

HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICY TOOLKIT: ADVOCACY

PURPOSE

Define Healthy Public Policy (HPP) advocacy

Define types of advocacy along the policy spectrum

Describe the process to develop an advocacy strategy

Describe WRHA & Population & Public Health (PPH) roles in supporting HPP advocacy

BACKGROUND

WHO IS THIS FOR?

This document is a guide for WRHA Population and Public Health Program teams to influence healthy public policy. Staff and teams may engage in advocacy work as part of daily practice (see policy spectrum), and while that work may inform healthy public policy, this toolkit does not focus on service or health system advocacy.

This document is part of the Healthy Public Policy Toolkit. It expands on the WRHA foundational document [Understanding & Engaging in Healthy Public Policy](#), which outlines public health roles in healthy public policy.

WHY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICY?

We know that the determinants of health shape the health of communities. We also know that systemic barriers prevent people and communities from reaching their full health potential.

“Healthy public policy improves the conditions under which people live: secure, safe, adequate and sustainable livelihoods, lifestyles, and environment, including, housing, education, nutrition, information exchange, child care, transportation, and necessary community and personal social and health services.”¹

WHY ADVOCACY?

Removing systemic barriers can be very difficult and contentious. Advocacy to create changes to structures and systems is sometimes needed to influence decisions about public policies and resource allocations within political, economic, and social systems.

HPP advocacy happens in many ways. It can occur quietly behind the scenes. It can be high profile, visible, and controversial, depending on the issue and the political context. HPP advocacy is a complex approach to influencing policy that requires a broad range of players. It inherently requires a team

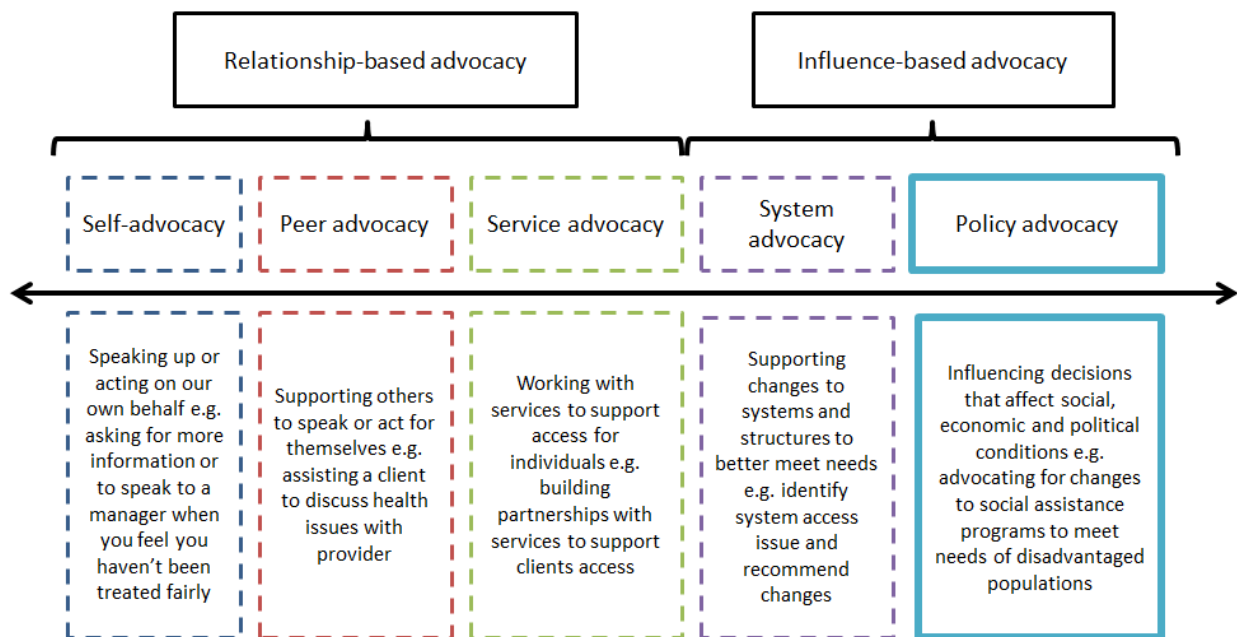
approach, with ongoing organizational consultation, checks and balances, and system approvals throughout the process.

