

## Overview

This lesson asks students to consider the challenges posed by noncommunicable diseases and then to advocate for a policy change to better combat them.

## Length

One–two class periods

## Materials

What Is Global Health? (World101)

Global Health Then and Now (World101)

The Rising Tide of Diabetes in Mexico (World101)

Noncommunicable Diseases and How We Measure Them (World101)

Letter to Member of Congress Worksheet (below) or Letter to the Editor Worksheet (below)

## Instructional Plan

1. Have students view and read about noncommunicable diseases. As they go, ask them to consider:
  - a. What is a noncommunicable disease?
  - b. Why are noncommunicable diseases a bigger problem now than they have been in the past?
  - c. What factors affect how prevalent noncommunicable diseases are in a country?
  - d. How is tackling noncommunicable diseases different from addressing infectious diseases?
2. Have students brainstorm how noncommunicable diseases could be better addressed, either by their local or national government, or by those that fund health initiatives (principally “the two Washingtons”: the U.S. government and the Gates Foundation).
3. Have students choose a proposal they would like to advocate for. Have them compose either
  - a. a letter to a member of Congress or the Gates Foundation (in either case, the Letter to Member of Congress Worksheet provides a useful template), or
  - b. a letter to the editor of a newspaper.

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## Extension and Additional Resources

Students could also start an awareness campaign on campus or in their community.

## Writing a Letter to a Member of Congress

Every state in the United States is represented by two senators and is divided into one or more congressional districts represented by a member of Congress who sits in the House of Representatives. Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Washington, DC, have nonvoting delegates in the House of Representatives and are not represented by senators.

If you do not already know who your representatives are, enter your address on the website <http://house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative> to find your representative. You can look up your senators at [http://senate.gov/general/contact\\_information/senators/contact](http://senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators/contact). Make sure that you are writing to your own representative—members of Congress give much more weight to letters from their own constituents.

Most communication is read by staff members, who tally up the issues raised and give the member of Congress they work for statistics on the issues. Adding your voice can raise the profile of your issue. Particularly well-written letters could get passed on the member of Congress to read personally. Sometimes members of Congress will respond, although often with a form letter.

Your letter should include four parts:

1. Salutation
  - a. For representatives, use “Dear Rep. Smith.”
  - b. For senators, use “Dear Sen. Jones.”
2. Make your point
  - a. Say what issue you are writing about. If you are writing about a specific bill, mention it.
  - b. Say what you want the member of Congress to do—vote a certain way, make sure a certain policy is included in a piece of legislation, or raise a certain issue.
  - c. Be sure to mention you are a constituent.
3. Support your point

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- a. Keep your letter short: pick your two or three best arguments.
  - b. If you have one, a personal story or description of a local impact can go a long way.
4. Closing
- a. “Sincerely” is always a good choice for a formal letter like this one.
  - b. Include your full name and address; it shows the member of Congress that you are a constituent and allows the member’s office to write back.

Additional tips:

- Keep it short! Members of Congress get a lot of mail.
- Be respectful, but remember that members of Congress are there to represent you.

## Letter to the Editor Worksheet

Most newspapers and magazines print letters to the editor: letters that readers send in, usually in response to recently published articles. These can be a useful way to get your voice heard.

Choose your target wisely: national and big city newspapers get thousands of letters a day and have room to print only a dozen or so. A neighborhood or small town paper will have fewer people writing to it and often more space to devote to printing letters. Whichever publication you choose, make sure to get a copy and look at previous letters to get a sense of what kind of letter that outlet likes to publish.

Some tips

- Always write in response to an article published in the last few issues. Cite the article by using the headline and day of publication.
- Agreeing with the article will almost never get you published. Look for something you disagree with, or raise an issue that the article overlooked.
- Be brief. Often letters are only a few sentences long, although small papers may print longer letters. As a result, you should make just one point in your letter.
- Be as clear and memorable as possible—editors receive many letters, make yours stand out.

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- If you have a personal experience about or expertise on the issue, use it.