

### Beyond Policy Development to Government Policy Uptake

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For more than ten years, OHHP-Taking Action for Healthy Living Community Partnerships has engaged in policy development and is now poised to further influence government policy uptake. This @ a glance will focus on how Community Partnerships can increase policy uptake by government decision makers.

**Policy Uptake is about *Determining Factors* and modeling Determination!**

#### What is Policy Uptake?

Policy uptake is about moving policy recommendations onto the government's policy agenda and for government representatives to "uptake" your policy recommendation into their political agenda. This sounds easy, but in practice takes significant work in preparing the what, how, who and when of your policy recommendation.

- *What* aspect of the policy do you to take forward?
- *How* do you want to move it forward?
- *Who* to influence within the government system for "best chance" of uptake?
- *When* is the best political time to move forward?

OHHP-Taking Action for Healthy Living Community Partnerships have an opportunity to position themselves as an *Institutional Group* at the political level through their provincial efforts as a network. More voices joined together provide a ground swell on issues!

#### Examples of policy recommendations to:

##### *Federal Government:*

- Stop the claw back on the National Child Tax Credit.
- Tax credit for registering children in physical activity programs.
- Changes to the Canada's Food Guide for Healthy Eating.

##### *Provincial Government:*

- Increase the number of physical activity credits for secondary students.
- Smoke-Free cars for children.
- Mandatory booster seats for children under eight years of age.

##### *Municipal Government:*

- By-law for bike lanes or sidewalks or multi-purpose pathways on all arterial roads.
- Municipal alcohol policy.
- Family-friendly municipal public spaces.

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# Four Steps for Policy Uptake

## 1. Determine *what* aspect of the policy to take forward: Does your policy address the Private or Public Realm or Both?

*“The boundaries of what is considered to be political are located where the state’s authority reaches... the public realm. Beyond this line is the private realm, where the state’s authority does not extend”<sup>1</sup> (p.4).*

You need to consider whether your policy recommendation affects the private or public realm or both. If your recommendation is within or touches the “private realm” you face a hard uphill battle. Policy recommendation includes a continuum of recommendation from less risk for the government such as accepting a copy of a summary report, endorsement of best practices to strong government support such as creating laws to support the recommended policy.

If your policy recommendation is within the “private realm”, consider moving your efforts outside of the government to community organizations or interest groups to help create a ground swell of support. Within this ground swell of collective strength a policy recommendation for the government can then be developed. The issue of drinking and driving is an excellent example of this type of policy development and uptake.

If your policy recommendation falls within the public realm then you are looking for it to “fit” with the political agenda for your best chance for policy uptake. To do this you want to move on to the next step: determining how to move it forward.

*“The relevance of policy research is demonstrated when it speaks to the challenges they [Government representatives] face. Effective policy research is first and foremost applicable to the context in which the government operates”<sup>2</sup> (p.5).*

Policy recommendations that address issues of the future were embraced more than policy research that only tackle current issues.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, policy research needs to include the changes or impacts the policy could face from external factors in the future.

## 2. Determine *how* to move it forward

Within the governmental system there are elected officials and bureaucrats. Elected officials such as the Prime Minister and Cabinet Members could change with each election. Bureaucrats are the civil servants who tend to stay regardless of which political party is in power. “Policy implementation is the role of the bureaucracy” and their influence “begins at the agenda-setting stage of policy making, when problems and possible responses are being defined”<sup>1</sup> (p.250). Learning about the different “actors” within the political system is important for policy uptake. You need to know how to frame your policy recommendation within the current political agenda. One way to determine this “fit” is to review the platform agenda of the party in power. Identify if they have a stand on your policy topic and determine where your recommendation fits. It is also helpful to review communication releases from the Central Agencies (defined in Policy Uptake Lingo) as this sets the overall political agenda and finances. Another way to learn more is to review Throne Speeches or Budget Reports to see if your policy recommendation topics are discussed and within what context.

## 3. Determine *who* to influence within the governmental system for “best chance” of uptake

As stated in the previous section, the government bureaucrat is important in the policy uptake process, but they are not the decision-makers. You need to increase your knowledge of the internal process of the government. There are several steps in the process and both bureaucrats and elected officials will review and discuss your policy recommendation. This is why developing policy tools such as briefing documents, key messages and background documents are so important. You need to be able to communicate your policy recommendation to many people who will have a different level of knowledge and experience of your topic area. It is also a good strategy to learn more about the Deputy Minister within the Ministry you wish to influence.

Questions that need to be considered and addressed are:

What policy is required?  
What problem it will solve?  
Why does it matter to the policy maker?  
What should be done about it?  
What problems are faced by specific policy-makers?

### The Role of the Deputy Minister:

Their “mission is to serve the minister in non-partisan fashion, competently, impartially, diligently and loyally... inform him in his decisions and projects....provides professional, non-partisan advice concerning the development and implementation of policies, prepares the tools that will enable the minister to take a discerning stand in public, and manage the compliance of the decisions he makes. On a daily basis, he ensures the sound operation management of the department. The deputy minister also acts as the senior adviser to the minister concerning all the responsibilities exercised by him”<sup>1</sup> (p.253).

