

Persuading Decision Makers Is Key Component of Advocacy

by Sandra Gines and Hayley Young

The Wisconsin Breast Cancer Coalition's mission is to reduce the burden of breast cancer faced by the people of Wisconsin through legislation, education and collaboration. A key component of our programming is based on integrating advocacy into every aspect of our work. Advocacy is the process that individuals and organizations use to persuade others about the best course of action for a given constituency.

For us, being involved in advocacy is the difference between "Now what?" and "What are we going to do about it?" When evaluating a current policy or proposal, we decide if the status quo is good enough or if we need to take action to change it.

Doing advocacy work at the organizational level involves leveraging the power of individuals, but it also means holding society-wide goals over individual concerns. Not every single person who works with us is always going to agree on every nuanced issue, but the Wisconsin Breast Cancer Coalition (WBCC) is an alliance of people who hold values that bind us together on issues like healthcare access, proactive education efforts and cutting-edge research.

There is a lot of great work done by organizations that focus on breast cancer that isn't advocacy work. But the WBCC is involved in advocacy because system change can't happen without it. Advocacy work has completely changed the landscape of what breast cancer patients and survivors face today, compared to 30 years ago. The response to a breast cancer diagnosis has changed radically over the last century. In the past, women were not in the driver's seat, and treatment decisions were made with little input from patients. Famous activists and social movements increased awareness and screening among women. A new area of activism and policy was born, and there has been a decrease in breast cancer mortality because of it.

As mentioned earlier, advocacy is about persuading decision makers. One of the most powerful tools at our disposal

is the power of the individual story. If we take the attempt to repeal of the Affordable Care Act as a case study, we might say that organizations all over the country come out against taking away affordable healthcare. But what we saw over and over again, including in our own organization, was the power of each individual's calls, stories and activism. Those individual actions collectively have had a profound impact and provide

a wonderful example of how advocacy connects to system change. As a smaller organization, we have the ability to be nimble and to work on major national policies, and also do deeper dives into Wisconsin-specific policy issues.

Our work is focused on evidence-based practices and a community-focused approach. Good policy outcomes come from good data and collaboration. WBCC's work on education is fundamental to our work on advocacy. Our presentation about the links of childhood obesity to breast cancer is as important for legislators as it is for parents of young girls. Every year, the WBCC goes to the Capitol to speak with legislators and staff about the issues that are important to us and our members. Serving as an educational resource and engaging with change-makers are such critically important pieces of our work, that our annual visits to the Capitol are an excellent example of advocacy in action. ■

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Sandra Gines is Executive Director at the Wisconsin Breast Cancer Coalition (WBCC).



Hayley Young is Capitol Advocate at the Wisconsin Breast Cancer Coalition (WBCC).

Contact them at wbcc@wibreastcancer.org.