

THE CHILDREN'S CENTER

ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

A guide to influencing decisions that improve the wellbeing of children and families.

The Children's Center | 79 Alexandrine West, Detroit, MI 48201 | 313.831.5535 | thechildrenscenter.com



Table of Contents

Click to jump to a toolkit resource.

Welcome - Let's Advocate Together	03
Letter from our Leadership	04
Toolkit - Who it's For and How it's Used	05
What is Advocacy?	06
Preparing Your Pitch	07
Data & Advocacy	08
Contacting Elected Officials	09
Phone Calls to Elected Officials	10
Legislative Meetings	11
Voter Registration	12
Social Media Advocacy	13
Advocacy at Work	14
Contacts & Acknowledgements	15



Welcome

Let's Advocate Together

The Children's Center (TCC) in Detroit, Michigan has been advocating for the wellbeing of children and families in the community since 1929. This advocacy toolkit was created to help staff and community members educate, inform, and emphasize the importance of legislation that will help children heal, grow, and thrive. The Children's Center serves children and families in Wayne County, Michigan, but these tools can be applied to advocacy work across the nation. By utilizing the resources in this toolkit, we can build awareness and advance policies that positively impact children's mental and behavioral health. Packed with resources, this toolkit will build upon the work The Children's Center is already doing to create a safer, healthier, and more supportive world for our children.

Our Vision

We envision a healthy community that heals through meaningful connectedness and supports.

Our Aim

By creating this toolkit, we aim to empower and educate our community to take action and advocate for the issues they care about.



Letter From Our Leadership

Dear supporters,

At The Children's Center, our mission is to help children and families shape their own futures. Advocating for our priorities is a major way for us to realize this. We cannot do this alone. A community that cares deeply about the issues impacting them and is equipped with the tools in this document can work to drive meaningful change. By getting involved, whether through voting, participating in public forums, or actively reaching out to elected officials, you can play a vital role in shaping the policies that affect us all.

A democracy is not complete without civic engagement. As we advocate for healthier communities and work to provide every child with access to the resources they need, your support can make a real difference. Acting on issues you care about is a commitment that requires planning and effort. The more you flex this muscle, the bigger imprint you will leave on society.

We are grateful for your continued advocacy and commitment to our mission. Let's create a world where every child has access to the comprehensive care and support they deserve. Your actions matter and they will help build a better future. Thank you for inspiring change.

Warm regards,



Desiree Jennings
President & CEO
The Children's Center



Who is this toolkit for?



Clients and families of TCC who can use their unique insight and lived experiences as a foundation to their advocacy work.



Staff members of TCC who can utilize this toolkit to further the work they already do in assisting children and families.



Volunteers and community members who can use their passion and connections to promote child health advocacy work.



Anyone interested in engaging with legislative advocacy!

How can it be used?

This toolkit includes just some of the many ways we can advocate for the wellbeing of children and families. This toolkit provides a range of options that advocates can garner ideas from and use as they see fit. If you are new to advocacy work, you can work through this toolkit from start to finish to understand what advocacy is and the many ways we engage with it. You can also jump from resource to resource to choose what might be most helpful for a wide range of advocacy work. We hope this toolkit inspires you to be an agent of change for our children and families- it's vital to speak up and speak loud!

By staying engaged and spreading the word about our advocacy priorities, challenges, and victories, you help improve children's lives.



What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is a call for change.

It gives people a voice about issues that are affecting them and their community. Advocacy uses evidence to back up these voices- either through stories of lived experience or through data gathering- sometimes both! Advocacy also influences people with power to change their thinking and decision making. Ultimately- advocacy works to create positive change within society.



For more information on advocacy, check out this resource:

[A Preface to Advocacy: What you should know as an advocate](#)

The Children's Center's Advocacy Principles

The Children's Center has set the following advocacy principles to guide our work in ensuring a better future for children and families. These principles set the foundation for all the community work, programs, and services we provide.



The Children's Center believes:

- The safety and well-being of all children, youth and families is vital to strengthening communities and economies.
- Behavioral health is critical to a child's total physical health diagnosis.
- Systems serving children, youth and families must work together to ensure and support barrier-free access to behavioral and physical health care and public education.
- All children involved in public systems deserve to be treated through a lens of equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- Children should be able to have access to services, supports and resources that forward quality education, housing, neighborhoods, social connections, health care and economic stability.



Preparing Your Pitch

When conducting advocacy work, it is important to have a pitch that describes who you are, why you are there, and what you are advocating for. A personal pitch gives real insight to obstacles you are facing. While elected officials have access to information and policy briefs, making a connection to the human impact of an issue is invaluable. This pitch is less about presenting facts, and more about fostering a connection. When time is limited, it is important to craft a compelling message with a clear call to action.

