

Messaging Reference Guide for Persuading & Activating Health System Leaders & Policymakers

The U.S. healthcare system is broken — a reality voters, advocates, and healthcare leaders largely agree on, even as they differ on the right path forward. That shared understanding is a valuable starting point for persuasive communications: rather than spending time making the case that change is needed, focus on building alignment around solutions.

These recommendations are based on research with health system leaders and policymakers. They are not a formula or communications plan, but guidance you can apply when developing messages. Whether your focus is expanding access to quality coverage, lowering costs, advancing health equity, or pursuing another priority, use these insights to build trust, strengthen persuasion, and motivate action.

★ See the full messaging recommendations and research insights [here](#).

MESSAGING STRATEGIES | *How to plan and deploy your communications.*

MESSAGING	TYPES OF CONTENT	MESSENGERS	IMPACT	SEGMENTATION
Incorporate all of the recommendations outlined on the next page into your messaging to ensure it meets the needs of your audience. Consider ways to tailor the recommendations and examples to your state's unique context.	Build a portfolio of different types of content to meet different needs and to use in different contexts. Consider case studies, patient stories, op-eds, fact sheets, policy briefs, and more, which can be tailored for your audience and goals.	Deploy a diverse set of credible and unexpected messengers. Consider patients, employers, medical professionals, and hospital system leaders — particularly across the spectrum of political ideologies — who are willing to speak out with new perspectives.	Use examples and proof points about what works from a range of geographically and politically diverse states. Consider how your examples and proof points reinforce feasibility and legitimacy of solutions in various state contexts.	Segment your communications by audience whenever possible. Consider how your messaging can focus on one audience's key constraints and concerns.

RECOMMENDATION	WHY THIS MATTERS TO OUR AUDIENCE
#1 Build Trust by Starting from Shared Values and Shared Reality Begin by having messengers speak to a shared commitment to patients, an understanding that the healthcare system is broken, and a desire for an improved healthcare system. Strengthen credibility by citing politically-neutral trusted sources.	<i>“A lot of people who are otherwise pretty stable in their lives can be completely destabilized by the way our healthcare system works. Our healthcare system is broken and it needs a lot of people to fix it. I find constant value in being a part of those solutions.”</i> —PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM LEADER
#2 Acknowledge Complexity Without Reinforcing Division Demonstrate awareness of the structural barriers that make change difficult by naming profit motives, fragmentation, variation across states and systems, and political pressures. Affirm that major transformations, while needed, may not be feasible right now — and highlight how incremental solutions can still make meaningful impacts on the system and patients.	<i>“Not surprisingly, there are some people that love the way the system works now because it works in their favor. They're making money. [...] It's kind of like, ‘Don't touch my stuff. Don't mess with what I have because I'm pretty happy with it right now.’”</i> —PRIVATE HEALTH SYSTEM LEADER (PUBLICLY-FUNDED)
#3 Calm Concerns by Making Change Feel Practical Reduce skepticism by showing how concrete solutions work in practice and cite data that show proof of impact. Name how various health system leaders can take realistic, meaningful action despite political and institutional constraints. Counter narratives about governmental “waste, fraud, and abuse” through examples of successful policy changes made possible through coordinated action in different levels of government and political contexts.	<i>“Even if you can get people to agree that our current system is broken and we need a unified financing system, what does that look like and how do you actually get there?”</i> —PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM LEADER
#4 Nurture Compassion Through Trusted Voices and Real Stories Share emotionally compelling stories from patients describing the challenges they have faced with the healthcare system and how solutions have improved their lives and communities. Elevate other credible, unexpected messengers, including physicians, employers, and policymakers, explaining why they support a solution; their stories are especially persuasive if they describe a change of heart on a particular solution.	<i>“The patient stories are the most compelling because I think — at the end of the day — what legislators really listen to and respond to in large part are real people and real stories.”</i> —PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM LEADER
#5 Activate Hope by Tying Today's Actions to Tomorrow's System Activate hope by clarifying pathways for change, rather than reinforcing awareness of problems. Lay out concrete, actionable steps that health system leaders can take, together with others, to implement solutions. Connect those solutions to shared values and a hopeful vision for an improved healthcare system.	<i>“You are not going to make everybody happy, but if you can get everybody to come to the table and compromise [...] We need to determine what the outcome needs to be and what we can all agree on and then figure out how we get there.”</i> —POLICYMAKER

MESSAGING EXAMPLES | *Tested content that shows the messaging recommendations in action.*

Note: The content linked below contains fictionalized elements and should not be distributed. Real stories and data were used in the development of the content, but names and details were changed for the purposes of message testing.

EXAMPLE & LINK	HOW TO ADAPT IT TO YOUR CONTEXT
 State policy brief: Exploration of solutions across a range of states from a trusted healthcare trade publication.	● Provide real-life examples of solutions similar to the one(s) you are advocating for, which have been implemented in a range of states, including states that are similar to yours (e.g., similar size, mix of urban/rural communities, or political context). ● Include short testimonials from diverse messengers within and outside of the healthcare system. ● Feature trusted sources your audience is already looking to for the latest research.
 Employer thought leadership: Column from an employer's perspective on employer-sponsored insurance.	● Consider how employer voices can contribute to the conversation about your specific issue, and highlight an employer voice who can also speak about impacts to their employees. ● Use economic framing tailored to your state's relevant challenges and priorities. ● Provide brief historical context that illustrates how the issue your state is facing today came to be. ● Affirm that we all have a role in building a better system and name those specific roles, including your audience's role.
 Medical professional op-ed: Perspective of a medical professional and health system leader who went through a "change of heart" on universal healthcare.	Feature a respected clinical and/or administrative expert messenger who can: ● Describe a specific outcome or vision rooted in shared values — like care and compassion for patients. ● Lay out a realistic path to achieve the outcome or vision. ● Include U.S.-based research or examples of what's possible. ● Offer a hopeful direction forward.
 Patient testimonial & voiceover: Emotional story highlighting how financial incentives within the system harm patients, from cancer diagnosis to treatment.	Feature a patient or consumer from your state who can: ● Authentically convey the emotional gravity of their experience, then pivot to explore underlying drivers that led to their situation to connect the dots to a broader problem. ● Highlight 1-2 facts with impact that relate to their situation. ● Name a variety of key actors responsible for causing or solving the problem of high healthcare costs (including hospitals, insurers, pharmaceutical companies, policymakers, etc.), rather than focusing on blaming just one actor. ● <i>Optional:</i> Lay out a realistic path to solve the problem.