

Injury research advocacy a high priority

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For researchers, the word “advocacy” and its associated activities are not well defined, nor are most researchers exposed to advocacy education during their academic training. Without a good definition, performing advocacy activities is often viewed as intimidating or even inappropriate for researchers. Advocacy activities are also commonly linked with lobbying, which involves paid efforts to promote a specific legislative bill or act. However, advocacy is not inherently related to lobbying, funding, or even policy development.

The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines advocacy as “The act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause, idea, or policy; active support.” Using this definition in the context of injury research, advocacy basically involves activities that put forward evidence-based approaches to safety and promote injury prevention.¹ It is important that injury researchers and scientists engage in these activities, whether it be to disseminate important research findings or support growth in the science and practice of the field.

The Society for the Advancement of Violence and Injury Prevention (SAVIR) has identified advocacy for injury prevention research as one of its priorities. In order to mobilize SAVIR members to better engage in advocacy, several activities are being planned to educate our membership, enhance skills, and facilitate participation in advocacy activities. One new initiative is the “SAVIR Advocacy Alert” which identifies timely actions related to promoting the field of injury and violence prevention. For example, Dr Ileana Arias of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was recently asked to testify on childhood safety before the United States Senate. A SAVIR Advocacy Alert was emailed to ask our

members to call the offices of their specific Congressional leaders, ask to speak to relevant staff members, and request that these staff members attend the briefing. It only took a few minutes to make the call, but made a big difference in educating legislative staff, showing there was a constituency for childhood safety, and bringing much needed attention to injury research.

However, advocacy does not need to be related to legislative activities to make an important contribution. Four additional examples of activities to give injury research “a voice” are listed below:

1. Write a letter to the editor. We all realize that our research findings often do not reach the general public. One method of providing input into current injury prevention topics is writing a letter to your local newspaper. For example, if there are timely observations about public safety that need to be aired or there has been a high profile injury event in your community, you can identify opportunities for prevention and tie these opportunities to injury research that you or others have conducted.
2. Disseminate a press release to accompany your research publications. In order to help promote the science of injury prevention to non-academic audiences, write a press release to describe your findings to a general lay audience. This is especially important for any publications that identify successful intervention strategies. Establishing a relationship with the person who does this at your institution is a good investment of time. Submit the release to the media through your institution or through a coalition or professional

organization with whom you are affiliated.

3. Offer to serve as an expert in your field. Injury researchers are not common, and many different audiences are interested in what we know. It is worth a call to your local media, community stakeholders, and governmental representatives to let them know what you do and that you are willing to serve as an expert resource.
4. Write an op-ed. Unsolicited opinion editorials deal with issues at the top of the news or with a fresh perspective on a topic, such as new research findings. Legislators and their assistants pay special attention to op-eds from experts in the field as a way to track issues important to constituents. It is worth the effort to write an op-ed, usually 500–700 words, and get a newspaper to publish it. You may also want to invite a legislator to co-author the op-ed with you. This strategy doubles your reach to both the legislator and the larger public.

One key to effective advocacy is cultivating relationships, whether it be with legislators, government agency staff, injury survivors, the media, relevant coalitions or the public relations person in your institution. Advocacy is important for all of us to encourage the growth of our field and take our injury research to the next level. SAVIR plans to include more information on different types of advocacy activities through training webinars and our website (www.savirweb.org). If you are interested in these activities, please consider joining the SAVIR Advocacy and Public Policy Committee. We welcome your participation and hope you will share examples of your advocacy for injury research and science.

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