### The Role of the Government Bureaucrat:

They are involved at the beginning stage of policy making, when problems and possible solutions are being determined. They are also involved at the policy implementation stage as they have contact with the groups implementing the policy change.

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#### 4. Determine *when* is the best political time to move forward

The window of opportunity for policy change is not open at all times. You need to consider the window of opportunity for your policy recommendation to have the biggest impact on current policy. *Influencing Decision-makers*<sup>4</sup> identified that governments make policy decisions that may be unpopular early in their mandate and they are generally hard to influence just prior to an election. Therefore, there is only a short window of opportunity (18 to 24 months) to have them implement what they could consider “risky” policy changes. You need to position your policy recommendation with the “best fit” within the timeframe described. Remember that there is a continuum of policy recommendations. That continuum can range from having the government adopt a less risky option, such as promoting a report, to having the government take a stronger stand by creating a law to support a recommended policy.

#### Example of what Policy-makers want to know about physical activity:

In her article on making physical activity research relevant to policy makers, McCann<sup>3</sup> (2006) identified a list of questions that policy makers would like answered:

- What policy initiatives will affect our return on investment by delivering reduced costs and better health?
- What policy initiatives have worked to increase physical activity and improve health?
- How can we influence behaviour?
- What land use and zoning changes make the most difference?

### Policy Uptake Lingo<sup>1</sup>

**Central agencies:** Parts of the bureaucracy whose main and only purpose is to support the decision-making activities of cabinet. The five organizations usually considered to have central agency status are the Privy Council Office, the Prime Minister’s Office, the Department of Finance, the Treasury Board Secretariat, and the Intergovernmental Affairs Office with the PCO.

**Influence:** A form of power that depends on the ability of a person or group of persons to persuade others that it is reasonable and/or in their self-interest to behave a particular way.

**Institutional Group:** Interest groups characterized by a high degree of organizational sophistication, the distinguishing features of which include organizational continuity, stable membership, extensive knowledge of sectors of government that affect their members and easy access to public officials in these sectors, concrete and immediate objectives, and overall organizational goals that are more important than any specific objectives.

**Policy Community:** The constellation of state and societal actors active in a particular policy field.

**Policy Network:** The nature of relations among the actors in a policy community

*Know the policy community and policy network for the level of government you want to influence!*

#### *Policy Uptake Tips from Margot Lettner<sup>5</sup>*

- ✦ Communication drives policy. Read archived media releases from the government office that you want to influence to understand their language and agenda.
- ✦ You need to frame and reframe the issue- use language that the audience will best understand.
- ✦ Policy is not just about laws and operations. It can be about sharing other items of interest to the government such as best practices.
- ✦ Look for the best possible means to get to the end- sometimes you are leaving some of the data you have collected behind.
- ✦ You can disagree with government policy but don’t attack it.

## Kim's Tip:

*Link your policy to fairness, freedom, representation, justice or dignity.*

*“The map of Canadian politics is today recognizably the same as it was a generation ago. But many of the borderlines, roads, and place names have changed. What has not changed, however, is the fact that all of the central issues in Canadian political life raise questions of fairness, freedom, representation, justice and dignity”*

## Helpful Resources and Tips: Put what you have learned into Practice

### Visit the Government of Ontario Web site [www.gov.on.ca](http://www.gov.on.ca).

Choose a ministry that you want to influence. Review how it is described and how it is Structured. Review their mission, vision and mandate. Determine how your policy recommendation may fit within that particular ministry.

### Participate in Policy Training:

The Wellesley Institute [www.wellesleyinstitute.com](http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com) offers affordable training on the topic of Community-Based Research to Affect Public Policy and publications on briefs and reviews that they have conducted on different policy topics.

### Gather more Tools for Policy Uptake From:

St. Christopher House [www.stchrishouse.org](http://www.stchrishouse.org) Click on Get Involved and Tools and Resources and you will find a wealth of information and tools on influencing the different levels of government and how to apply social policy framework. Make sure to click on Advocates Manual for a listing of key resources for policy uptake!

### Physical Activity Resource Centre's Workbook for Influencing Physical Activity Policy

<http://www.ophea.net/parc/policy.cfm>. This workbook provides tools to help community partnerships focus their physical activity policy efforts.

**The Health Communication Unit** [www.thcu.ca](http://www.thcu.ca). Click on Information and Resources and choose Policy Development. Available is the Road Map for Policy Change and other resources related to policy development.

## References

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4. Heart Health Resource Centre (2007). *Influencing Decision-makers*. @heart, Vol 25, Summer.
5. Margot Lettner is a professor at Ontario Universities and principal consultant at Wassabi Consulting on the topic of influencing government decision makers. The information and tips shared were gathered as a participant during training at the Wellesley Institute, Toronto, Ontario.

## About the HHRC

The Heart Health Resource (HHRC) anticipates and meets the needs of public health agencies and their communities in chronic disease prevention.

The HHRC was established in 1993 to support five demonstration projects in Ontario. It currently works with 36 community partnerships of the OHHP-Taking Action for Healthy Living.

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