This document outlines the steps to developing an HPP advocacy strategy, PPH roles within the WRHA, and describes relevant organizational resources and policies. It intends to help increase PPH capacity to undertake HPP advocacy.

PART 1: DEFINING ADVOCACY

Advocacy is a process of influencing outcomes, and consists of organized actions to address an issue. Types of advocacy fall along a spectrum as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Policy Spectrum



Adapted from Vancouver Coastal Population Health: Advocacy Guidelines and Resources (n.d.)²

Advocacy approaches may be relationship-based. Advocacy may support groups and individuals, particularly those who have less social, economic and political power in society, to:

- Express their view and concerns;
- Access information and services;
- Protect their rights and responsibilities;
- Explore choices and options.

Public health staff often supports the health of individual clients through service and, to some degree, system advocacy. However, this resource will focus on healthy public policy advocacy, which is, advocacy for structure, system and policy approaches to address health issues at the population level. Organizations engaged in advocacy should lead by example by demonstrating internal organizational policies that align with healthy public policies. This maintains credibility when influencing external policies.

ADVOCACY FOR HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICY

At its core, healthy public policy questions the ‘givens’ of public society and asks how we can structure our society in a way that supports health.³ It moves us away from the health systems’ traditional focus on individual behaviors and behaviour change, toward an upstream focus on the social and environmental impacts to health at a population level.

HPP advocacy can bring public health issues to the forefront for governments and other decision makers. A recent Canadian Public Health Association paper that places the social determinants of health, health equity, and social justice as the foundations of public health validates it as an essential tool for public health practice.⁴

HPP advocacy requires recognition of the explicitly political aspects of creating change within the broader determinants of health. Broader change, which re-shapes society in support of population health, requires interventions that “alter the societal forces that foster these problems”.⁵ Healthy public policy advocacy aims to influence public policies so that visions of social justice become a reality and disparities are reduced.

PRINCIPLES OF HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY

Advocacy is a core competency of public health practice in Canada. Public health leaders need to be able to “advocate for healthy public policies and services that promote and protect the health and well-being of individuals and communities”.⁶ HPP advocacy occurs through collective action to effect systemic change; a focus on changing upstream factors; and engagement in political processes.⁷

Advocacy for healthy public policy requires careful consideration of the role of public health. Public health’s advocacy actions must align with the following principles:

- Non-partisan activities and viewpoints i.e., without bias towards any political party.
- Focus on the health and well-being impacts of the issue.
- Align with professional and public health values e.g., as described in Core Competencies for Public Health in Canada and other professional standards.⁴
- Be evidence-informed.² See [evidence model](#) for more information.⁸

PART 2: ADVOCACY IN ACTION

Public health issues with potential policy solutions present the opportunity for us to influence through advocacy. Before we can move forward in the work, we need to acknowledge that HPP advocacy is a complex and highly skilled activity. HPP advocacy requires public health practitioners to understand and apply theories of social change, critical analysis, strategic framing, and collaborative practices (using intersectoral and interprofessional approaches) to influence effective social change.⁷

The next section describes how to develop an advocacy strategy within our program. Advocacy strategies require a collaborative team approach to address the need for a broad skill set and experience. Roles and responsibilities of individual PPH staff will vary depending on professional scope

and job function. PPH roles are explored in more detail in Part 3. A strategic, coordinated approach with consultation and system checks will maximize advocacy opportunities and minimize risks.

DEVELOPING AN ADVOCACY STRATEGY

Advocacy strategies will include these components:

- A. Problem definition and analysis
- B. Set goals for advocacy strategy
- C. Identify opportunities and risks
- D. Implement advocacy action plan
- E. Evaluate advocacy actions

The scope, approach and actions will be informed by the issue, its place on the policy spectrum and public health's role.

A. PROBLEM DEFINITION AND ANALYSIS

Identifying and defining a public health issue or problem is the first step in both policy and advocacy action.

