



ELECTION ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

How to Talk About What's at Stake
for Health Equity

2024

Many health equity advocates across the country are **ANXIOUS** right now.

The two presidential candidates, along with contenders for state legislatures and Congress, hold [divergent views on many issues critical to equity](#), including poverty, welfare, employment, healthcare access, and housing. They have widely different regard for civil rights, reproductive justice, and gender equality. While Kamala Harris has supported incentives for states to adopt Medicaid expansion, Donald Trump has proposed transforming Medicaid into a [block-grant model](#) that would cap federal funding and cut eligibility for many low-income Americans.

What's certain is that the outcome of the 2024 election, from statehouses to Capitol Hill to the White House, will have profound implications for health equity. (HealthBegins' [October 2024 webinar](#), co-hosted with the Health Equity Community Collaborative, spelled out what's at stake.) It has the potential to propel our recent gains further forward or reverse some of them, to embed equity more deeply into policy and public funding or write fresh racism, classism, and misogyny into law. Recent [harmful Supreme Court decisions](#) have shown how much hinges on election outcomes and the values of those who attain power. Real lives hang in the balance.

CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS






For us as Upstreamists, the election could effectively enable or impede the pursuit of health equity—and that uncertainty can feel lonely. We need colleagues to stand with us, learn with us, and act with us. Yet in many settings, our healthcare colleagues are focused on other priorities.

How do we open conversations with colleagues about what's at stake in this election and what to do about it? How can we approach those conversations so that they're constructive, rooted in the values we share as caregivers? How do we build bridges about what matters most for health?

Through our work at HealthBegins supporting courageous health-equity leaders across more than 30 U.S. states, we have discovered some helpful starting points. We offer them to you here. **Let them help you open conversations, share information, build shared passion, and encourage action** — both for the 2024 election and civic engagements to come.

THE UPSTREAMIST'S GUIDE:

Steps to Productive Policy Conversation

1. **UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE.** 
2. **TELL A STORY ABOUT WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU.** 
3. **CRAFT A MESSAGE TAILORED FOR YOUR AUDIENCE.** 
4. **SHARE KNOWLEDGE APPROPRIATELY SIZED AND SALIENT TO YOUR AUDIENCE.** 
5. **PREPARE A MENU OF OPPORTUNITIES TO TAKE ACTION.** 

1. UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE.

To gauge what may spark their interest, ask yourself: What is their professional role? What are their personal values? Which issues do they care about most, such as [women's health](#), LGBTQIA rights, food security, housing, or healthcare access? What personal experiences may shape their worldview?

Avoid making assumptions about a person's partisan preferences. Instead, connect on the issues that matter to them.

2. TELL A STORY ABOUT WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU.

A story can open a colleague's heart and mind to new information and inspire action. This should be a real-life story, either from your own experience or the experience of someone directly affected by these policies.

- **Consider your own policy story.** How does your own experience intersect with these issues? What policies have allowed you to exist the way you are? Your story could reflect only your own experience, or your experience with a patient or other person you cared for.
- **Begin with "I."** Opening with a personal story or a statement about your own feelings (such as "I've been really worried about..." or "I really care about...") can ease resistance and encourage listening.
- **A compelling story involves stakes**, where someone hopes or strives for something important to them, where something meaningful is on the line. To spot a story, look for a challenge undertaken or overcome, an improvement, a transformation, gains or losses, a crucial goal, or a powerful relationship.
- **Choose concrete details** (but only meaningful ones) to make your story vivid. Who was the grandmother who inspired this person's work? To what lengths did your care provider go to support their patient?
- **Clearly identify the idea or message** that you want your colleague to remember, and keep the story focused on points that support that.

3. CRAFT A MESSAGE TAILORED FOR YOUR AUDIENCE.

For example, depending on your colleagues' roles and interests, your message might be:

- We've been working so hard to improve maternal health. But this election could derail that work by making it harder to devote resources to the most vulnerable groups.
- We've made really important progress on directing Medicaid dollars to address food insecurity. This election could change that.
- Medicaid expansion has brought so many more people within reach of regular health care. I don't want to lose that.
- This election could either expand or cut support for families at risk of poverty. If it cuts support, that will make both health and equity worse.

