a meeting similar to the AAFP's Congress of Delegates usually held in late spring or early summer. In general, the Board of Directors of the constituent chapter is responsible for approving policy resolutions. As with the National COD, resolutions can be sent to the state through several paths. It is best for resolutions to come from a group rather than an individual, but even individuals' resolutions can find support at the constituent chapter's COD with adequate advocacy and coalition building.

Local Involvement

One key to working within AAFP is staying local. If you can get involved in your local county chapter and at the state level, you will be seen as a valued contributor and then more likely to be successful when arguing for resolutions or applying for a national commission.

For example, in New York State, several residencies have their own chapters and can send delegates from their chapter to the State COD. Local chapters can also submit resolutions to the State AAFP. Additionally, the local chapter can be a great gathering place for advocates in the area to come together and strategize. Many local chapters host business meetings with an opportunity for CME credits. By offering CME credits in a variety of subject areas, the chapter can attract a broad range of physicians and involve them in ongoing advocacy efforts.

Building Coalitions

Another key to successful AAFP advocacy is to build coalitions. Within the State Congresses or All Member meetings, it is important to build support for your resolutions from the attendees. For example, the New York County Chapter can pass on to the state as many resolutions as it wants, but ultimately, if these

resolutions are not supported by family physicians in other county chapters, they will be defeated at the state meeting.

Other strategies for garnering support and building coalitions:

1. Send the resolution to a commission for additional support (such as the Public Health Commission)
2. Spend time at State Academy Meetings getting to know members from throughout the state and identifying potential allies.
3. Encourage attendance and involvement from your pro-choice colleagues from around your state at the State Congress of Delegates. This could mean their vote if they are a delegate, their testimony on a pro-choice resolution, or even introducing a resolution themselves.
4. Be an active contributor to the work involved in the State Academy. Volunteering time and effort at the State Academy helps you gain respect as a member of the community, rather than functioning as an outsider coming in with an issue-focused agenda.

Many state AAFP chapters have commissions which members can join. Active membership in a state commission could also put you in a position to advocate for a resolution at the commission level which, if adopted, becomes an issue that many of the commission members will want to support.

National Conference of Constituency Leaders

<https://www.aafp.org/events/aclf-nccl/nccl/about.html>

At the annual National Conference of Constituency Leaders (NCCL), held each spring, delegates from each state are given an opportunity to bring forth resolutions. Each state has delegates and alternate delegates representing each of the five constituencies:

1. New Physicians
2. LGBT Physicians
3. International Medical Graduate Physicians
4. Minority Physicians
5. Women Physicians.

At the National Congress, each constituency has a caucus that introduces resolutions. The Congress votes on the resolutions presented and submits accepted resolutions for review. Once submitted, the NCCL Convener and the following year's Convener designate which reference committee the resolution will go to, depending on the resolution topic.

The reference committee reviews the resolution, listens to relevant testimony, and writes a formal recommendation on behalf of the resolution. The reference committee presents their recommendation during the Business Session. If adopted by NCCL, the resolution is sent to the Board of Directors.

Since each state has five delegates and five alternates for the NCCL, there are often open spots that the State Academy needs to fill. Call your State Academy to see if you or an advocate you know can be a delegate or alternate delegate at the NCCL meeting. Travel and hotel expenses to this meeting are generally covered by the State Chapter.

Once at NCCL, delegates can work in their caucus to get a resolution brought up to the Congress, and gain supportive testimony from other delegates and attendees.

National Conference of Residents & Students

<https://www.aafp.org/events/national-conference/about.html>

The National Conference of Residents and Students works similarly to the NCCL conference, except that each state sends delegates and alternates representing Resident and Student Physicians. Each state may select one student delegate and one student alternate, and one resident delegate and one resident alternate (for a total of four).

At the National Conference, participants can craft resolutions that are heard at Reference Committees (Public Policy, Education, Finance, etc) and then recommendations are made to the National Congress (of Residents or Students, respectively). Delegates can vote on the resolutions, but most often it is the Reference Committee's recommendation that is followed. It is therefore important to involve residents and students in your advocacy efforts, so that they may be good advocates in reference committees and possibly serve as voting delegates.