Key Actions

- Gather and analyze information and evidence related to the public health issue.
Consider:
 - Many types of evidence will need to be considered including; community preferences and knowledge, peer-reviewed research, community health issues. See [Evidence Model](#) for more information.⁸
 - Is PPH already working on this issue? See the [Public Health Issues Process](#) for more details on how to raise an issue.
 - Does the issue have a clear population health impact?
 - Is there a WRHA Position Statement on this issue? If not, consider whether a position statement should be written and consult with others. If a position statement is deemed to be necessary, follow the [Position Statement Process](#). Position statement development always utilizes a team approach with multiple iterative approval and consultation steps.

B. SET GOALS FOR ADVOCACY STRATEGY

An advocacy goal describes the long-term impacts on the issue. This may already be identified in a position statement. Remember - advocacy can take months and years. Short-term objectives should describe the decision that you are aiming to influence.

Key Actions

- Describe the goal of the advocacy strategy.
- Determine shorter term objectives to meet the goal.
- Review section **E – Evaluate advocacy actions** to determine evaluation questions.
Consider
 - Does your goal align with PPH mandate and vision?
 - How do you know if the strategy is successful?
 - How will the objectives be measured?

C. IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS

Internal and external factors can influence the issue of interest. There may be policy engagement opportunities on the horizon, a recent government announcement, or strong public demand that provide for advocacy opportunities. Or the issue may be a silent or invisible one, and may or may not fit with stated government priorities or ideologies. These various factors will inform the advocacy approach.

Key Actions – Internal factors

- Describe the opportunities and risks that need to be considered when choosing advocacy actions – including building internal organizational support.

Consider:

- How controversial or contentious is the issue? Are there implications for the WRHA's involvement in the issue?
- Do internal organizational policies align with the healthy public policy approach being advocated for?
- Are resources available (human and financial) for the advocacy actions?
- Is there the potential for unintended outcomes?

Key Actions – External factors

- Determine sources for strategic inquiry and the best approach to connect with them. There may be existing relationships and collaborations between Population & Public Health staff and stakeholders that can provide opportunities. Potential sources include public servants, policy advisors, interest groups, non-government organizations, and academics.
- Undertake strategic inquiry to explore political and public policy environments. Strategic inquiry can help to identify opportunities and risks, identify the stage of policy development and determine stakeholders' position on the issue.
- Explore and document the 5 P's of strategic inquiry.⁹

Consider:

- **Public policy context:** how does the government view the issue? What is the relative importance to them?
- **Positioning:** who is involved in this issue? Who are the key relevant players – decision makers, advisors, and stakeholders?
- **Process:** what are the public policy processes and timelines related to this issue?
- **Precedent:** have other governments made the change you are advocating for? What were the outcomes?
- **Politics:** big "P" and small "p". Who are the potential champions for this issue? Are there sensitivities around the issue to be aware of?⁹

D. DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT ADVOCACY STRATEGY

The development and implementation of advocacy strategies is often where the work becomes publicly visible. When the evidence on the issue and an understanding of the environment has been established, the elements of the advocacy strategy can be developed and implemented, but before moving forward, the following questions should be asked:

Do you have the right people around the table (content and process expertise)?

Do you have the needed organizational approvals? **See the section on Benefits and Risks; and Appendix A for more details on organizational approvals.*

Key Actions

- Determine and frame the “ask(s)”. Specify **what** should change, and **who** can make the change. It is important to be specific to inform the most appropriate advocacy actions to influence the change.
- Identify appropriate advocacy actions to reach goals. To understand your specific role in the teamwork approach to advocacy see Part 3 and refer to the role descriptions.
 - Advocacy actions to develop internal organizational approval:
 - Develop background materials to increase understanding and awareness within WRHA e.g., PowerPoint slides, case studies, evidence reviews.
 - Use internal mechanisms to elevate briefings (Program Team to VP, CEO, Board) to bring issues to government through existing channels (e.g. CEO to Deputy, Deputy to Minister).
 - Actions to influence external organizations and policies:
 - Share background materials to increase understanding and awareness with public stakeholder groups or the media.
 - Discuss issue with stakeholder partners including advocacy groups
 - Public communication e.g., writing of an op ed (article that appears opposite the editorial page).
 - Using existing partnerships and engagement mechanisms to provide input into policy issue e.g., providing feedback on active transportation infrastructure through advisory committee, engage in community partner discussions on poverty.
 - Support disadvantaged communities to provide input into policy issues through engagement in processes delivered by external organizations.
 - Use WRHA engagement processes (e.g. Local Health Improvement Groups, Community Engagement Manager) to help inform HPP advocacy.
 - Engage in active policy processes e.g., appear as a delegate at City of Winnipeg council committee meetings.