4. SHARE KNOWLEDGE APPROPRIATELY SIZED AND SALIENT TO YOUR AUDIENCE.

This knowledge should be:

- Relevant to their role and interests
- Accurate and reliable
- Nonpartisan
- Easily accessible, so that they can do their own research if they prefer

5. PREPARE A MENU OF OPPORTUNITIES TO TAKE ACTION.

For example, these steps could include:

- Register to vote. You can find your state’s registration deadlines and links [here](#).
- Help someone else register to vote.
- Join the [Vot-ER](#) efforts to register voters in healthcare settings.
- If you manage employees, make sure they have time and encouragement to vote.
- Share one of the resources offered here with three other people.
- Reach out to community partners who might collaborate on local advocacy.
- Watch [our webinar](#): “Election 2024: What’s at Stake for Health Equity and How to Protect It.”

BEYOND THE FIRST CONVERSATION

Don’t worry if your first conversation only makes it to step two or three. The conversation you start today is only the beginning—an important step toward building a relationship and an ongoing dialogue.

“It’s not a one and done,” says Dr. Nazleen Bharmal, who has led health equity initiatives from Washington DC to Ohio to California for more than ten years. “It’s okay to have a second, third, and fourth conversation, and you should.”

Those conversations can evolve, and your partnerships can grow, to fuel collaboration in pursuit of health equity over time. And they can form the basis of a community that supports our values and amplifies our impact. (To help build that community, HealthBegins is gauging interest in launching a [leadership academy for health equity action](#). [Sign up](#) if you’d like to learn more.)

Dr. Bharmal, who serves as Chief Health Equity Officer at Stanford Health Care, takes the long view. Even if the work becomes more constrained for a time, and even if we have to call it another name besides “equity,” it will continue.

“I’ve seen the pendulum swing so many times, and it will swing, that’s just the natural reaction, and it will swing back again,” she says. Our job is to keep at it, to understand the constraints and be at the ready for the next opportunity to leap forward when it opens.

HealthBegins Program Manager Vince Pancucci contributed research and editorial feedback to this guide.

RESOURCES FOR EACH STAGE OF THE CONVERSATION

This is a partial list of available resource and interest groups, provided as a starting point.

1. UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE.

Healthcare Access and Health Equity Broadly

Title and Link	Resources	Description
Election 2024: What's at Stake for Health Equity and How to Protect It	HealthBegins and Health Equity Community Collaborative	Webinar panel discussion
Compare the Candidates on Health Care Policy	Kaiser Family Foundation	Breakdown of presidential candidates' policies on ACA, Medicaid, maternal health, and more
All Things Equal: Health Equity Considerations this Presidential Election Cycle	Rollins Magazine, Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University	Article on impacts of homelessness, censorship, jail and prison health, and more issues
Health Policy and the 2024 Election	Rollins Magazine, Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University	Article on issues including healthcare affordability, healthcare deserts, and the opioid epidemic

Women's Health

What's at Stake in the 2024 Election for Women's Health	The Commonwealth Fund	Breakdown of key issues and candidates' policies
Black Women's Health and the 2024 Election: A Call to Action	Black Women's Health Imperative	5 pillars of Black women's health, plus a voter guide and voter checklist
Gender Justice Voter Guide	National Women's Law Center Action Fund	Information on challenges, opportunities, and policy priorities

LGBTQIA Health

Get Out the Vote	The National LGBTQ+ Bar Association	Voter registration tools
Queering Reproductive Justice: A Mini Toolkit	National LGBTQ Taskforce	Helps advocates deepen their understanding within an LGBTQ context
An Employee Guide to Advocacy 101: Using Your Voice Inside and Outside of the Workplace	Workplace Equality Program and Human Rights Campaign Foundation	Guide to advancing LGBTQ+ rights

