

# Advocacy for Healthy Public Policy:



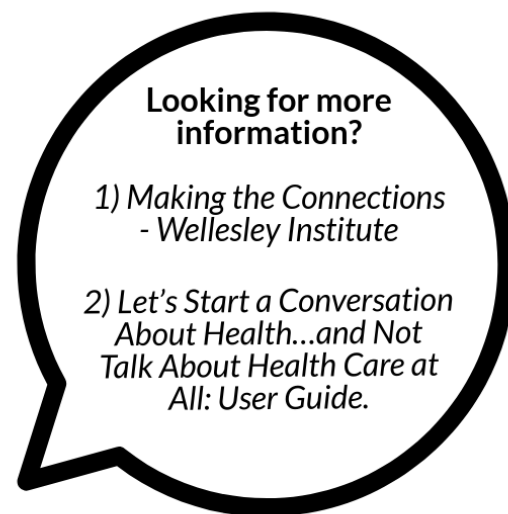
## A resource for Community Health Boards.

### What determines health?

Access to health care services, family history, and lifestyle choices, such as diet and exercise, make up only a small part of what determines how healthy we are. To a much greater extent, our health is shaped by where we live, how much money we make, our level of education and the racial or cultural discrimination that we face. These factors are called the social determinants of health.

Nova Scotia Health Authority (NSHA) and Community Health Boards (CHBs) work to address the social determinants and health and support the rights of all people to live a long and healthy life. One way that we do this is by advocating for healthy public policies.

Healthy public policies help shape what our communities have to offer so that everyone has a fair chance to be active, to eat well, and to feel connected. Unlike programs and services that only reach certain people or groups, healthy public policies improve health for all by making the healthy choice the easy, accessible, and available choice.



### A case study of physical activity.

Low rates of physical activity is a key issue for children in your community. You are aware of a number of active living programs in your area, but know that they are poorly attended. You partner with a recreation centre to raise awareness of these programs and their benefits. To your surprise, this does not increase the number of children or families who attend.

As a follow-up, you speak with parents in your community and find out that they are aware of the programs, but cannot afford the registration fee. Many also live outside of town and do not own a vehicle.



**What are the root causes of inactivity for children in this scenario?**

## What is a healthy public policy?

Simply put, a policy is a plan that outlines how things should be done. Policies guide actions and reflect a certain set of values and beliefs. They can be stated as standards, rules, laws, principles, or directives. Policies can remove or increase barriers to health. Different types of policies include:

**Personal policies** - those that guide individual choices and actions.

**Organizational policies** - those that guide how organizations or businesses operate.

**Public policies** - those that guide how communities are organized. These policies are set by all levels of government.

A **healthy public policy** is a policy that addresses the root causes of poor health. Rather than focus on changing people's behaviors, healthy public policies aim to change the spaces and places where people live, learn, grow and play. The goal of a healthy public policy is to create a supportive environment that allows everyone to be healthy and live well.

## What does a healthy public policy look like?

Consider the scenario above.



**What is a healthy public policy that could improve physical activity for children?**

**How does this policy reflect an understanding of the many factors that determine health?**

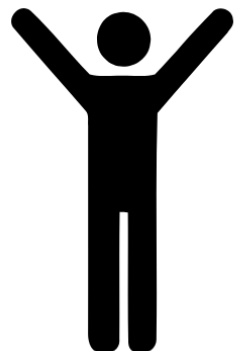
**For example.** You advocate to have recreation centres offer free ice time and after-school programs for children and families. This is a healthy public policy that improves access to physical activity opportunities by addressing cost-related barriers for families.

## What is advocacy?

**Advocacy** is the process of influencing ideas, opinions, actions, and outcomes.

**Types of advocacy might include...**

- Speaking up for your own rights or the rights of others.
- Encouraging others to speak up for themselves.
- Helping to remove the barriers that keep people or families from accessing the programs and services they need.
- Working with others to change practices and policies that impact your community as a whole.



Advocacy for **healthy public policy** is the process of trying to influence decisions that will address the root causes of poor health and have a positive impact on the community.

### Advocacy in action!

- You work with your team to *develop* and run an active living summer *program* for children and youth in your community – a wonderful initiative, but it's not advocacy.
- You *organize, vocalize, and build support* for an open space playground to be built in a low-income area of your community - that's advocacy.

