

**National Eating Disorders
Association's**

1st Annual In-District Advocacy Day

February 28, 2020

Advocate Guide



National Eating Disorders Association

I. Introduction to NEDA's In-District Advocacy Day

What is an In-District Advocacy Day?

On Friday, February 28, 2020, NEDA's eating disorders advocates from across the country will meet with staff members from their Member of Congress' district offices to advocate on behalf of our eating disorders initiatives, which you can read about in more detail below in the [What We Are Advocating For section](#).

What's the Purpose?

The purpose of this advocacy day is to convince staff members from your Member of Congress' district office that the initiatives we are advocating for are important and needed, so they in turn will convince your Member of Congress to support and join our initiatives.

Why advocate In-District, and not in Washington, DC?

While a very effective means of advocacy, traveling all the way to and from Washington, DC can be expensive and time-consuming for some advocates and their families. An in-district advocacy day allows advocates from all over the country to participate, greatly amplifying the collective impact of the advocacy effort.

II. What is the role of an Advocate?

As an Advocate, you will join a team of local constituents in an advocacy meeting with staff from your Member of Congress' local office, where you will relay your personal story dealing with an eating disorder, as part of a larger effort to convince your Member of Congress' office to support our initiatives. Your job is to show your Member of Congress' office that there are people in their community affected by eating disorders who are willing to put pressure on their elected officials on eating disorders issues.

For a full list of all the duties associated with volunteering as an Advocate, please see the [Your To-Do List section](#) below.

Overall, being an Advocate is a straightforward job. If you have questions about any of the information contained in this guide, please reach out to Kerry Donohue at kdonohue@nationaleatingdisorders.org. Also, you will be able to ask any questions you might have during your Advocate Webinar Training.

III. Advocacy Meeting Basics

Who: This meeting will involve you (the Advocate), other Advocates on your team, a Lead Advocate who will be organizing and leading your advocacy meeting, and a staff member ("staffer") for your Member of Congress within the local Congressional district office.

What: You and your fellow advocates will be meeting with a staffer to tell your personal stories of how eating disorders affect your life/lives and request that the Member of Congress co-

sponsor the Eating Disorder Prevention in Schools Act of 2019 and sign-on to a Congressional letter to the Appropriations Committee requesting more funding for eating disorders research. Again, see the [What We Are Advocating For section](#) below for more information.

When: This meeting will take place on NEDA's In-District Advocacy Day: **Friday, February 28, 2020 between 9:00 AM-5:00 PM local time.**

Where: The meeting will take place in your Member of Congress' local office.

Why: NEDA's In-District Advocacy Day provides you with an opportunity to advocate in-person with your Member of Congress's office and staff. While other forms of advocacy certainly exist, we've found that nothing works better than good old-fashioned in-person advocacy. With the chance to engage face-to-face with your Member of Congress' staff comes the opportunity to effect real change.

Specifically, the goal of this advocacy day is to fight for the Eating Disorder Prevention in Schools Act of 2019, which would require schools to include eating disorders prevention education, as well as to ensure that eating disorders research is properly funded.

IV. Why Your Voice Matters

There is no one in the world that Members of Congress and their staffers want to hear from more than you, because as a constituent and a voter, you are effectively their boss. Your voice matters to them more than anyone else's, they are one hundred times more likely to remember your story than a practiced speech from a professional lobbyist.

Legislation doesn't get passed on eating disorders issues or on anything else without direct advocacy from people like you, so thank you for dedicating your time to advocate on such important issues.

V. What We Are Advocating For

Eating Disorder Prevention in Schools Act of 2019: This bill would require schools across the country to include eating disorders prevention education as part of their Local School Wellness Policy. Currently, schools' policies must educate students on obesity prevention, nutrition, and physical activity. As many of us know, a narrow focus on obesity prevention education can have a negative impact on students who are affected by disordered eating behaviors or eating disorders. This bill would fill an important gap in education that is currently missing in most schools today by requiring any education efforts around food and nutrition to include eating disorders prevention and encourage eating disorders screening, regardless of weight status.

FY2021 Spending Bill Request for Increased Eating Disorders Research Funding: The National Institute of Health (NIH), which is a US government agency in charge of all public health research, currently substantially underfunds eating disorders research. Increased funding for eating disorders research through NIH would greatly help us improve prevention and treatment efforts related to eating disorders, which affect the lives of millions of Americans from all different backgrounds.