An effective “Personal Pitch” should include:

- Who are you?
- What is your goal?
- What problem are you hoping to solve?
- Why is this needed and why is this important to you?
- What will happen if this problem is not solved?
- What is the call to action?

To find more information on how to use your “Story of Self” when advocating, see [The Power of Storytelling: The Story of Self, Us, and Now](#)

If advocating on behalf of a non-profit, be sure your call to action is not considered lobbying. To learn more about the differences between advocacy and lobbying, see [this resource](#).

A Call to Action

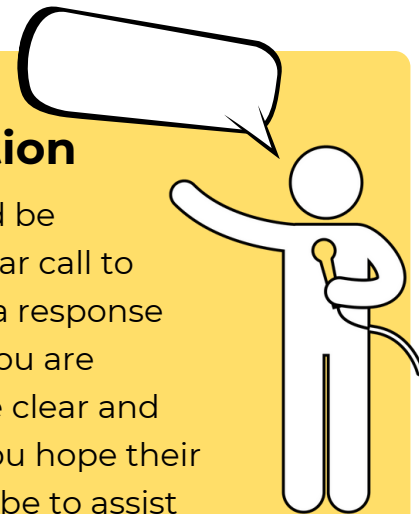
Every pitch should be finished with a clear call to action that seeks a response from whomever you are engaging with. Be clear and concise in what you hope their next steps should be to assist with the issue at hand.

Consider Length & Language

- Keep your message short and sweet—these messages stick best!
- Use language and verbiage that is easily understood by everyone.

Utilize Passion and Connections

- Infuse your message with personal connections or lived experiences that relate to the issue at hand.
- Enthusiasm and emotions help show your passion for the present issue; just be mindful and always stay professional in your pitch.



Data and Advocacy

Well researched facts and statistics help lend evidence towards claims and are useful when talking to policy makers and community leaders.



Look for data that is specific to the geographical region, population, or cause for which you are advocating.



Make sure the data matches the “level” of advocacy.

Ensure your data matches the issue at hand! If you’re advocating for a local change, share city-level data rather than global-level data.

What message are you trying to convey with your data?

It is important to consider what message you want to emphasize. Data can be used to convey how dire a situation is and how many people are impacted. It can also be used to show the future impact or positive change that could occur. The example below shows similar facts, but each is framed in a different way.

— Emphasizing negative impact: Untreated mental illness results in more than \$193 billion in lost earnings each year in the U.S.

+ Emphasizing positive change: Every \$1 investment in prevention and early intervention for mental illness yields \$2 to \$10 in savings in health costs, criminal justice costs, and low productivity.

*Statistics from the [Steinberg Institute](#)



Explore these resources for data related to your advocacy efforts:

Mental Health

[Quick Facts and Stats About Mental Health State Fact Sheets](#)

National Level Data Sources

[American Community Survey](#)
[Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System](#)
[Opportunity Index](#)

Child Health Data Sources

[National Center for Health Statistics](#)
[National Survey of Children’s Health](#)
[The Annie E. Casey Foundation](#)

Detroit Specific Data Sources

[Data Driven Detroit](#)



The Children’s Center Advocacy Toolkit

Contacting Elected Officials

Contacting elected representatives is an important part of advocacy work- they hold power and can assist us in making change! Utilize the guide below to assist in communicating with representatives in your area.

Elected representatives care most about calls from constituents- meaning people that live in the area they represent. It is best to contact elected officials that represent the area you live in.

Visit these websites to find out who represents you at a local, state, and federal level.

[Common Cause](#)

[MyReps](#)

[USA Gov](#)

Phone and Written Communication to Elected Officials

When calling an elected official, you will almost never speak to them directly, and instead will talk with someone working in their office or be instructed to leave a voicemail. When emailing or writing letters to elected officials, your letter might be read by someone else in the office, or presented in a summary to the representative.



- ★ Prepare what you will say to the representative: think about why you are calling or writing, and what you hope they take away.
- ★ Keep your message brief and to the point. If emailing or sending letters, avoid attaching extra documents as those rarely get read by the representative.
- ★ When calling or writing, be sure to mention your full name and where you live (so they know you are a constituent).
- ★ Be firm in your stance and be clear on if you expect a response or action from them.
- ★ Be passionate but avoid anger- some representatives will refuse to communicate with people who leave aggressive voicemails and letters.
- ★ Be consistent and frequent in your communications- if you want a response, and didn't get one, follow up. Work to rally a large number of people to call or write to their representatives. Larger numbers are harder to ignore.