Consider:

- Be professional and collaborative – work with, not against. Do not take an antagonistic or aggressive tone/stance.
- Who from Population & Public Health is best positioned to speak publicly about this issue?
- Be flexible. The political and public environments may change so the advocacy actions may need to change.

E. EVALUATE ADVOCACY ACTIONS

The long-term outcome on population health as a result of advocacy will likely not be reached in the near future. Evaluation of advocacy actions will concentrate on the shorter-term objectives outlined in the goal-setting stage.

Key Actions

- Determine what will be measured during the advocacy strategy development. i.e., what do you want to know about how the strategy is working? Think about both process and outcome evaluation questions.

Process questions could include:

- Did the planned activities take place?
- Did they reach the intended targets?
- Were there windows of opportunity that opened? Were you able to respond to these? Why or why not?
- Did anything unforeseen happen that influenced the effectiveness of the strategy?
- Did you have the resources to implement the strategy?

Outcome questions could include:

- Have perspectives on this issue shifted or changed?
- What were the most and least successful actions and why?
- Was the objective of the strategy reached?
- Develop an approach to capture evaluation data. Record the advocacy actions taken and how successful they were. Track and record the outcome of the policy process.

PART 3: ADVOCACY AND POPULATION & PUBLIC HEALTH

The values of the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority's strategic plan for 2016-2021 include equity – promoting conditions in which every person can reach their full health potential. PPH aims to improve the health of the population and promote health equity within the Winnipeg Health Region. The goal of the program is to advocate and work with people and communities to reduce health differences and to improve everyone's health. While advocacy will aim to influence external policies, the WRHA should maintain credibility as a proponent of healthy public policy by leading by example with healthy internal organizational policies.

A thoughtful and collaborative teamwork approach to advocacy will support coordination and alignment with other PPH activities. Roles and responsibilities of individual practitioners will vary depending on professional scope and position. Specific roles in advocacy by position are outlined below. South Shore Health Policy and Advocacy Framework informed this section.¹⁰ Figure 2 provides an overview of developing an advocacy strategy and PPH and WRHA staff roles in advocacy strategies.

Healthy public policy priorities are informed by people with lived experience and those impacted by policies. Policy issues may be raised through community areas, PPH centralized, community partners and the health care system. As such, policy issues can be identified through all roles within PPH, executive and the board.

FRONTLINE STAFF (PUBLIC HEALTH NURSES, PUBLIC HEALTH DIETITIANS, HOME VISITORS, OUTREACH WORKERS, COMMUNITY FACILITATORS)

- Take opportunities to develop a greater understanding of how healthy public policy impacts health.
- Identify local issues with public policy solutions. Discuss with other PPH staff. See [Public Health Issues Process](#).
- Translate understanding of individual client/patient health issues into suggestions for policy change at a population level.
- Develop and maintain meaningful community partnerships and networks to increase collaboration and understanding of community issues.

- Develop, initiate, and contribute to background documents to increase understanding and awareness on public health issues within WRHA and externally.
- Share expertise, knowledge and experience to support external advocacy e.g. share WRHA position statements and background documents.
- Share expertise and evidence on public health issues through government and stakeholder engagement activities e.g., provide feedback on active transportation infrastructure through City of Winnipeg advisory committee, or engage in community partner discussions on poverty.

