



Moving from Data to Action

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The work of public health has been exemplified through three core functions: assessment, policy development, and assurance. These functions are interconnected, and none can be successful without the others. Policy development is the core function that has received the least amount of attention in public health education, practice, and continuing education. At the same time, intentional and strategic policy development is becoming a central tool and focus for public health, especially with regards to primary prevention via changes in personal behavior.

In an era that demands evidence-based action in health care, it is important to use a systematic process to ensure effective decision-making. The proposed framework attempts to connect three large elements of policy development: *partnerships and collaboration, policy analysis and prioritization, and policy implementation and evaluation*. At the same time, this framework shows the interrelationship among assessment, policy development, and assurance activities.

At the outset, some definition of terms is needed. While “policy” is usually considered to be in the domain of government (bills, statutes, ordinances), private institutions also play a role in public health prevention. Think about all of the health-related policies in the workplace, i.e., second hand smoke, infectious disease restrictions or having fragrance-free areas. While some of these directives can be driven by government policy, the workplace as private setting is another venue where the formal policy can be created to effect change.

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

These concepts are not new to the work of public health. However, nurturing these relationships takes on a different cast when placed in the policy development framework. Here, the goal is not program design and implementation, but rather sorting, promoting, enacting, and implementing policy change. Public health has learned that their voice alone in the policy change process may not be adequate. The question here is “Who is involved and how?” Thus, building coalitions and partnerships as an explicit way to

effect policy change becomes a critical success feature in all stages of policy development.

POLICY ANALYSIS AND PRIORITIZATION

These concepts are typically called out in most policy development models. Public health is very comfortable with much of this work - defining issues and discussing the relative merits of various proposals. Data is obviously a critical element to define a policy issue. In stages A and B, two questions are asked: “Should something be done?” (i.e., is there an issue that needs to be tackled), and “If so, what should be done?” The first question relates to the need for core public health information/data (the burden of disease; the urgency, the perceived need), while the second includes issues of feasibility, affordability and community acceptability.

The following stages (C and D) continue the analysis: “Can it be done?”, and “How should it be done?” These concepts are less typical as they wade into the murkier waters of politics, advocacy, and some early forecasting of policy implementation. A critical element is the notion of political feasibility and opportunity. Sometimes, finding (or creating) political opportunity can be a critical factor in this part of the equation.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

At the other end of the framework is perhaps the least intuitive aspect of the model: implementation and evaluation (stages E and F). Implementation includes two major ideas: policy implementation and evaluation. Implementation asks the question “What type of support is needed?” Understanding how a policy can be placed into current reality – how it is to be operationalized – is one major component of implementation. The media and the impacted community are two groups with potentially critical roles, especially with regards to enforcement. Successful policy implementation is often dependent upon clear, consistent and sustained enforcement. Media and community members can help keep the issue at the forefront of the entities charged with accountability and enforcement. Further, in some settings, community members can be the local “eyes and ears” and assist with enforcement efforts. The interests of the media and the affected community can also begin the process of assessing policy impacts, which in turn could lead to policy modification.

The other main component is evaluation: “Can any anticipated policy changes be measured?” and “What happened and what difference did it make?” In this era of heightened accountability, the ability to set up and tell an outcomes story is central to sustained policy impacts. To be clear, both these concepts – implementation and evaluation - are critical to assess when analyzing policy options, and not after the policy was enacted.

In sum, successful policy development requires good ideas that are based on credible evidence (data) and can be implemented and measured in the real world, driven by mobilization strategies that can include multiple partners and coalitions.

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**PARTNERSHIPS
&
COLLABORATIONS**

PRIORITIZING POLICY CHOICES

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

	Identify an Issue	Determine Policy Options	Assess the Social Climate	Develop a Plan	Implementation & Adaptation	Evaluation & Analysis
Who Is Involved & How?	Should Something Be Done?	What Should Be Done?	Can it Be Done?	How Should it Be Done?	What Type of Support is Needed?	What Happened & What Difference Did it Make?
	Stage A	Stage B	Stage C	Stage D	Stage E	Stage F
Partnerships are core to all stages of policy development	Is there a problem? What are the contributing factors?	Community assessments	Assess political climate and policy readiness	Forecast expected activities and outcomes	Provide adequate resources and support	Evaluation purpose
Community-identification	Is the data compelling? (burden of the problem)	Identify stakeholders ✓ Support ✓ Opposition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Delivery system in place ✓ Level of complexity/enforcement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Logic model ✓ Key components of planning 	Use media to educate about policy	Evaluate observed policy outcomes
Shared goal	Urgency & timing	Power of local policy efforts	Strength of support and depth of opposition	Magnitude of impact on the community	Frame the policy messages around common values	Adjust and reformulate policy
Coalition building and the spectrum of partnerships: ✓Leadership	What happens if it is not addressed? (societal costs)	Proven policy idea ✓ Evidence-based measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Political ✓ Organizational 	Unintended consequences	Identify unintended consequences	
✓Citizens, government, and private industry	Does it unequally impact the population? (disparities)	Analyze ✓ Cost-benefit ✓ Cost-effective ✓ Fiscal impact		Extent of government's role	Pinpoint obstacles and constraints	
✓Understand roles	What are the biases and assumptions?			Feasibility of measuring results		
✓Cautions				Develop a communication plan		Policy Modification
				Lobbying cautions		

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