

Making Public Policy to Prevent Falls

This guide has been written to help to increase public awareness of falls prevention strategies. It is intended that the information will inspire you, the reader, to participate in the creation of falls prevention policies in your communities. This guide is for individuals or groups seeking to either

1. *create* a policy to benefit the health of community residents, or
2. *support, oppose or advocate* for change in a policy which may have health effects in your community.

You are encouraged to become a champion of falls prevention policy in your community.

The guide covers both situations. All of this information may not apply in all circumstances, or at all times. Use the information which best suits your situation. This information has been adapted from the heart health and healthy public policy material

THOUGHTS ON FALLS PREVENTION AND HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICY

Policies that promote falls prevention can lead to changes in our communities that are very visible and some that lead to change without a lot of notice. Building codes that ensure safe stair design, installation of adequate lighting in stairs and entranceways, policies to remove snow in areas that are used by seniors as a priority or business regulations that create more accessible and safer environments can all help to reduce falls. Changes can be addressed to an individual business location or apartment or to a policy for building codes in a municipality or the province.

As concerned citizens and community members, we can work together to create solutions for problems affecting risk factors for falls. When working to change policies forming partnerships with key players can be an important step.

Partnerships might form around falls prevention for some of the following reasons:

1. Community problems are complex. No single person or organization has the knowledge, time or resources to solve the problem.

2. A broad base of community support is required to address the social, economic, and political agendas related to health with a view to bringing about social change.
3. Different outlooks can provide fresh approaches to old problems. Traditional approaches to health promotion have not been effective in reaching those living in disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances.
4. Funders are increasingly looking for evidence of community partnerships in order to avoid duplication and maximize the use of resources.
5. Businesses keen to demonstrate their social responsibility sometimes provide resources to community-based organizations which, although they are a legitimate force in the community, do not have the resources needed to be effective.
6. Partnerships provide social support for individuals working on common issues. This can result in personal behaviour change as well as community environmental change.
7. The synergistic effect of forming a partnership among several organizations, each with a vested interest in the issue, can balance the influence of individual members.

Partnerships may assume various forms, ranging from rather loose networks to more formalized collaborative structures. The form a partnership takes will depend on how complex the common mission is, how strong the members want the links to be, and how formal the agreed terms of reference are.

1. In addition to the community itself, various levels and departments of government may be involved, as well as non-government health, social and labour organizations, and private industry.
2. Key players from these various sectors may include community leaders and activists, members of community service organizations, local politicians, church leaders, agency directors, health professionals, educators, volunteers with non-government health and social organizations, labour and industry

leaders, spokespersons for special interest groups, and representatives from coalitions.

3. The list of possible partners is as extensive and unique as the community itself. What is important is to identify those organizations and individuals who can most effectively influence the issue, both directly and indirectly.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS IN POLICY MAKING

Policy is a decision or direction.

Public Policy: a decision embodied in legislation or an action of a Government, a directive made by a Board of Directors of a private company or non-profit organization with authority to make the decision.

Healthy Public Policy a decision or actions intended to have a positive effect on the health of people.

Policies or decisions are made by politicians and people who hold positions of authority.

However, individuals and community groups can influence public policy. Maybe you can do something within your immediate environment to improve your own health or act as an advocate for others.

If there is an issue which really concerns you, you can make a difference.

The Guide will help you:

1. to think about "falls prevention" issues,
2. to consider the impacts of decisions that affect all of us,
3. to take action to improve or establish falls prevention policy in your community.

Get Involved!!

THE BIG PICTURE -

THE POLICY MAKING ENVIRONMENT

Key Concepts

Origins of Policy

The policy-making process has been described as beginning from the top down (governments) or from the bottom up (the citizens). Each depends on the other to achieve its goals.

Top Down Policy may originate from government through

1. legislation,
2. a policy direction (e.g. deficit reduction), or
3. policy initiative (e.g., creating a positive business climate).

As governments need electoral support, politicians are interested in satisfying citizens' concerns.

Bottom Up Policy may originate from

1. the community's organized efforts to create change
2. one person (*a champion or an initiator*) who organizes a working group to advance a cause.

With every policy decision taken, especially by government, there are far reaching consequences for the whole population. Every decision made has cost associated with it and support for one item may have an impact on another item.

Authority to Legislate

Each level of government in Canada - federal and provincial has defined powers under our constitution. Certain fields have been assigned to either the federal government or the provincial governments and each level can make laws in that field. Provincial governments, by way of legislation, create municipal governments and allow them to exercise certain provincial powers for the benefit of local residents. It is very important for a community organization to know to which level of government to

target its efforts. Be sure to select the right player.