SPECIALISTS/MANAGERS (CLINICAL NURSE SPECIALISTS, PROGRAM SPECIALISTS, MANAGERS, PHIL, PHEIL)

- Take opportunities to develop a greater understanding of how healthy public policy impacts health.
- Identify local issues with public policy solutions through practice and community partners.
- Provide content and process expertise to advocacy actions.
- Facilitate dialogue within PPH to support healthy public policy action.
- Navigate, facilitate and support moving issues through the system using appropriate processes. See [Public Health Issues Process](#).
- Support staff to build their capacity to engage in policy and advocacy work.
- Develop and maintain meaningful community partnerships and networks to increase collaboration and understanding of community issues.
- Encourage staff to share their expertise, knowledge and experience to support advocacy actions.
- Link to municipal/provincial/federal advocacy efforts.
- Demonstrate support for healthy public policy through public comment.
- Develop, initiate, and contribute to background documents, including position statements where applicable, to increase understanding and awareness within WRHA and externally.
- Share expertise and evidence on public health issues through government and stakeholder engagement activities e.g., provide feedback on active transportation infrastructure through City of Winnipeg advisory committee, or engage in community partner discussions on poverty.
- Identify internal policy opportunities that align with external healthy public policies.

MEDICAL OFFICERS OF HEALTH

Medical Officers of Health are hired by the Province of Manitoba and are deployed to work at the WRHA to serve the public health needs of the citizens of the Winnipeg Health Region. They work on various aspects of the PPH strategic plan.

- Take opportunities to develop a greater understanding of how healthy public policy impacts health.
- Provide evidence-informed leadership on the creation of healthy public policy in their areas of work.
- Monitor, assess and share information on the health of the population in their portfolio areas.
- Identify trends and interpret epidemiological data on issues.
- Work with WRHA Communications and others to engage in timely, proactive communications activities such as op eds, letters to editors, articles or media briefs in their areas of expertise.
- Be available to WRHA Communications (media relations) to comment on policy-related issues in their areas of expertise.
- Attend and speak on behalf of policy-related issues at appropriate stakeholder meetings and events.
- Work with the health system and community partners to recommend and develop public health policy, system change, actions and approaches that impact the determinants of health.

- Identify internal policy opportunities that align with external healthy public policies.

PPH HEALTH DIRECTOR AND MEDICAL DIRECTOR

These positions provide overall leadership for all aspects of the PPH program's activities.

- Take opportunities to develop a greater understanding of how healthy public policy impacts health.
- Identify local issues with public policy solutions for exploration by PPH.
- Demonstrate support for healthy public policy by engaging in, or delegating, both proactive and reactive public commentary.
- Coordinate PPH resources and collaborative efforts to more effectively advocate for healthy public policy.
- Support the development of organizational position statements.
- Encourage and support PPH capacity building on advocacy and healthy public policy.
- Discuss public health issues with relevant government partners and stakeholders.
- Support the development of internal policies that align with external healthy public policies.

WRHA EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Executive council includes the CEO and VPs.

