

HOW TO ORGANIZE A TOWN HALL MEETING

A Planning Guide

**Recovery
Advocacy Toolkit**

MAKING OUR VOICES COUNT

Recovery

INTRODUCTION

Making Our Voices Count through Town Hall Meetings: A Planning Guide

Here are step-by-step instructions for holding an effective town hall meeting, one way that your organization can use **The Recovery Bill of Rights** and the **Recovery Voices Count** campaign to mobilize and organize support for new attitudes and policies to support addiction recovery in your community.

For many years, town hall meetings have been an important tool to inform citizens about emerging issues, gauge where a community stands and identify and implement solutions to a problem. They are also a great way to get your message across to the public by generating news media coverage, jump start your local advocacy efforts and identify people who you can involve in your organization's activities in the future.

PLANNING A TOWN HALL MEETING

To help you get started on planning your town hall meeting, we've outlined some basic key steps for you to think about.

Step 1: Form a Planning Committee

A good way to make your event as successful as possible is to form partnerships with a variety of organizations and other likely allies and work with them to plan and hold your event. These relationships will raise the profile of your town hall meeting and increase public awareness and attention. Your partners will also be able to help you establish your event's credibility and secure free services, such as audio visual equipment, space, or refreshments. All planning partners should be publicly recognized as supporters in your publicity and program. Some possible partners include your local or state agency responsible for alcohol and drug services, treatment and recovery centers, Drug Courts, educators, family groups, and faith-based organizations. It is helpful to recruit your planning committee as early as possible. They will help plan, manage and promote the event. Sometimes, more than one committee or subcommittees may be appropriate, such as a logistics committee or media committee who can work independently and report back to the planning committee.

Step 2: Understand the Unique Characteristics of Your Community

Before organizing your town hall meeting, it is important to understand your community's unique issues, challenges, and opportunities for change. Review local data from a variety of sources and develop a community profile based on solid research. This information will help you know how to focus the discussion and give your program and presentations credibility. For example, it is important to understand the demographics, distinct culture, political environment, history of alcohol and drug problems, opportunities for treatment and recovery support services, and barriers to obtaining help in your community.

Step 3: Identify Objectives

No two town hall meetings are alike. Your meeting's content, format, and objectives will depend on the particular concerns and needs that you and your partners have identified. For example, you may simply want to inform families and residents about recovery in your community and the need for treatment and recovery services; to introduce **The Recovery Bill of Rights**; to inform people about the **Recovery Voices Count** campaign; or to hold a candidates forum. Other communities may want to use their town hall meeting as a call to action for new policies to allow more recovery homes to open or make recovery support services available to people reentering communities after incarceration.

Step 4: Determine Format

Your format will depend on what you are trying to achieve. One of the most common formats is a briefing by a panel of three or four people and a moderator. The panel discussion typically lasts from 35-50 minutes and the question and answer period usually lasts about 30 minutes. The public and policymakers are the primary audience for this type of town hall format. For example, for the HBO's *ADDICTION* documentary, a 20-minute portion of the program was shown and a panel of community leaders and experts discussed the program, followed by audience questions and answers.

Another format possibility is a media roundtable. This would typically include two to four panelists who bring different viewpoints to the issue. They have a moderated discussion designed to highlight the issue and then take questions from reporters. Reporters are the primary audience for a media roundtable. These media roundtables can be held in a small setting such as an office conference room or a classroom.

A third format is a policy panel. At a policy panel, the public presents their opinions. The panel members are community leaders who receive testimony from residents. Speakers give their accounts and urge the panelists to adopt certain measures or recommendations. For this format, the policy panel can convene after the meeting and issue its findings or recommendations based on what they have learned from the public.

THE LOGISTICS OF YOUR MEETING

Step 1: Selecting the Place and Date

Finding the appropriate location is an important step in the planning process and should be determined as early as possible. In some cases, the location can help set the tone for your meeting. It is important to select a place that is easy for residents and local media to get to. Some ideas are city hall, treatment centers, community centers, universities and colleges, and public libraries. The event date and time is equally important. When selecting a date, check out community calendars to avoid competing community events. When selecting a time, think about who you want to have attend, your target audience. If you want your friends and neighbors who work to attend, early evening is probably your best bet. If you need to know how many people will be coming, set up a way for people to RSVP. As long as you are able to get a satisfactory number of RSVPs the event should not be rescheduled.

