

Bird-Dogging Basics

Plan Your Calendar

Information about upcoming appearances by candidates is available via news outlets, campaign websites and social media, or by calling the candidate's office directly. Ideal events and appearances are those where the candidate is easily approachable and media is in attendance.

Do Your Homework

Research candidates' positions on mental health and suicide prevention by visiting their official websites. Recently, Mental Health for US reached out to the leading presidential candidates to ask about what steps they would take to improve mental health and addiction in America. The survey asked 11 unbiased questions addressing suicide and drug overdose, criminal justice reform, equal access to care, and more. You can read the responses at <https://www.mentalhealthforus.net/voters/candidate-positions/>.

Prep Your Question(s)

Based on your research and personal experiences, prepare a question to ask the candidate. Keep it brief, grounded in fact, and to the point. Practice asking your question until you don't need notes. Be ready with a follow-up to your original question. Please review the guidelines from NAMI National on how to identify yourself as a member of NAMI NH (if you choose to do so) while conveying that your views are your own.

Get Visible

Consider going green for mental illness awareness and bringing signs, if permitted, that express your advocacy for mental health and suicide prevention.

Attend the Event – Arrive Early

The early bird gets closest candidate access – you want to sit/stand as near to the front as possible, especially if there will be a Q & A period.

Ask Away – Put Your Hand in the Air!

When the floor opens for questions, most people will hesitate before raising their hand. Be ready to put your hand in the air early, making it more likely you'll be called upon. In a clear voice, slowly ask your question – which should reflect your knowledge of the candidate's position, and your advocacy area of interest regarding mental health and suicide prevention.

Post-Event Opportunities

After the formal event or appearance has concluded, candidates will often walk amongst the crowd of attendees for handshakes, photo opportunities, and brief conversation. Put yourself in the path of the candidate or get in the selfie line to ensure an opportunity to ask your question(s) on the record.

Notes & Video

Make notes of candidate responses, especially if you are working on a follow-up question. Engage a team member to make a video recording of your exchange with the candidate, if possible.

Find Help, Find Hope.

Keep Calm & Carry On

Strive to remain consistently calm and respectful in your exchanges, both on- and off-camera. Commit to bird-dogging as a marathon, not a sprint. Continue attending appearances and events until you get real answers from candidates on the advocacy areas that matter most to you.

Be Ready for the Media

Journalists often like to interview advocates who have asked questions of the candidate. If they don't approach you, don't hesitate to introduce yourself and start a conversation. It's important to remain on message – stay focused on your primary advocacy issue.

Share Your Experiences

In addition to sharing your candidate experiences on social media, via letters to the editors, and in conversation – please also email advocacy@NAMINH.org with a recap of your exchanges.

Build a Team

Invite fellow mental health and suicide prevention advocates to join you! Grow your group to a sizeable team that can be tapped for candidate appearances and events. It's powerful to have the support of fellow advocates, but be sure to disperse at the event to improve the likelihood multiple advocates will have an opportunity to ask a question.