The Players

There are key players who are involved in policy-making and a community group must be aware of the roles of each.

Provincial Legislature or the House of Assembly - members who are politicians, that is, elected representatives of the people of the Province. Laws, in the form of legislation containing a policy, are passed by the House of Assembly. While Members may support a policy direction, policy is rarely initiated in this forum.

Cabinet - the Premier and elected representatives selected by the Premier.

The Cabinet has the ultimate decision-making power to place legislation before the House of Assembly. Many decisions related to the existing legislation are contained in Regulations which Cabinet has the power to pass without further approval from the House of Assembly.

Bureaucracy - the deputy minister, senior officials, professionals, and staff whose direction comes from Government and legislation. The officials are members of the public service who study proposed policy initiatives, provide recommendations to the decision-makers and sometimes initiate policy development.

Community - includes municipal politicians, opinion leaders, aboriginal leaders and representatives of various interests at the community level.

Policy can be initiated at this level and support gathered for action by the legislature. Policy can also be developed and implemented at this level.

Board of Directors - a legal body managing either a private company or a non-profit organization.

A Board can develop and implement policy affecting its own organization. A decision of a Board to support a policy advocated by another group could be helpful in trying to promote adoption of legislation by government.

Individual - a citizen

The individual is a citizen to whom politicians are accountable for policies of government. The individual can champion an action and encourage the involvement of others to help themselves or influence policy decisions. Individuals can make views known to an elected representative to encourage or discourage support for the policy.

STEPS FOR CREATING FALLS PREVENTION POLICY IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Individuals and groups are encouraged to participate in developing a healthy public policy.

Advocating change requires a plan. While every process has its unique twists, there are common steps to each process.

1. A champion,
2. Identify the issue,
3. Gain support - form a working group,
4. Conduct a needs assessment - get to know your community,
5. Develop an action plan,
6. Encourage participation - work towards success,
7. Communicate with the public through the media,
8. Implement change,
9. Monitor/evaluate/adjust

This is a working guide to help you successfully achieve your goal.

Step 1. The Initiator or Champion of the Cause

An idea for the development of a falls prevention policy comes from both individuals and groups of citizens.

The champion or initiator identifies the nature of the issue, conducts an initial assessment and suggests potential courses of action. The champion recognizes that

a number of individuals and groups need to be involved throughout the process. The initiator could be you!

Step 2. Identify the Issue

Identifying the issue is the starting point for developing falls prevention policy or changing a policy in the interests of falls prevention.

Step 3. Gain Support - Form a Working Group

No one person can answer every question. Involve people who are prepared to share their views on the subject. The working group is exactly the members who are prepared to contribute time and energy to the group's activities.

The working group should include:

1. *consumers* - people who have been directly affected by the issue and can speak from experience on the subject.
2. *professionals/experts* for example, consultants.
3. *interested citizens*

As the work progresses and directions are determined, the working group could involve others in the process, such as:

1. *public officials*
2. *municipal politicians and opinion leaders*
3. *potential detractors (to win over likely opponents)*

Step 4. Conduct A Needs Assessment - Get to Know Your Community

Use the lists which follow when compiling information and assessing needs in your community.

Where you can go for information:

1. *Community Health Region (your local Public Health Office)*
2. *City Hall or the Town Office*

3. *Provincial Government Departments*

4. *Provincial Government publications*

5. *Statistics Canada*

6. *Centre for Health Information*

7. *Seniors Resource Centre*

8. *Community organizations*

9. *Libraries*

The *Think About Your Community* list has been designed to help you consider the impacts of public policy on health. Whether working on general assessment of your community, designing a program to assist one group or assessing public policy, background information is required to start the planning process.

THINK ABOUT YOUR COMMUNITY

Assess the situation now and think what the likely effect will be after the proposed policy has been implemented.