Step 2: Identify and Invite Panelists

Trusted, well-respected speakers are key to your meeting. They can be a draw for attendance and media coverage. But it's also important to include a local angle on your panel and people in long-term recovery who can tell their stories of hope and the reality of recovery. When you're putting together your panel, think about the issue that you'd like to address and what you want to get out of your event. The most interesting panels usually feature experts with a broad range of experience, such as academic researchers, community leaders, individuals with clinical backgrounds, elected officials, treatment providers, or counselors. In addition, include individuals in your community who have experience with long-term recovery, and/or family members. A good mix for a panel could be a medical expert, preferably an M.D., a law enforcement official who is interested in ending the revolving door of people with addiction, a family member who hasn't been able to get help for their child, and a person who has been in recovery from addiction for at least two years. You can contact the public relations department of a local university, hospital, or medical center to secure a medical expert. The "Addiction: Communities Take Action" web site (www.AddictionAction.org) that was developed in conjunction with HBO's *ADDICTION* documentary has other ideas for people to contact. Invite panelists by first speaking with them and then follow up with formal printed invitations sent by mail or simple letters mailed, e-mailed, and/or faxed.

Step 3: Identify a Moderator or Facilitator

The facilitator or moderator you select should be a well-respected community figure, such as a local educator, reporter, high-level city official, or community leader. This person will be responsible for facilitating the panel discussion and fielding audience questions to panelists. Consider a moderator who is adept at collaboration and is not a polarizing figure. It is also a good idea to pick someone that has close ties or experience with the recovery community to help steer the conversation toward recovery solutions.

Who to Invite?

Some of the people who you can invite are key civic and political leaders, treatment and recovery community leaders, parents, educators, school administrators, law enforcement officials, and public health officials. It is also important to invite young people to attend. For example, you can identify school-based youth organizations and invite leaders who can help get the word out about your event.

Step 4: Prepare Panelists and Media Spokespeople

You'll want to make your panelists comfortable with their colleagues and with their role.

- Give them background information on the event—in writing—as soon as you have confirmed their participation.
- Schedule an informal prep session with the panel about 60 minutes prior to the event. Please refer to the “Talking about Recovery” document, found in the Media Outreach section of this toolkit, which provides training and information on ways that people can most effectively share their recovery stories.
- For all speakers, especially young people, find out if they and/or their parents are comfortable with their name being released to the media, and if they would like to be photographed or filmed.
- If you are inviting people who are in recovery to speak, Faces & Voices recommends that they should have at least two years of recovery and have had experience and training in speaking publicly about their recovery.

It is also important to identify individuals who will serve as media spokespeople to provide comment for the press. These individuals could include local officials who can discuss the nature and the extent of addiction problems and the need for solutions in your community, people in long-term recovery, and citizens who can talk about the next steps that you will be taking as a result of your event.

Step 5: Staff Your Event

A key step in your town hall meeting planning is to identify people who will help out on the day of the event. Someone should be assigned to handle requests from the media; to greet and seat members of the audience and panelists; to distribute materials; to record comments and questions from the audience; to manage equipment set-up or to handle any other important logistical matters. This person doesn't need to be a paid staff member; it's a great job for a volunteer!

Step 6: Prepare Materials to Distribute On-Site

We have included additional materials in this toolkit that can be used as templates to create customized materials for your town hall meeting. You can use them to help support your efforts around the **Recovery Voices Count** campaign and **The Recovery Bill of Rights**. These materials are available at: <http://www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org>

You should also use the information that you research to develop localized materials that make the issue relevant for citizens of your community. It is a good idea to share this information with local reporters for them to use in articles about your town hall meeting.

PROMOTING A TOWN HALL MEETING

Step 1: Getting the Media There

To get reporters to attend and report on your meeting, it is not enough to simply invite them; you must let them know why the event will make a good story and why it is important for the community to know about your efforts.

The first step is creating a targeted media list. The goal is to identify reporters who cover areas or “beats,” such as health or medical issues, alcohol and drug problems, parenting, lifestyle and family, or teens. Reporters who have reported on addiction and alcohol and drug problems or covered other events hosted by your organization should be at the top of your list.