Racial Health Equity

A Vote for Democracy	NAACP	Breakdown of key election issues affecting the Black community
Voto Latino	Voto Latino	Breakdown of key election issues affecting the Latinx community
APIAVote	Asian & Pacific Islander American Vote	Voting and policy information to strengthen and sustain a culture of civic engagement
Native Vote	Native Vote	Voter registration, voter guide, and regional webinars

2. TELL A STORY ABOUT WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU.

Title and Link	Resources	Description
A Guide to Empathetic Social Change Storytelling	Who Tells the Story?	Tool for nonprofits to partner with clients and communities
Story Based Strategy 101	Center for Story Based Strategy	A quick and easy guide about story based strategy in movement building
Telling Our Story: An Elections Communication Guide	The Elections Group	Guide for countering misinformation and promoting trust and respect for our election system
Storytelling as a tool to increase voter participation	County Health Rankings & Roadmaps	Webinar on the role of storytelling in promoting civic participation
Storytelling and Social Change	Paul VanDeCarr for Working Narratives	Guide for organizers, organizations, and activists, including strategy, methods, structure, and case studies

3. CRAFT A MESSAGE TAILORED FOR YOUR AUDIENCE.

Title and Link	Resources	Description
Crafting Your Advocacy Message	The National Council on Mental Well-Being	Step-by-step breakdown for advocates
Advocacy Messaging	Global Health Advocacy Incubator	A primer in message crafting
Creating an Advocacy Message	The Campaign Workshop	4-minute video outlining the steps
What should I write?	Vote Forward	Tips for communicating across partisan divides
Campaign Skills Handbook: Module 6 – Message Development Creating Powerful and Persuasive Messages	National Democratic Institute	Manual for political candidates that also works for anyone

4. SHARE KNOWLEDGE APPROPRIATELY SIZED AND SALIENT TO YOUR AUDIENCE.

Title and Link	Resources	Description
Election 2024: What's at Stake for Health Equity and How to Protect It	HealthBegins and Health Equity Community Collaborative	Webinar panel with national leaders summarizes what's at stake from their different perspectives
Vote to end childhood hunger	No Kid Hungry	Voting resources for food security
Medicaid Food Security Network	Medicaid Food Security Network	National network to mobilize Medicaid systems to become a key partner in food and nutrition security
What Every Elected Official Should Know About Hunger	Food Research & Action Center	One-stop-shop to learn about the extent of hunger in America and potential solutions
Our Homes, Our Votes	National Low Income Housing Coalition	Guide to nonpartisan voter and candidate engagement for the housing and homelessness field
The Politics of Health Care and the 2024 Election	Kaiser Family Foundation	Chapter from KFF's Health Policy 101 primer
What's at Stake in the 2024 Election for Medicaid	The Commonwealth Fund	Article on implications for coverage and access
Health Is on the Ballot in the Presidential Election	JAMA Forum	Article on issues including reproductive rights, migrant health, gun violence, and pandemic preparedness
Election 2024	American College of Physicians	Breakdown of candidate position on key ACP healthcare priorities

5. PREPARE A MENU OF OPPORTUNITIES TO TAKE ACTION.

Title and Link	Resources	Description
From Now to Election Day: How Upstreamists Can Get to Work	HealthBegins	Newsletter with election action timeline by month
Vot-ER Resource Hub	Vot-ER	Introduction and resources for healthcare-based voter engagement
Thrive Through Civic Health: We Will Vote Campaign	Civic Health Alliance	Pledge campaign to help public health and healthcare communities get out the vote
Civic Health Compact	Civic Health Alliance	Helps healthcare delivery organizations to integrate civic engagement into policies and programs
RxVote Campaign	Civic Health Alliance	Printable prescription cards for voting
Nonprofit Voter Engagement Playbook	Independent Sector	Comprehensive guide to voter engagement efforts
Making A Voter Engagement Plan: Questions to Consider	Nonprofit Vote	Key questions for planning voter engagement efforts