VI. Your To-Do List

1. Read this guide fully and reach out to Kerry Donohue with any initial questions you might have: kdonohue@nationaleatingdisorders.org.

2. Immediate Next Steps

- If you haven't already, please block off 9:00 AM-5:00 PM local time in your calendar for Friday, February 28.
- If you know of any advocates in your district that might be interested in joining for the advocacy meeting, have them sign up through the official registration form.
- Keep an eye out for an invitation for your Advocate webinar training, which you should receive by February 12.
- Keep an eye out for an email from your Lead Advocate with the time and location information for your advocacy meeting, which you should receive by mid-February.

3. Start Preparing Your Personal Story

While the Advocate webinar training will go over in detail how to prepare an effective personal story for your advocacy meetings, you might find it helpful to start thinking about your personal story now. Your goal is to make a lasting impression on the staffer with your engaging and memorable story about your experience dealing with an eating disorder. To tell a story that will grab a staffer's attention and stick in their mind, we recommend following the steps below:

- Always keep the larger goal in mind, which is to gain the Member of Congress' support for our initiatives—supporting the Eating Disorder Prevent in Schools Act of 2019 and increase in NIH funding for eating disorders. If possible, relate your story to your district or state (i.e., my local nutritional health expert was crucial to my successful recovery).
- Try to get the staffer's attention right from the beginning with an exciting hook. The rest of your opening should be focused on establishing the context for your story, describing what was at stake for yourself and your family.
- When describing your personal story, use as much detail as possible. Your story should feel real, practical, specific, and your details should serve as an emotional hook.
- Since everyone who has been affected by an eating disorder has gone through a different experience, there's no reason to tell a generic story. Make your story as unique and surprising as the real experience.
- Now that you've described your struggle and the hardships you've faced; you can explain how you were able to overcome the situation and inject the potential of success/joy.
- End your story with a memorable line that will make a lasting impression on the staffer.

4. Participate in the Advocate Webinar

The 1-hour training will either take place on Thursday, February 20 at 2pm-3pm EST or 4pm-5pm EST. We will follow up and confirm the timing based on the responses we receive. You will receive a reminder for the webinar 24 hours beforehand.

The webinar will contain the following information:

- A breakdown of how to tell the most impactful personal story possible.
- How to stay bipartisan and on message.
- Basics of the two initiatives listed in the [*What We Are Advocating For section*](#).
- Best practices for preparing for an in-district advocacy day.

Note that a full recording of the advocate training webinar will be sent out to all advocates who were unable to attend the live webinar.

5. Attend the Meeting

This meeting will last around 30 minutes, (unless the district office you're meeting with states otherwise) and will take place in the district office of your Representative. While the bulk of this information will be covered in your webinar, here's a brief overview of what the meeting looks like:

Introductions

You and your team will introduce yourselves, then the Lead Advocate will mention that you are here on behalf of NEDA. The Lead Advocate will give a brief description of NEDA and then explain that you are here advocating for the Eating Disorder Prevention in Schools Act of 2019 and a letter to the Appropriations Committee requesting an increase in NIH research funding for eating disorders.

Eating Disorders 101

The Lead Advocate will give the staffer that you are meeting with some basic information and statistics about eating disorders, including the prevalence of eating disorders in the US, the different kinds of eating disorders, and the mortality rates.

Constituent Stories

In this section, you and other advocates on your team will describe your personal stories to the staffer, describing your lived experience with eating disorders, as described above.

Educate and Make Ask

Here, the Lead Advocate will explain the basics of the Eating Disorder Prevention in Schools Act of 2019 and request for further eating disorders research funding.

Ask for Final Questions

After presenting all this information, the Lead Advocate will ask the staffer if they have any questions about the two initiatives and answer any questions they might have.

This is just a quick overview of how the meeting will work, as mentioned the Advocate webinar will provide you with a comprehensive step-by-step training on exactly how to prepare for and navigate through the meeting with a district staffer.

6. Fill out the NEDA Follow-Up Survey

After you've completed your advocacy meeting, NEDA will send you a follow-up survey on Tuesday, March 2, which must be completed and submitted by Friday, March 13.

This survey will be very straightforward and not too time consuming. You will be asked to list the staffer/staffers that met with you, to rate how well you think the meeting went, and if you'd be interested in volunteering again as an advocate at some point in the future or even serving as a Lead Advocate. This survey should only take around 10 minutes or so to complete.

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in NEDA's 1st Annual In-District Advocacy Day!