The following are all good sources for print, television and radio media contacts, however they are paid services:

- *Bacon’s Media Source* (www.bacons.com)
- *Burrelle’s Media Directories* (www.burelles.com)
- *News Media Yellow Book* (www.leadershipdirectories.com)

And if you don’t have resources to pay for sources for media contacts, you can also call your local newspaper, radio, and TV stations to identify reporters who might be interested in attending and reporting on your event. Another way to identify friendly reporters is to keep track of who is writing articles or covering stories about your issues. It is a good idea to ask supporters of the event or panelists if they have existing relationships with any members of the media in your local community. The next step is to send an e-mail media advisory to reporters on your targeted media list at least one week in advance of your event. (See the “How to Reach Out to the Media” section for a sample media advisory.) Don’t forget to ask to have your event listed on their “daybooks,” where all local events that will be happening on a particular day are posted. The advisory should emphasize speakers and should be followed up with phone calls to reporters that you have identified. When you talk to reporters, stress the newsworthiness of your event, the local angle, **The Recovery Bill of Rights**, the **Recovery Voices Count** campaign, and the main goals of the event.

**Please see the “The Major Themes” section of this guide for tips on how to create local hooks.*

Step 2: Other Ways to Promote Your Event

Another effective way to promote your town hall meeting is to enlist the support of other organizations that you work with, whether or not they are part of your planning committee. Your outreach efforts combined with theirs can help increase your publicity. Once you’ve figured out your target audience, there are different strategies for inviting them to attend. If your target audience is community stakeholders, business leaders and parents, issue personal invitations and advertise through PTA meetings or other outlets.

If your audience is the general public, then add your town hall meeting to the event calendar in your local newspaper by contacting the calendar editors at the publication. Another cost-effective way to promote your meeting is by posting flyers, posters or banners in visible, popular places such as schools, community centers, coffee shops, grocery stores, faith-based institutions, public libraries or hospitals. Don’t forget recovery houses, recovery community centers and 12-step clubhouses! Keep in mind that you may have to pay to have your ads in some places like a local newspaper. And there are new ways to attract people by using online media like blogs, Facebook and MySpace.

Step 3: Create Press Kits

You will need to prepare materials to hand out to reporters. The easiest way to hand out materials is to create a press kit. It should include the media advisory and/or news release, a fact sheet with local statistics about addiction and recovery, brief biographies of speakers, as well as copies of any reports or case studies. In addition to the materials available in this toolkit, a number of agencies offer local, state and national data on addiction and recovery, such as:

- Center for Substance Abuse Treatment Partners for Recovery <http://pfr.samhsa.gov/>
- Faces & Voices of Recovery www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org
- Join Together www.jointogether.org
- National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors State Overviews http://nasadad.org/index.php?doc_id=966
- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/>
- National Institute on Drug Abuse <http://www.nida.nih.gov/>
- Online state profiles www.oas.samhsa.gov/states.htm
- Recovery Community Services Program <http://rcsp.samhsa.gov/>
- *Recovery Month* Web site www.recoverymonth.gov
- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) www.samhsa.gov

HOLDING YOUR TOWN HALL MEETING

Step 1: Setting-Up Your Meeting

To ensure a successful event, assign volunteers and staff to different tasks.

- Room set up: Some people should arrive early to make sure the room is set up properly and to make any last-minute adjustments. Check on tables, chairs, podiums, equipment, or visual displays. For large meetings, you may need to have a sound system, including table microphones for the panelists, as well as a stage or elevated panel table in the front of the room.
 - Small meetings, with 25 or fewer attendees, work well with a roundtable setup, with panelists on one side of the table and attendees around the remainder of the table. Extra chairs can circle the perimeter of the room to accommodate additional guests.
- Sign-in/registration table: You will need to set up a sign-in table, where you can collect names and contact information for everybody who comes and hand out materials.
- Sign-in sheets: Remember to have separate sign-in sheets, one for the general audience and one for members of the media. This information will be invaluable as you conduct your follow-up activities and plan future meetings. You can also subscribe attendees to your organization's newsletter or listserv.

- **Hand-outs:** At the sign-in table, you may want to have agendas and other information, as well as press kits for reporters. If you plan on discussing specific documents, such as **The Recovery Bill of Rights** or the **Recovery Voices Count** campaign, have copies available.

Step 2: Conducting Your Meeting

The meeting should begin with a welcome and introduction by the head or spokesperson of the host organization or planning committee. The welcome and introduction should last no more than five minutes and should explain the purpose of the meeting, welcome guests, and introduce the moderator. The moderator should then begin the panel discussion with a brief introduction of the issues that will be discussed, a review of the format, and introductions of each panelist. It usually works best to have all of the panelists speak and then each should have three minutes to answer a question from the moderator. The entire panel discussion shouldn't last longer than 50 minutes.