Find out About:

The population

1. distribution by age groups
2. types of groups e.g. disabled

Economic conditions

1. business activity

Social supports

1. services in place or gaps in services, e.g. elder care, day-care, homemaker

services

2. costs of services, subsidies available, how accessed
 3. availability and access to home assistance or repairs
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Health services

1. hospitals, clinics, programs, health professionals serving the population
 2. illnesses contributing to disability, disease and death
 3. prevention programs in place
 4. findings of health studies about your community
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Other Services

1. recreation
2. opportunities for being physically active
3. availability of nutritious foods
4. safety concerns

Find Out About:

Basic services

1. green space and parkland (open to the public and safe)
2. transportation (accessible and affordable public transit)
3. housing
 1. availability of affordable housing,
 2. suited to individuals' needs (e.g. people with disabilities, seniors, children)

3. meets safety standards and requirements

Opportunities to create awareness

4. public meetings
 5. information distribution
 6. opinion survey/questionnaire
 7. newspapers
 8. radio
 9. television
 10. display boards, e.g. town council office, grocery store, open house by community agency
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Resources in the community

11. Community Health Regions
12. consumers' organizations, for example:
 - Consumer's Organization for the Disabled
 - Seniors groups
13. voluntary health organizations, for example:
 1. Red Cross,
 2. Fire Departments
 3. NL Safety Council
14. service clubs
 1. Lions Club
 2. Legions
 3. Kinsmen/ Kinettes

STEPS FOR CREATING FALLS PREVENTION POLICY IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Once the research findings have been evaluated by the working group, a goal can be set. Be careful to consider all information available and be sure of the facts. Being associated with sloppy work may undermine your constructive efforts.

Step 5. Develop an Action Plan. In order to turn your idea into reality, you should develop an action plan. This plan outlines objectives and the activities to be undertaken to meet your goal. It lets everyone know:

1. what is to be done,
2. how it is to be done, and
3. who is going to do it.

Deadlines should be set

Involve people in committees but remember, there must be central coordination. This can be achieved by having one person or a small working group monitoring all activities.

For more information refer to the Community Action Pack listed in, the *Readings* section.

Step 6. Encourage Participation - Work Toward Success

Participation will depend on the type of activity you are planning to undertake. Once individuals express an interest, involve them in an activity so they can feel they are contributing. Be sure adequate information is available.

Any activity involving a new policy or change to one already existing will raise questions and, perhaps, opposition. This is part of the political process and change.

Step 7. Communicate with the Public Through the Media (newspapers, radio, television)

You may want to make the public aware of your group and its goals. As your activities unfold, the media should be kept informed and events presented from *your* perspective.

Use:

1. press releases
2. press conferences
3. television appearances
4. radio interviews
5. public meetings you organize and invite politicians to attend
6. events to draw attention to your cause

The plan should be coordinated and monitored to ensure the goal is still within sight.

Note: Not every project will want or need media attention. However, those who are seeking to introduce legislation, amend a law or stop an activity from proceeding are likely to require it.

Step 8. Implement Change - Success!... Maybe...

This is the time that policy comes into effect and the control transfers from you to others. Problems may arise and you will have to work through them.

Step 9. Monitor/Evaluate/Adjust

You can enjoy your success but your work is not over yet. The work of the champion, the initiator or the sponsor may be entering a new phase. Ensure the goal is being met.

From the early stages of the process, no matter what the goal, the working group must direct its energies toward evaluation. Maintain an interest in the progress of your success.

Ask yourself:

1. Has anything happened because of your efforts?
2. Has a policy been written or changed?
3. Are there resources available to implement it?

4. Has the policy had the desired effect?

Few things are perfected without testing and there is always potential for failure.

The more flexible and open you are to incorporating what you have learned along the way, the more likely your success.

Remember... Things take time...

HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICY IN ACTION

Achieving Health For All: The Framework for Health Promotion is used as a tool in health planning. Healthy Public Policy is one of the implementation strategies.

The examples which follow show how healthy public policy has been developed in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Example 1

The introduction of legislation to ensure building accessibility thereby promoting a healthy environment for all citizens,

EXAMPLE 1:

COMMITMENT TO CHANGE TO CREATE A HEALTHIER ENVIRONMENT: THE BUILDINGS ACCESSIBILITY LEGISLATION

Issue Identification Through Needs Assessment

In 1976, the Community Services Council, a social planning and research organization, conducted a study on the housing needs of the physically disabled. Lack of wheelchair accessibility to most housing units was identified as a major problem.

Public Awareness of the Issue

1. A press conference was called to raise this issue.
2. A meeting was held with members of the St. John's City Council which identified the lack of regulation to ensure buildings were accessible. Council's

support was obtained.

3. A public meeting was organized to which there was an overwhelming response.

Formation of a Working Group

The Accessibility Action Committee was formed. The membership of this Committee included staff from the Community Services Council, the Executive Director of the Canadian Paraplegic Association, a medical specialist and a consumer, i.e., a person with a disability who formed part of the target population.