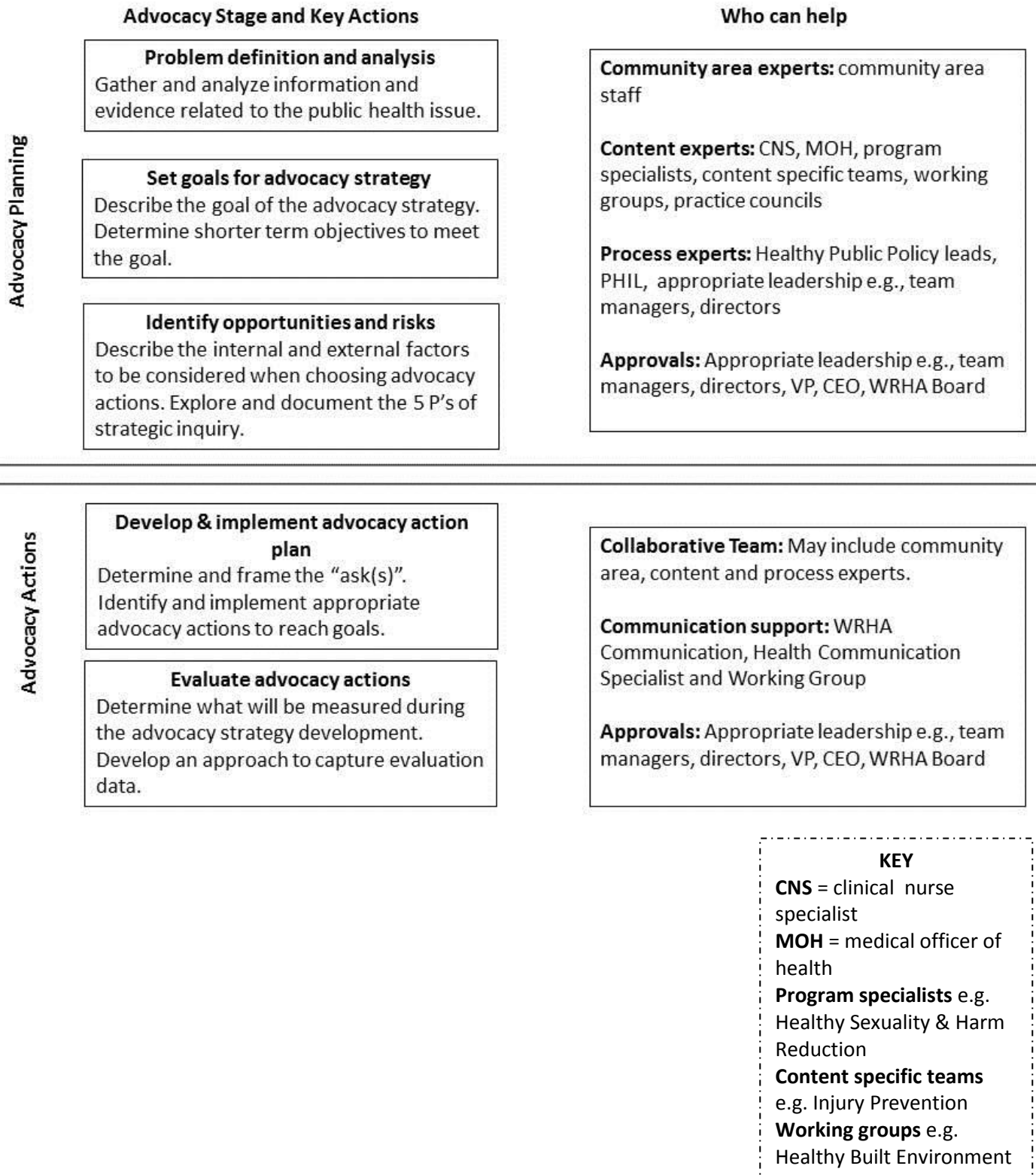
- Take opportunities to develop a greater understanding of how healthy public policy impacts health.
- Identify local issues with public policy solutions for exploration by PPH.
- Endorse organizational position statements through Executive Council.
- Elevate briefings to Province of Manitoba.
- Demonstrate support for healthy public policy through public comment.
- Address public policy issues through collaboration with stakeholders.
- Support organizational capacity on advocacy and healthy public policy.
- Identify organizational risks and opportunities for advocacy.
- Support the development of internal policies that align with external healthy public policies.

WRHA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The WRHA Board has legislated responsibility for governance of the WRHA.

- Take opportunities to develop a greater understanding of how healthy public policy impacts health.
- Identify local issues with public policy solutions.
- Approve and endorse organizational position statements.
- Support the development of internal policies that align with external healthy public policies.