After the panel discussion, the moderator begins the question and answer period, taking questions from the audience and fielding them to the appropriate panelist. Depending on the size of the audience, it may be helpful to set up a microphone in the center of the room or to walk over to audience members and allow them to speak into the microphones. Leave time to wrap up the session, summarize major points, discuss next steps and thank guests. The Q&A should last about 30 minutes.

Step 3: Coordinate Media Interviews

Leave enough time after your briefing for media interviews. Generally, you should set aside 30 minutes after the question and answer period ends to coordinate the interviews between members of the media and your spokespeople. In many cases, media will request an advance interview, so make sure someone at your organization is always available to handle requests for media interviews.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

Your efforts do not end with the town hall meeting. In most cases, the meeting is a catalyst for future strategies, activities, and advocacy campaigns. To truly achieve your goal, you will need to take a number of follow-up steps beginning no more than two weeks after the event:

Step 1: Conduct a “Debrief”

No more than two weeks after your meeting, get together with key individuals, who were involved in your planning, to talk about how it went overall. It's also a good idea to get feedback from the panelists. Discuss whether you achieved your goals and put together a report giving an overview of the event and summarizing the problems and solutions offered by people who attended and the panelists. Your report should also include clippings of any coverage your event received in newspapers, as well as scripts from any radio or TV coverage.

Step 2: Develop an Action Plan

Think about what the next steps could be and develop an action plan. Some possible ideas are policy recommendations, an advocacy campaign, information dissemination, or media outreach.

Step 3: Using Town Hall Meetings to Build Your Advocacy Work

One of the most useful resources that you can develop from your meeting is the names and contact information of everyone who attended. This database can become your mailing list for future events and a source of potential supporters and volunteers. The database can also serve as a resource to identify people who might be interested in appearing before city councils or speaking at legislative hearings.

Adapted from: Maximizing Outreach Through Town Hall Meetings: A Planning Guide.

MAJOR THEMES

Here are three themes that you can use as you plan events and activities in your community:

1). Everyone has a right to recover from addiction to alcohol and other drugs

The Recovery Bill of Rights is a statement of the principle that all Americans have a right to recover from addiction to alcohol and other drugs. You can use the principles and the fact that **The Recovery Bill of Rights** has been endorsed by a wide range of organizations to anchor an event. It explains that recovery is a process that requires time, patience, and support and calls for implementing public and private policies at the local, state, and federal levels to help individuals and families get the help they need, including access to effective treatment and to recovery support services.

How to bring this story to life in your own community:

Identify an issue in your community that your organization believes needs to be addressed. For example, are people being discharged from detox and left to fend on their own without referral to treatment or access to recovery support services? Are there recovery high schools and alcohol and drug-free activities for young people in your community? Are there new reports and information on the numbers of people who are or are not getting treatment in your community and/or state that you can use to highlight the need for more treatment and recovery support services?

2). The recovery community is active in our civic life

The **Recovery Voices Count** campaign is one part of a national movement to educate our friends, neighbors and families about long-term recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs by building recognition of the recovery community as a constituency of consequence. As recovery community organizations and recovery advocates register voters, educate candidates for public office about key issues and turn out voters in growing numbers, we will have an even greater impact on the lives of people who still need help with their addiction, people in long-term recovery, their family members, and communities.

How to bring this story to life in your own community:

Hold a Candidates forum and invite candidates for public office to answer the 5 Questions for Candidates and respond to the Candidates pledge. You can attend candidate-sponsored events and ask questions of candidates. Invite elected officials once they are in office to participate in your events and activities. Hold elected officials accountable for positions taken while they were asking for your vote during campaign season.

3). There are many pathways to recovery

Millions of Americans have used mutual support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) to find recovery. A new generation of medications has been developed in the last decade that can help effectively treat addiction, especially when coupled with counseling and other recovery support. There are already several FDA-approved medications available to treat alcohol and drug dependence, including buprenorphine, naltrexone, methadone, and acamprosate. These new, effective treatments are an important addition to the arsenal of treatments and recovery supports that are helping people achieve long-term recovery. To learn more, please refer to the “Pathways to Recovery” section of the Recovery Advocacy Toolkit.