**Think about the types of advocacy you could lead to help improve physical activity in your community!**

### Advocacy for healthy public policy should...

- Include the voices of those affected by the issue.
- Reflect an understanding of inequity and how it can lead to differences in health for certain populations.
- Be based on current evidence and best practice approaches.
- Respect different values, beliefs, hopes and experiences.
- Support positive change.
- Promote shared leadership and partnerships.



For more information on health equity please refer to: **Health Equity for CHBs: Health starts for all where we live, learn, work and play.**

### When do we advocate for healthy public policy?

The overall success of our advocacy efforts depends on how we share the best information with the right people at the *right time*. Sometimes we get to decide when and how we advocate. Other times we are pulled into advocacy by the actions of others or in response to new opportunities or changing public priorities. No matter our reason, it is important that we take time to fully understand the issue and to talk with our organization and community partners before taking action.

**Looking for more information?**

*Thought about food. A Workbook on Food Security & Influencing Policy.*

## Some things to consider when deciding whether or not to take action.

### ***Consider your role...***

- Is this issue a CHB priority that has been developed with the community?
- Does it reflect the mission, vision and values of NSHA?
- Do you have the time, resources and ability to proceed with this work over the long-term?

### ***Consider the issue...***

- Do you fully understand the causes, who is impacted and what it means for the health of your community?

### ***Consider your partners...***

- Are there others who will work with you on this issue?

### ***Consider the readiness for change...***

- Are others ready to do move this work forward (for example, community members or groups, government...)?

### ***Consider the benefits...***

- Who benefits the most, the least, and who doesn't benefit at all from you taking action on this issue?

### ***Consider the barriers and/or consequences...***

- Are there any unintended consequences of taking action (what about for certain groups)?
- What are the barriers that could delay your success (for example, are there people or groups that might oppose your position on the issue)?



**Remember!** When new issues and opportunities arise it can cause a temporary or long-term shift in the focus of your advocacy efforts. This is a normal (and often necessary) part of community based advocacy, and one of the many reasons why healthy public policy change can be a long and challenging process.

## How do we advocate for healthy public policy?

There are many ways to advocate. The “*visibility*” of advocacy can range from taking part in a quiet conversation to leading a public event. Conflict is a risk (not a given) of advocacy. Some advocacy actions are higher profile than others and therefore carry more risk for conflict.



## Examples of low profile advocacy actions.

- Speaking with others about an issue.
- Setting up a working group to address an issue.
- Sharing known research or findings about best practices.

## Examples of medium profile advocacy actions.

- Circulating a petition.
- Writing public opinion pieces.
- Meeting with or writing a letter to an elected official.
- Presenting at a special event.
- Starting an awareness-raising campaign.
- Getting support from important figures or groups.
- Holding community forums.
- Writing campaigns.

## Examples of high profile advocacy actions.

- Working with the media (ads, press releases, letters to the editor, interviews, web and social media).



It is important that you choose the right activity to build support for a policy or raise the profile of an issue. This requires you to balance what should be done with what you or your team are able to carry out based on available time or resources, your role, and the mandate of your organization.

CHBs are in a unique position to advocate for healthy public policies. Through the health planning process, they work with community members to identify local trends, issues, and priorities. The resulting health plans communicate what communities need in order to support their health and well being. CHBs work with government, health and community partners to realize these priorities and support a shared vision for healthy people and healthy communities - for generations.

## Choosing the right action for your advocacy goal.

You choose to take action on the issue of inactivity in children by advocating for government funded recreation programs. You have collected information, formed partnerships and understand the benefits and consequences of this approach. You decide that the first step is to raise awareness and form important partnerships.

**What actions would best support this advocacy goal? Why might it be harmful to your cause to move forward with a higher profile advocacy action first?**

**For example**, think about how working with the media to point out a lack of support for families to participate in physical activity could close the door to relationships with key decision makers.

### Key resources:

- 1) AVH Population Health/Healthy Communities Advocacy Framework. Phase 1. June 2010. Annapolis Valley Health.
- 2) Vancouver Coastal Health. (no date). Vancouver Coastal Health Population Health: Advocacy Guideline and Resources.
- 3) Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. Understanding & Engaging in Healthy Public Policy: Describes healthy public policy, Population & Public Health steps and roles in engaging in healthy public policy.
- 4) Community Tool Box. <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/advocacy/advocacy-principles/overview/main>