Refining We Issues/Identifying The Goals

As the Accessibility Action Committee began to work on this issue, it became obvious that the issue was broader than first thought.

1. The lack of housing for those with a physical disability was a small piece of a larger concern. The efforts undertaken should be to achieve accessibility to all buildings.
2. The focus had to be provincial in nature, and not limited to municipal regulation. Thus the goal became the introduction of a piece of legislation through the House of Assembly.

Gaining Participation of Various Interests

The Committee recognized that their membership had to be expanded to include:

1. provincial public servants who could advise on the process of policy-making,
2. representatives of the sectors which would be affected by the changes in building requirements, for example, the engineering profession, the construction industry.

Working with the Key Players to Make the Goal a Reality

From the public meeting in 1976 through to 1978 the Committee worked on a policy that would result in legislation. In 1979, legislation was introduced in the Newfoundland House of Assembly. Once regulations were drafted under the

legislation, the Buildings Accessibility Act was proclaimed into law in 1981

Monitoring Progress

Under the legislation, the Buildings Accessibility Advisory Board was established to advise the Minister on, and to hear appeals from, any person who felt wronged by the application of the Act. Over time, it became evident that there were difficulties with the enforcement of the Act.

Learning Through Experience/Making Adjustments

In 1987, the Government acknowledged that there were definite problems as expressed by consumers, builders and the public. A Committee was appointed by the Minister to review the Act and recommend change. They consulted widely with municipalities, interest groups and the public. Subsequently an Implementation Committee was appointed by the Minister to oversee legislative amendments.

Attainment of the Goal

The Newfoundland Buildings Accessibility Act is considered to be one of the most comprehensive pieces of legislation of its kind in Canada.

Ongoing Evaluation

As of 1993 media attention regarding inaccessible public buildings and the enforcement of the legislation continues. Consumer and other groups within the community have taken ownership of the issue of building accessibility and are committed to the intent and spirit of the Act.

Observations on the Process

1. Public awareness of an issue cannot be assumed.
2. The need for ongoing education is the key. Once the Act was law, all concerned had to be educated on the specific features of the changes.
3. There must be at least one or two members of the working committee to sustain momentum and keep the activities moving forward.
4. The committee invited potential detractors to participate in its activities. They

became supporters.

5. Consumer representation is vital.
6. Know where the decision-making point is and target it.
7. Involve the policy makers from the outset and get them committed to the issue.
8. Constant monitoring and vigilance is necessary.

EXAMPLE 2:

GOLDEN LEGION MANOR: GRASPING A CHANGE

Issue Identification Through Needs Assessment

An extension was built on The Golden Legion Manor in Gander. In the new section handrails were installed along all of the hallways. A resident (a champion of the cause) of the existing section realized the benefits of the handrail and identified this as an unmet need for the existing section.

Public Awareness of the Issue

The residents of the existing area were made aware of the issue through word of mouth and by the issue being raised with the tenants committee.

Formation of a Working Group

The tenants committee served as a working group and the issue clarified. A goal was set to ensure that there was a railing available throughout the building.

Gaining Participation of Various Interests and Key Players

The tenants committee was then able to approach the building management with a clear request.

Monitoring Progress

The railings are now in place and available throughout the building.

Observations on the Process

The involvement of a group of residents that was affected by the issue and addressing the concerns with support from the tenants committee helped to bring out the importance of this issue.

The tenant committee was able to effectively identify the policy makers and the appropriate place to address their concerns to bring about the change.

Suggestions To Other Businesses If Undertaking A Program

By approaching the problem with an attitude of partnership in making a change there was a positive response from the Golden Legion Manor management and the change was brought about.

You can make a difference!!

You may be thinking about issues in your community that could be addressed to reduce the risk of falls. Through Project UPRIGHT: NL Falls Prevention the Seniors Resource Centre is supporting seniors groups and organizations to address these types of changes. There is a sample of a letter that a project volunteer has sent to a business in her local community to raise awareness of the issue. (See the following letter). You may want to use this strategy as well. If your group or organization would like the official support or assistance of Project UPRIGHT and the Seniors Resource Centre of Newfoundland and Labrador please contact the Seniors Resource Centre. We may be able to help you gain support for your issue, identify key decision makers, develop an action plan, host a meeting with decision makers, communicate with the media, and provide official letterhead to bring your concern forward as a concern for all seniors.

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Readings

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(A kit developed for community groups which contains information, on a step-by-step basis, to guide a group through the process of creating healthy public policy. This resource is available through the public health units in the province.)

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