How to bring this story to life in your own community:

Many recovery community organizations have developed recovery resource guides that are much different than this, meaning they're focused on what resources are available for people once they are out of treatment. We have put together a different way of including the information that you are suggesting below:

- **Exhibit Booths and Health Fairs** - Set up a booth at a local hospital, community center, festival, health fair, or wellness event to distribute educational materials about opportunities for recovery, addiction and recovery and related subjects. Talk to local clinics, treatment centers, and physicians to see whether they are prescribing medications for addiction treatment and recovery. You can find out more by going to the American Society of Addiction Medicine [www.asam.org] to identify physicians in your area who could talk about these new medications. You can also use the online Buprenorphine Physician Locator [www.buprenorphine.samhsa.gov or www.naabt.org] to find physicians in your area who are licensed to prescribe this new medication. You can find out more about medication-assisted recovery and physicians in your area by visiting [www.turntohelp.com].
- Find out about mutual support groups in your community by going to Faces & Voices of Recovery's Guide to Mutual Support [http://www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org/resources/support_home.php].
- If you want to do something even bigger, coordinate with other organizations to sponsor a health fair that addresses multiple health issues. Be sure to ask local treatment centers, mutual support groups, faith-based organizations, and other service organizations that can offer information about how they assist people in your community to be part of your event. Make your event family-friendly, by having music, giveaways, face painting, and other kinds of activities.
- Identify recovery-friendly businesses in your community. The US Department of Labor's Working Partners website [www.dol.gov/workingpartners] includes a free drug-free workplace program builder that businesses in your community can use.
- **Articles** - Write a series of articles or work with your local newspaper to develop a series of articles featuring individuals in recovery, each with a different pathway. For example, The *Bangor Daily News* has run a series of articles focusing on individual recovery stories. If possible, include a Web site or telephone number where people can find more information or get help.

SAMPLE TOWN HALL AGENDA

[Insert event title]

EXAMPLE: Making [Insert Your City] Voices Count

[Insert Location]

[Insert Date]

[Insert Time]

Sponsored by:

[Insert your coalition or local group]

Introductions

Planning committee member or key local leader welcomes everyone, tells them what they can expect from the event, and recognizes special guests.

(5-10 minutes)

The Recovery Bill of Rights

*Review **The Recovery Bill of Rights** and what it means for the recovery community*

(10-15 minutes)

Panel Discussion

(20-30 minutes)

Moderator: [Insert name of moderator]

Local recovery community leader or a seasoned local media partner

Panelists:

Youth or Adult in Recovery

Topic: Putting a face on addiction and recovery—a story of hope

Recovery Advocate

Topic: Removing barriers and discrimination for people in recovery or with addiction to alcohol and other drugs

Medical Professional

Topic: What really happens in the ER on a Saturday night in [Insert your city]

Treatment Provider

Topic: Navigating the system to find quality treatment options in [Insert your city]

Elected and Appointed Officials

Your state Senator or Representative, state alcohol and drug abuse director, local mayor or other political leader

Topic: The City/State strategy for supporting addiction treatment and recovery.

Q&A and media questions

(10-20 minutes)

NOTE: Your planning committee will decide who the best speakers will be and what topics should be discussed. Remember to keep in mind the longer-term goals you have and what you hope to achieve from bringing all of these people together. Try not to have more than 4 people on a panel. With that in mind, here are some other potential panelists and topics:

- Faith Leader

- Topic: The positive role the faith community can play to improve the environment for recovery
- **Addiction Medicine Specialist**
 - Topic: The new frontier of medications for alcoholism and drug addiction
- **Business Leader**
 - Topic: Why I hire people in recovery; Why I have a drug-free workplace; Why I have an EAP program
- **Sheriff or other Law Enforcement official:**
 - Topic: Why people in my jail receive treatment and are connected with recovery resources in the community before they leave if they have an alcohol or other drug problem

Sample Media Advisories

A media advisory is an invitation for press to attend an upcoming event. It should be distributed to media outlets in your community (e.g. TV, radio, newspapers, and magazines). Please also see the “Media Outreach” section of the Recovery Advocacy Toolkit for more information.



MEDIA ADVISORY MEDIA ADVISORY MEDIA ADVISORY MEDIA ADVISORY
[Insert your organization name] INTRODUCES THE RECOVERY BILL OF RIGHTS

*Local experts gather at [Insert date] Town Hall Meeting to introduce **The Recovery Bill of Rights** and call for action to increase opportunities for addiction recovery for people and families in [Name of your city/town]*

WHAT: [Insert name] is hosting a town hall meeting to introduce **The Recovery Bill of Rights**, which is a statement aimed at maximizing support for people with addiction to alcohol and other drugs and calling for action to address laws, policies and practices that interfere with long-term recovery.