Figure 2: Overview of Advocacy Strategy Development



BENEFITS AND RISKS OF ADVOCACY

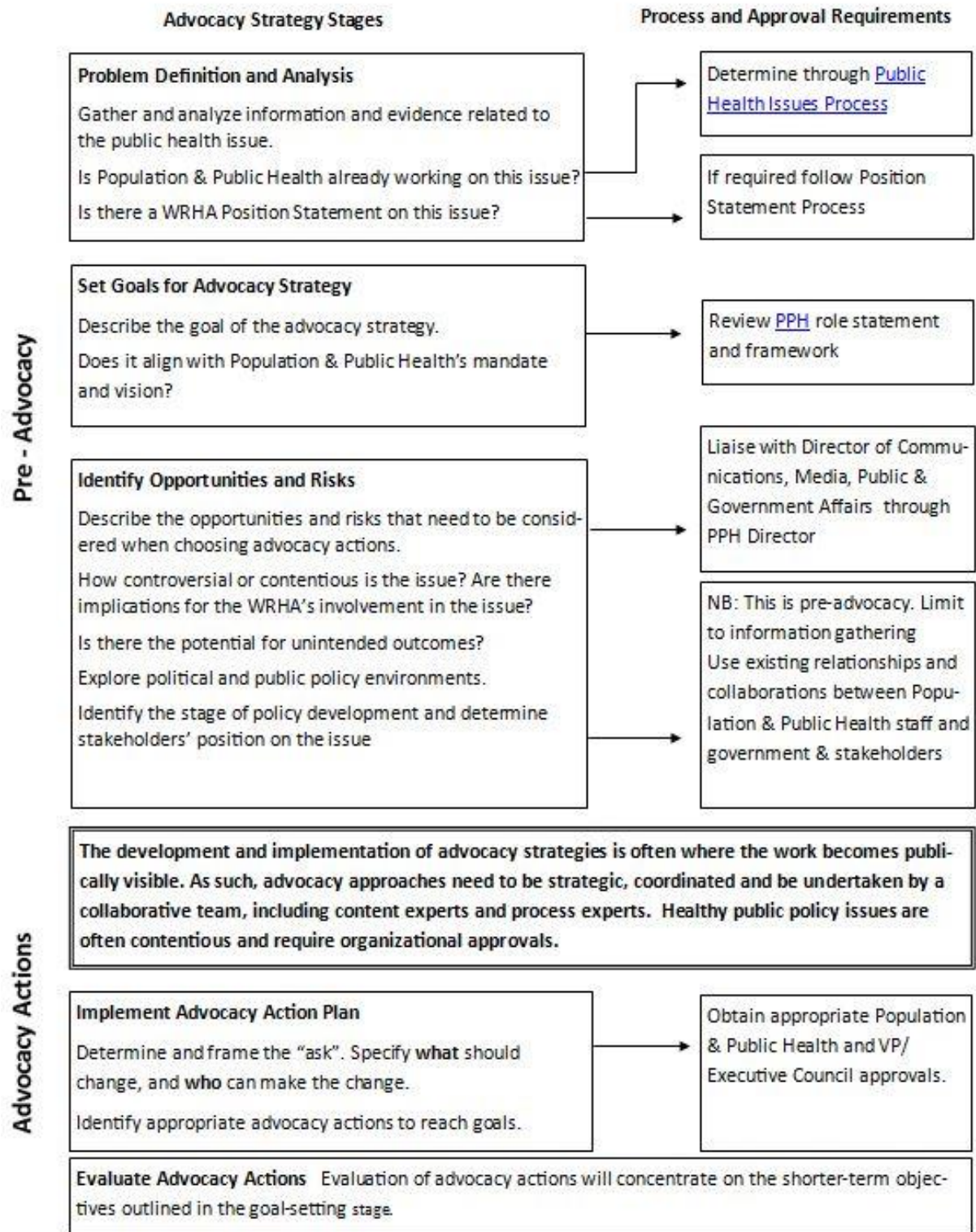
Advocacy is a critical approach needed in some circumstances to influence public policies that create social, environmental, political and economic conditions supportive of health. “Social advocacy is central to the mission of public health and a significant responsibility for public health professionals.”¹¹ However, as advocacy aims to address the issues of power that determine the social determinants of health, it can be challenging and create public and political tension. There may be conflicting interests, and varying perspectives of stakeholders and government. As many advocacy actions occur in the public realm, it can create risk for individual staff and the organization.

Where clear benefit of a policy action exists through evidence and precedence, and where there is clear support from those the policy intends to benefit, then advocacy risks may need to be taken. As with other areas of health care, such as caring for someone with a serious communicable disease by paying close attention to infection control measures, risks in the HPP area must be recognized and skillfully managed. Just as it would be unethical to abandon a patient because their care may pose risks, we similarly cannot abandon our patient- the public. However, if facing risks, appropriate risk management must be employed.

