



ADVOCACY TIPS: WORDS THAT WORK

WORDS MATTER. People can react to the same statement very differently based on how it's worded. To convince the public and legislators to support our community's interests we must choose our words carefully. The Herndon Alliance, a nonpartisan group focused on health care messaging, suggests:

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Listen first. People will then be more inclined to listen to you. It also gives you the opportunity to understand their experiences and concerns. Then tailor your message accordingly.

SEEK TO WIN THE PERSON, NOT THE ARGUMENT

Values motivate; statistics do not. Rather than trying to win a policy debate, use the language of values and beliefs. Here are words to use and avoid based on commonly held American values:

WORDS TO USE

Prevention
Individual responsibility
Fairness
Quality, affordable care
Peace of mind, giving security
Smart investments, invest in the future
Competition, accountability
American solutions
Choice, control

WORDS TO AVOID

Universal
Regulated
Required, mandated
Government health care
Inexpensive
Free
Avoid complex terms such as prophylaxis, recombinant, or expenditures.

PERSONALIZE THE ISSUE

Focus first on how the policy affects people, not on how it affects the health care system. Instead of saying "This policy will decrease the state's overall health care expenditures," say, "This policy will give my family and others peace of mind by making health care affordable."

USE STORIES

A great way to personalize an issue is to have people discuss how it personally affects them. Tell a story about a time treatment saved you or your family or about the effects of a lengthy hospital stay on your life.

CONSTRUCTIVELY CHANNEL ANGER

Anger motivates. Constructively tap into it by emphasizing that the situation now is not working and is not fair. Then channel their anger by urging them to take action in support of your advocacy goal.

To learn more, see the Herndon Alliance's new video, "Introduction to Effective Communication," at www.herndonalliance.org. It includes a story about someone with hemophilia!