A panel of community advocates and experts will explore addiction and recovery in [insert name of your city/town] and discuss ways to increase awareness about solutions to alcohol and drug problems. Parents, teachers, nurses, law enforcement officials, and people in the recovery community are joining forces to bring addiction and recovery issues to the forefront in [name of your city/town].

Confirmed speakers include:

- [Name, title, organization]
- [Name, title, organization]
- [Name, title, organization]

WHY: Two-thirds of Americans have a family member who is still struggling with addiction and needs help to recover. [Name of your organization] along with [List of your partners] has joined with Faces & Voices of Recovery, a national non-profit organization committed to organizing and mobilizing the millions of Americans in long-term recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs, to introduce **The Recovery Bill of Rights** to our community.

Through the town hall meeting and other local activities, organizations in [Insert name of your city/town] are bringing the messages and goals of **The Recovery Bill of Rights** to life in this community to take action to increase opportunities for people to get the help they need to get well. To learn more about **The Recovery Bill of Rights**, visit http://www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org/about/campaigns/bill_of_rights.php.

WHEN: [Date and time]

WHERE: [Address]

PRESS CONTACT: To arrange pre- or post-event interviews with speakers, please contact: [Name, Phone, Email]

The Recovery Bill of Rights is a statement of the principle that all Americans have a right to recover from addiction to alcohol and other drugs. It was developed and adopted by Faces & Voices of Recovery’s board of directors and has been endorsed by national allied organizations. We call on all Americans and our elected officials to take action to build communities of recovery that will support the more than 22 million Americans and their families still needing help and end discrimination facing millions in long-term recovery.

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MEDIA ADVISORY MEDIA ADVISORY MEDIA ADVISORY MEDIA ADVISORY
[Name of your organization] Sponsors Candidates Forum

New attitudes and policies could safeguard health and build safer communities

[Name of your organization] Citizens to discuss national movement to bring recognition to the recovery community as a constituency of consequence at [Insert date] Town Hall Meeting

WHAT: [Insert organization name] is hosting a Candidates Forum to introduce candidates for [name of office] to issues of concern to individuals and families supporting policies to promote prevention, treatment and recovery from addiction. Citizen advocates, parents, political leaders and concerned individuals are joining forces to bring addiction and recovery issues to the forefront in this year's election as part of a national campaign, **Recovery Voices Count**.

Candidates have been invited to speak at various times during the event and answer questions from area residents.

WHO: [name of moderator, identifying information] will moderate the Forum. People in long-term recovery from addiction, their families, friends and allies; elected officials; law-enforcement officials.

Confirmed candidates include:

- [Name, title, organization]
- [Name, title, organization]
- [Name, title, organization]

WHY: Today, serious gaps exist in our nation's ability to identify and treat people with alcohol and drug problems, keeping millions of Americans from contributing to our society. We know that people can and do recover from addiction to alcohol and other drugs. Effective health responses to addiction – that prevent and treat problems and support people in long-term recovery, will safeguard our nation's health and build safer communities.

WHEN: [Date and time]

WHERE: [Address]

PRESS CONTACT: To arrange pre- or post-event interviews with panelists and other spokespeople, please contact: [Name, phone, e-mail]

BACKGROUND:

Now is the time for candidates to inform [Name of our city/town] voters about the steps that they will take to adopt meaningful health policy reforms that will save lives and taxpayer dollars – and strengthen families and communities.

-more-

The following 5 Questions for Candidates reflect key issues facing people in **[Name of your city/town]**:

- 1). Untreated addiction is the cause of other problems and illnesses like heart disease, lower work productivity, and overcrowded jails and broken families. Yet millions of Americans can't access the treatment and recovery services they need. If elected, will you support an increase in funding to ensure that treatment and recovery services are available to all who need them?
- 2). Have you developed a campaign platform to address illegal drug and underage drinking problems? If yes, please elaborate. If not, why not?
- 3). Many in long-term recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs, myself included, have experienced insurance discrimination, which means we have been denied life-saving treatments. Will you vote for a bill to end insurance discrimination by offering the same coverage – parity – for addiction services as for other health issues?
- 4). The war on drugs has proven that despite spending \$40 billion a year to fight it, drug use has not decreased. America's mayors, along with local law enforcement officials, are pushing for a new approach that puts an emphasis on treatment and alternatives to jail. Do you agree or disagree with this new direction and why?
- 5). Millions of Americans are in recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs, yet many still find it difficult to get an education, a good job, or health insurance due to discriminatory policies and laws. Do you support the repeal of these laws, which basically prevent people who have paid their debt to society from contributing to their families and communities in a positive way?

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