Untoward events (such as a negative media story) may occur during the implementation of advocacy strategies. To ensure the organization can manage risks and untoward events, advocacy actions must follow these Population & Public Health Advocacy guidelines:

- Have appropriate Population & Public Health and WRHA approvals (see Figure 3).
- Adhere to WRHA and program policies and guidelines including but not limited to:
 - [Media Relations Policy](#) – WRHA
 - [Conflict of Interest Policy](#) – WRHA
 - [Clarifying and Learning from Partnerships](#) - PPH
 - [Health Equity- the language we use](#) - PPH
 - [Operational Guideline - Social Marketing for Health Communication](#) - PPH
- Be thoughtful; include PPH consultation and system checks. If in doubt, check with your colleagues and supervisor.
- Align with the principles of advocacy –
 - Non-partisan activities and viewpoints.
 - Focus on the health and well-being impacts of the issue.
 - Align with professional values and standards.
 - Be evidence-informed.²

Figure 3: Advocacy Process and Approvals



Please see Appendix A for advocacy action examples and scope of practice and approvals.

EVIDENCE INFORMED ADVOCACY

Advocacy and healthy public policy actions should be informed by evidence. Evidence can be qualitative and quantitative. The role of public health is to provide and interpret credible information on the health impacts of issues. Community context, preferences and knowledge are important sources of evidence that should be used to inform advocacy actions. The National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools provides a [model](#) on types of evidence that should be reviewed.⁸

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST

We have many roles in our lives beyond our profession and job role. Private citizens have the right to engage in public issues and democratic processes. As WRHA employees we must respect and maintain the scope of our job roles and expertise. For those involved in volunteer advocacy activities these guidelines to manage conflicts of interest should be followed.

- Be clear about what you are wearing particularly if the topic relates to your professional practice
- Restrict volunteer activities to non-working hours
- Ensure that you have clearly expressed that you are speaking as a private citizen
- If engaging in online advocacy actions, do not identify your workplace in your personal social media accounts
- Do not use your organizational email address

Adapted from Vancouver Coastal Advocacy Guidelines (n.d.)²

CONCLUSION

“Advocacy is a critical population health strategy that emphasizes collective action to effect system change.”¹² To promote conditions in which every person can reach their full health potential we must continue to build on this core competency of public health.

FURTHER READING

For more information about Healthy Public Policy and Population & Public Health visit our [webpage](#).

References

1. Milio, N. (2001). Glossary: Healthy public policy. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 55, 622-623.
2. Vancouver Coastal Health (date not specified) *Vancouver Coastal Health Population Health: Advocacy Guideline and Resources*. Vancouver: Vancouver Coastal Health. Available at: http://www.vch.ca/media/Population-Health_Advocacy-Guideline-and-Resources.pdf
3. Hancock, T. (1985). Beyond Health Care: From Public Health Policy to Healthy Public Policy. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 76:1, 9-11.
4. CPHA. (2016). Public Health: A Conceptual Framework. Available at http://www.cpha.ca/uploads/policy/2016_ph-conceptual-framework_e.pdf
5. Cristoffel, KK. (2000). Public health advocacy: Process and product. *American Journal of Public Health*, 90, 722-6.
6. Public Health Agency of Canada (2008). *Core Competencies for Public Health in Canada*. Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada. Available at: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/php-ppsp/ccph-cesp/pdfs/cc-manual-eng090407.pdf>
7. Johnson SA. (2009). *Public health advocacy*. Edmonton, Alberta: Healthy Public Policy – Alberta Health Services. Available at <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/popoh/hi-popoh-hpp-public-health-advocacy.pdf>
8. National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools. (2012). A Model for Evidence-Informed Decision-Making in Public Health. [fact sheet]. Available at http://www.nccmt.ca/pubs/FactSheet_EIDM_EN_WEB.pdf
9. Moore, S. How the System Works....and How to Work the System. Presented at Policy Advocacy and Engagement Workshop; 2015, November 25.
10. South Shore Health (2014). *Policy and Advocacy Framework*. Available at <http://www.southshorehealth.ca/about/position-statements>
11. Dorfman L, Sorenson S, Wallack L. (2009). Working upstream – skills for social change: a resource guide for developing a course on advocacy for public health [Internet]. Berkeley (CA): Berkeley Media Studies Group. Available at http://bmsg.org/sites/default/files/bmsg_handbook_working_upstream.pdf
12. National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health (2015). Let's Talk: Advocacy and Health Equity. Antigonish, NS: National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health, St. Francis Xavier University. Available at http://nccdh.ca/images/uploads/comments/Advocacy_EN.pdf

Appendix A: Advocacy Action Examples