National Congress of Delegates

<https://www.aafp.org/events/congress.html>

The Congress of Delegates has a Reference Committee structure similar to the Residents & Students Conference. National resolutions are submitted to the

AAFP by the State Academies, National Congress of Special Constituencies, or by the National Conference of Residents & Students. The schedule for resolutions being presented to the Reference Committees is available on the AAFP website about a week before the national COD.

If you are going to the COD, it is advisable to plan testimony and assign who will speak to each resolution beforehand. The more testimony heard in support of a resolution, the more likely a Reference Committee is to support it. Resolutions are debated in Reference Committees and then brought to the Congress with recommendations.

The State Academies, Resident & Student Conference, and Special Constituencies Congress all send voting delegates and alternates to the national COD meeting.

Even if you haven't been able to become a State Delegate, you take action by testifying at Reference Committee hearings and gathering support from the national delegates before the vote.

Member Interest Groups (MIG)

<https://www.aafp.org/membership/involve/mig.html>

MIGs are opportunities for members with shared interests across the country to work together and represent diverse perspectives within the AAFP. MIGs provide a place for members to suggest policy, network, pursue professional development, and deliver a unified message to AAFP leadership on behalf of their members' interests. RHAP helped start the Reproductive Health Care MIG (<https://www.aafp.org/membership/involve/mig/reproductive-health-care.html>) in 2014.

MIGs have an online community where members connect, plan policy priorities, and share resources. Each MIG reports directly to national commission, typically the one that most closely aligns to the MIG's mission.

Utilizing MIGs for Advocacy

Because the National MIGs have members from many different states, the MIG is a great space to work with your like-minded colleagues to write resolutions that MIG members can in turn put forward at their State Academies. Although the MIGs themselves do not directly submit policy resolutions, members may

work directly with their State Academies to develop and pass policy resolutions. Simply having several State Academies support the same resolutions increases the chances of those resolutions being passed at the national AAFP.

Per the AAFP Board, a quicker and more effective way to create policy changes in the National AAFP is for **MIGs to submit recommendations directly to their oversight commission**. If the oversight commission is in support of the MIG's recommendation, the commission may pass the recommendation along to the Board for more immediate consideration.

Resources & Contacts

American Academy of Family Physicians

Website: <http://www.aafp.org>

Toll free number: 800-274-2237

AAFP link to find your Constituent Chapter Contact and Website

<http://www.aafp.org/cgi-bin/chapterlookup.pl>

AAFP National Bylaws (September 2017)

https://www.aafp.org/dam/AAFP/documents/about_us/congress/Bylaws.pdf

AAFP Family Medicine PAC

<https://www.aafp.org/advocacy/donate/fammedpac.html>

AAFP Foundation

<https://www.aafpfoundation.org/foundation/home.html>

Affiliated Organizations:

American Board of Family Medicine

<http://www.aafp.org/about/affiliated-organizations/other-fam-med/abfm.html>

Learn more about the American Board of Family Medicine, supporting family medicine.

Association of Departments of Family Medicine

<http://www.aafp.org/about/affiliated-organizations/other-fam-med/adfm.html>

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Learn more about the Association of Departments of Family Medicine, devoted to transforming care, education, and research to promote health equity and improve the health of the nation.

Association of Family Medicine Residency Directors

<https://www.aafp.org/about/affiliated-organizations/other-fam-med/afmrd.html>

Learn more about the Association of Family Medicine Residency Directors, empowering family medicine residency program directors to achieve excellence in family medicine residency training.

North American Primary Care Research Group

<http://www.aafp.org/about/affiliated-organizations/other-fam-med/napcrg.html>

Learn more about the North American Primary Care Research Group, a multidisciplinary organization for primary care researchers.

Society of Teachers of Family Medicine

<http://www.aafp.org/about/affiliated-organizations/other-fam-med/stfm.html>

Learn more about the Society of Teachers of Family Medicine, supporting teachers and scholars of family medicine.