Letters to the editor educate readers on an issue, affect public opinion and influence public officials' positions and decisions. They also alert the editorial boards of newspapers that an issue is relevant to their readership, and therefore it merits coverage. Similarly, a campaign of letters to the editor (letters sent from multiple sources addressing a single issue) can add energy and urgency to the call for increased attention to different health issues. A sample letter to the editor is provided in this tool kit.

1. **Make it timely.** Letters to the editor are usually a response or a reaction to an article that appeared in that specific newspaper. They should be submitted within seven days from when the article appeared in the paper.

2. **Cite references.** Reference the article in your letter, and include the headline and date in the first or second sentence of your letter.

3. **Keep it short.** Check with your newspaper’s editorial department on the word limits. Most are between 100–250 words but guidelines can vary greatly. Newspapers often take the liberty of editing letters they receive. Keep your letter concise to ensure that your important points won’t be cut.

4. **Make one point.** Make your well thought out point in 100–250 words.

5. **Start strong.** Grab the reader’s and editor’s attention with a passionate opening sentence.

6. **Substantiate.** Support your position with succinct facts. Provide the complete reference for these facts as an addendum.

7. **Personalize.** Write about your own experience or how the issue affects people directly. Explain why YOU care about the issue and why the readers and editor should care.

8. **Make it local.** How does this issue affect the community?

9. **Use your title.** If you are in a leadership position locally with QVF or another health-related organization, consider signing the letter with that title. Providing your title and the name of your workplace or institution can sometimes help to get a letter printed. Larger papers may wish to confirm that you are indeed the signatory.

10. **Submit it electronically.** Most newspapers prefer e-mail submissions or faxes of letters to the editor. Check the paper's Web site or call to confirm the preferred method of submission.

11. **Include your complete contact information.** Complete means name, day and evening phone numbers, cell phone number, fax number and e-mail address. Reporters must be able to reach you after 5:00 p.m.