



# BACKGROUND:

## WHAT IS HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICY



## AND HOW CAN WE INFLUENCE IT?

### What is Healthy Public Policy?



A healthy public policy has a clear focus on health and equity in all aspects of the policy. These policies aim to create social and physical environments in which healthier lives are easier and possible for all citizens. Decisions made by policy makers affect the health and equity of communities. So, in order to build healthy communities, policy must be addressed.

### How Can You Influence Policy Development?

Policy change is complex, involving numerous stakeholders, often with competing interests. Patience is key to policy change work, as it can take a long time and a lot of energy to achieve the desired policy outcomes. In this backgrounder, we present the policy development process, and tips for policy advocacy. However, policy development is not necessarily a linear, step-by-step process, so adjustments may be needed in order to suit your community's needs.



**Tip:** Whenever you discuss the issue, also suggest solutions. Be prepared to rebut challenges from those who oppose your position.



**Tip:** Provide supportive evidence. Use local evidence to support your policy when available, in order to paint a picture and tell the local story.

## Eight stages of Policy Development

These eight stages are adapted and summarized from the Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance’s Toolkit to Healthier Communities – Influencing Healthy Public Policies. A link to this full resource, which includes worksheets to support these eight stages, is provided at the bottom of this backgrounder.



### 1. Identify and describe the issue

At this stage it is helpful to gather a detailed understanding of the situation and create a short document summarizing the issue. This can be a valuable communication tool to use with various stakeholders. The backgrounders that we have developed on urban form and health equity, safety and vulnerable users, active transportation and participatory processes are great resources to help you identify and describe issues related to health and the built environment.



### 2. Assess readiness for policy development

Policy development requires appropriate timing and resources over an extended period of time. During this stage you should determine whether to proceed with policy development based on the readiness of your community, your organization and/or potential partners.



### 3. Develop objectives and policy options

At this stage you should define clear objectives for the potential policy change and generate a list of policy options for decision makers to consider. We recommend that the list of objectives should be simple and plain language. This stage is vital to focusing your efforts and moving forward with the policy change process.



### 4. Identify decision makers and influencers

During this stage, you should decide which decision makers or key influencers should be the focus of your advocacy campaign and which actors will be key allies. Some questions to consider at this stage are: who is already talking about this issue, and who shares a stake with your issue?



**Tip:** Raise public awareness of the issue and engage community members in your advocacy. Build coalitions and partnerships across sectors.





### 5. Build support for your healthy public policy

Building support for your policy depends on the framing of your message. At this stage, you should work to reach key decision makers and influencers through an effective communication plan.



### 6. Write and revise the policy

This is the stage where the logistical and legal aspects of your policy takes shape. At this point, you should make sure that the wording of the policy is clear, concise, and aligns with your policy change objectives.



### 7. Implement the policy

Review completed work and implement the policy.



### 8. Evaluate and monitor the policy

Proper monitoring and evaluation of the policy will ensure effectiveness and can identify any unintended consequences. Communities have a key role in keeping governments accountable to a good evaluation and monitoring plan. Objectives set out in step 3 should be paired with measurable indicators of success that can easily be understood by communities.



**Tip:** Frame the issue to appeal to the audience you are trying to influence. Use stories and real-life examples to illustrate how people will be impacted personally by the policy.



**Tip:** Assess the costs and benefits of your policy change.



## Helpful Resources

There are existing resources and toolkits that are useful when deciding how to influence policy. Below is a selection of these resources.

1. [Policy Readiness Tool: Understanding a Municipality's Readiness for Policy Change and Strategies for Taking Action](#) - This tool from the University of Alberta can help you assess your municipality's readiness for policy change, and offers strategies for policy change at several levels of readiness.
2. [Toolkit to Healthier Communities – Influencing Healthy Public Policies](#) - This toolkit from the Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance is offered in both French and English, and includes worksheets for each stage of the policy development process.
3. [Policy Approaches to Reduce Health Inequalities](#) - This briefing note from the National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy discusses different policy approaches to reducing health inequalities, and their differing impacts.



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