Phone Calls to Elected Officials

Follow the script below for guidance on what to say when calling elected officials:

Introduction:

"Hello, my name is [Your Name], and I am a resident of [City/State]. I am calling as a concerned citizen to share my thoughts on [issue/topic]. Thank you for taking the time to listen to me today."

Statement of Purpose:

"I am calling to express my concerns and to ask for your support on [specific issue]. As a member of this community, I believe it is important that our elected officials understand the perspectives and needs of their constituents."

Personal Story or Connection to the Issue:

"Personally, this issue affects me because [briefly share a personal story or reason why this issue is important to you]."

Use our ["Personal Pitch"](#) tool to help you craft a meaningful connection!

Facts and Data:

"According to [reliable source], [provide a key fact or statistic that supports your position]. This shows the importance and urgency of addressing [issue]."

For resources on finding and sharing data, see our ["Data and Advocacy"](#) tool.

Specific Request:

"I respectfully urge you to [take a specific action, such as supporting or opposing a piece of legislation, attending a community meeting, etc.]."

Our ["Call to Action"](#) tool can help you create a clear and impactful request!

Offer Further Information:

"If you need more information or would like to discuss further, I am happy to connect with you and provide additional details. You can contact me at [your contact info]."

Thank You and Follow-Up:

"Thank you for your time. I appreciate your service to our community and hope you will consider my perspective when making decisions about [issue]."

*Portions of this script were created using OpenAI.



Legislative Meetings

Meetings with elected officials, whether virtual or in-person, are a great way to educate and influence legislators. Here are some tips for setting up and conducting a meeting with an elected official.

Request a Meeting



- Identify the elected officials who have influence over the issues you're advocating for or that represent your district.
- Reach out via email or phone to request a meeting. Be specific about the purpose of your meeting.
- If you don't hear back, follow up - persistence is key!

Prepare and Run a Meeting



- Research the elected official's stance on the issue and create a meeting agenda to ensure you stay on track and get your main point across.
- Prepare a personal pitch and gather materials to bring with you (news articles, resources, or data to help support your pitch).
- Be punctual- government offices have security measures that could take extra time.
- Introduce yourselves and your purpose; be prepared to answer questions or provide additional information during your conversation.
- End with a clear call to action and ask for the legislator's response.
- Take notes to summarize key takeaways and next steps.

Tip #1: After meetings or events, send a thank you note and include any additional information that was requested. Continue to reach out to the legislator's office for updates on your issue.

Tip #2: Collaborate with community organizations or neighbors who share your concerns. There is power in numbers!

Attend Events

Elected officials host events (coffee hours, office hours, or town halls) as opportunities to engage with constituents and learn about their issues.

- Check the legislator's website or contact their office for event schedules.
- Prepare questions or comments related to your advocacy issue to discuss at the event.
- Arrive early to meet legislative staff and fellow concerned citizens.
- When asking a question, introduce yourself, state your concern, and form a question to get your elected official's stance on the issue.



Voter Registration

Elected officials are voted into office by you! By voting in primary and general elections, you can influence who is representing your area and who will be making decisions that will affect you and your community.

1

Check to see if you are registered to vote! You can do this by visiting [vote.gov](https://www.vote.gov).

2

If you're not registered, register as soon as possible! If you are, ensure your voter registration information is up to date with your accurate name and address.

3

Make your voting plan early. Each state has different rules about how soon before an election you need to register. Each state also has different restrictions on in-person and online voter registration.

4

Vote! And encourage your family, friends, and community members to vote, too!

Michigan Voting Information

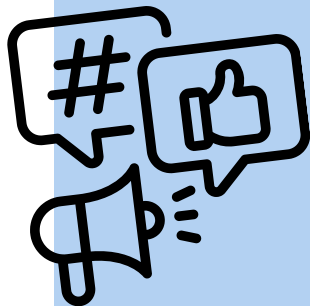
Visit [Michigan Voter Information Center](#) to access information on registration, absentee ballots, accessible voting, and poll locations.

- MI online voter registration deadline: 15 days before Election Day
- MI mail-in voter register deadline: Postmarked 15 days before Election Day
- MI in-person registration deadline: Available up to and including on Election Day



Social Media Advocacy

Social media is an incredible tool in advocacy work! It allows us to share information widely and craft powerful stories of advocacy work.

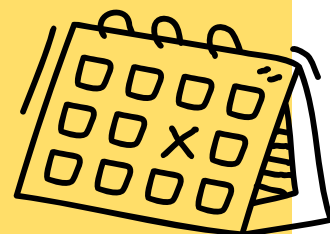


Social media can be used to connect with your elected officials!

