TOOL: HOW TO ADVOCATE WITH YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER OR HEALTH SYSTEM

Advocacy matters to you as an individual and as part of your community. Here are specific tools to help advocate for individual and population health.

Health care is just one part of the equation for good health, and it's an important one. When interacting with a health care provider system, people should make sure they understand the health information shared with them, feel respected and heard, and have a sense of how their lived experiences—such as housing, income, food access, transportation, and racism and other forms of discrimination—impact their health and well-being. Neighborhood living conditions, access to community resources, and civic engagement all influence social and health needs.

STEP 1: PERSONAL ADVOCACY IN THE EXAM ROOM (WITH YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER)

Here are some key things to consider when advocating for yourself or a loved one in the exam room:

- **Know your symptoms and medical history.** Before speaking with a care provider, take a few minutes and write down how you are feeling, how long you have been experiencing symptoms, what makes it better or worse, and your past medical history. Also, write down questions you may have for the physician or health care provider.
- **Bring a supporter.** Bringing a trusted friend, family member, or advocate to take notes, ask follow-up questions, and ensure your concerns are heard.
- **Speak up for clear communication**. It's OK, even encouraged, to ask providers to speak in clear, plain language. Patients can always repeat what they hear back to the provider to ensure mutual understanding. If language is a barrier, patients can also ask for an interpreter who speaks their language and can translate.
- **Ask what else may be causing your symptoms.** If you don't feel satisfied with your interaction with your provider or their response, feel dismissed, or believe something important is being missed in your evaluation, ask them what else could be causing your symptoms. Ask the physician or health care provider to list other possible causes of your symptoms, known as a "differential diagnosis."

For sample questions to ask your health care provider and other toolkit resources, visit: naacp.org/resources/ace-your-health-literacy-toolkit

STEP 2: ADVOCACY WITH THE HEALTH SYSTEM

Here are the key action steps to take if you've had a negative experience in a doctor's office, hospital, or community health center—or if you want to advocate on behalf of a community or population:

- **Know your patient rights.** The Patient Bill of Rights and Responsibilities must be displayed in public, in an easy-to-see, easily accessible location (such as waiting rooms, exam rooms, and admissions). They must be available in multiple languages, especially the primary languages spoken in the community. They should be given to patients upon admission to ensure they understand their rights to respectful care, privacy, and active participation in their treatment. This is known as "patient-centered or human-centered care" and "shared decision-making."
- **Ask to speak with a patient relations representative or a member of the patient experience team.** If you feel you've been mistreated, disrespected, discriminated against, or if being discharged is unsafe, ask to see this person and have them take your complaint.
- **Escalate the situation to a senior team member or executive officer**. If you are not satisfied with the response from the patient relations staff, ask to speak with a senior member of the patient relations, patient, or human experience team. If no one is available, ask for their contact information, and consider writing a letter to the Chief Executive Officer by hand or email to describe your experience at the health care facility. Also, complete the patient experience survey when it is sent to you by email, mail, or phone. Hospitals and health centers are evaluated on their quality and patient experience scores.
- **Join a Patient and Family Advisory Council or Community Advisory Board, or attend a health care facility public board meeting.** Your voice and active participation in the health system hold power. You can join an advisory council to help improve the patient and human experience at the facility. You can attend or participate in a hospital community board to ensure that health services meet the community's needs and priorities, and that there is a shared priority to achieve social and cultural fluency in care (the ability to understand, respect, and effectively respond to people from all cultural and social backgrounds in real-time interactions). Finally, you can sign up to speak at a board meeting to share an idea, ask how the hospital invests in the community, ask if it buys services from local and diverse businesses, ask if it hires diverse and inclusive health care providers and staff, to report an interesting or concerning community health finding, or to advocate on behalf of a particular patient or clinical population.