- Find your elected officials on social media - follow them to see what causes they find important, and what decisions they are making.
- Tag your elected officials in posts that you want to draw their attention to.
- Use social media to express gratitude for decisions made by your elected officials.

National Awareness Months and Days

Utilizing National Awareness Months and Days can be a great way to build off existing advocacy work! You will see The Children's Center social media pages highlighting these awareness months and using them to share information around important issues.



To find existing awareness times that align with your advocacy work, check out these resources:

[Mental Health Awareness Calendar](#)

[Heritage Months](#)

[Celebration and Awareness Days](#)

See examples of The Children's Center social media advocacy!



[Instagram](#)



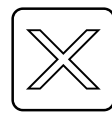
[LinkedIn](#)



[Facebook](#)



[YouTube](#)



[Twitter/X](#)



[TikTok](#)



The Children's Center Advocacy Toolkit

Advocacy at Work!

The Children's Center is involved in a wide range of advocacy activities. Take a look at how we have incorporated the ideas in this Advocacy Toolkit into our work with the community.

TCC Staff show off rainbow flags in support of the LGBTQ+ community during Pride Month



TCC Youth Advisory Council attended a conference on youth leadership and advocacy



TCC hosted a youth led candidate forum for community members to connect with people running for elected office



The Children's Center of Wayne County

July 1 at 1:00 PM · 🌐

Celebrating Disability Pride Month! 🌈 Let's honor the achievements, and diverse experiences of the disability community. Together, we can advocate for inclusion, accessibility, and equality for all.



Happy Disability Pride Month!

July marks the anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. We uplift disabled individuals by celebrating their achievements, advocating for their rights, and supporting their journeys toward inclusion and equality.



2

TCC Social Media pages promote awareness and show support for Disability Pride Month



TCC leadership joined CBS Detroit to raise awareness on the mission of TCC



The Children's Center Advocacy Toolkit

Contact & Acknowledgements

Contact Information

Connect with us! Whether you have questions about this Advocacy Toolkit, are seeking our services, or want to help promote our mission, reach out- we'd love to hear from you.

The Children's Center
79 Alexandrine West, Detroit, MI 48201
313.831.5535
thechildrenscenter.com
[TCC Contact Form](#)

Contributors

Thank you to Annie Clark (Community Partnerships and Project Intern) for the content gathering, creation, and graphic design of this toolkit. Thank you to all the staff members of The Children's Center who influenced the content of this toolkit, especially Aubrey Gilliland (Community Programs Manager), David Sanchez (Senior Director for External Affairs and Advocacy), Julia Serlin (Strategic Communications & Digital Advocacy Specialist), and Alessandra Akers (Community Partnership and Projects Intern).

Sources

The following organizations and resources informed the content of this toolkit:

- [Michigan's Children](#)
- [Michigan Federation for Children and Families](#)
- [UNICEF Advocacy Toolkit](#)
- [Plan International Advocacy](#)
- [Plan International Toolkit](#)
- [American Planning Association](#)
- [KQED California](#)
- [Share4Rare Toolkit](#)

External Resources Cited

Below are the hyperlinked resources throughout the toolkit in the order they appear:

- [Commons Library: A Preface to Advocacy](#)
- [Commons Library: The Power of Storytelling](#)
- [Arizona State University: The Power of Storytelling](#)
- [Mental Health America: Quick Facts and Stats](#)
- [NAMI: State Fact Sheets](#)
- [US Census: American Community Survey](#)
- [CDC: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System](#)
- [Opportunity Index](#)
- [CDC: National Center for Health Statistics](#)
- [Child Health Data: National Survey on Children's Health](#)
- [The Annie E. Casey Foundation](#)
- [Data Driven Detroit](#)
- [Common Cause: Find Your Representatives](#)
- [My Reps](#)
- [USAGov: Find and Contact Elected Officials](#)
- [Vote.gov: Register to Vote](#)
- [Michigan Voter Information Center](#)
- [Washington College: Mental Health Awareness Calendar](#)
- [Harvard University: Heritage Months](#)
- [Buffalo State: Celebration and Awareness Days](#)

Creation and Updates

The creation of this toolkit was completed in July 2024. The toolkit was most recently updated in August 2024.





THANK YOU!

LET'S ADVOCATE TOGETHER.

The Children's Center
Advocacy Toolkit

The Children's Center | 79 Alexandrine West, Detroit, MI 48201 | 313.831.5535 | thechildrenscenter.com

