

## Public Policy/Advocacy

Advocacy allows organizations to promote their causes by educating the public, community decision makers, and policymakers. At the community level, public policy generally refers to laws, codes, and regulations established by governing entities such as city councils, departments of transportation, zoning commissions, county commissioners, or the state legislature. Regulations and codes might also be established by community agencies such as planning departments, water departments, school boards, and parks and recreation departments. How public policy is developed and implemented varies from one municipality, county, and state to another.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed individuals can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

– *Margaret Mead*



## Education

In order to impact policy change, it is necessary to first educate policy makers about the issues that your coalition is concerned with. In the area of physical activity, it is essential that policy makers understand the impact of your cause, using information that is credible and valuable.

Be strategic in how you create awareness and communicate with policy makers and community leaders to influence change. Sometimes, when community-based coalitions think about awareness or education, there is a tendency to jump to tactics such as writing news releases, producing public service announcements, or printing brochures. While these tools have their place in awareness and education for the general public, they are not particularly targeted and are generally difficult to measure and evaluate in terms of their effectiveness as it pertains to policy makers.

When communicating with policy makers and community leaders, tactics that are more likely to be effective are one-on-one or small group meetings or briefings that include your target audience and one or two experts who can provide in-depth information on the issues related to physical activity and community change.

When educating policy makers, keep in mind that short, simple messages are often best. Policy makers are inundated with information, facts, and data. Their time is at a premium. Focus presentations with a few clear facts and tie your data to your community as much as possible. Develop easy-to-read leave-behind folders that include fact sheets, one-page overviews of the issue, a copy of the AFI data report, and information on how to contact you for follow-up or to get more information.

## Public Policy

To create systemic lifestyle changes in communities, policy change is often needed. For example, educating smokers about the negative health impact of tobacco only went so far in reducing tobacco use. However, once laws went into place regarding clean indoor air, tobacco excise taxes became significant enough to deter many from purchasing cigarettes, and smoking became socially unacceptable in most public places and businesses, real change began to occur.

### The American Public Health Association offers 10 Rules of Advocacy.<sup>6</sup>

1. Get to know legislators, their districts and constituencies, voting records, personal schedules, opinions, expertise and interests.
2. Acquaint yourself with the staff members for the legislators, committees and resource officials with whom you will be working. These people are essential sources of information and have influence in the development of policy.
3. Identify fellow advocates and partners in the public health community to better understand the process, monitor legislation, and assess strengths and weaknesses.
4. Identify the groups and other legislators with whom you may need to negotiate for changes in legislation. Do not dismiss anyone because of previous disagreements or because you lack a history of working together.
5. Foster and strengthen relationships with allies and work with legislators who are flexible and tend to keep an open mind.
6. Be honest, straightforward and realistic when working with legislators and their staff.
7. Be polite, remember names and thank those who help you both in the legislature and in the public health advocacy community.
8. Learn the legislative process and understand it well. Keep on top of the issues and be aware of controversial and contentious areas.
9. Be brief, clear, accurate, persuasive, timely, persistent, grateful and polite when presenting your position and communicating your needs or wants.
10. Follow up with legislators and their staff. Remember to thank them for their time and efforts.

<sup>6</sup> American Public Health Association. Top Ten Rules of Advocacy. <http://www.apha.org/NR/rdonlyres/B333E66A-5E83-408B-9871-9808EFAA209D/0/TopTenRulesofAdvocacy.pdf>. (accessed 4/18/09)

## Understanding community government

Community-based organizations that want to participate in policy issues need to have a clear understanding of who makes decisions, how decisions are made, and how policies are introduced and established. One way to learn how your community government works and who you should meet with is to look at your city, county and council of government (COG) Web sites. These will almost always provide detailed information on structure, elected and appointed officials, which regulatory and code agencies or departments are in place, and what they do. These Web sites will also provide contact information, meeting schedules, and agendas for meetings. Look for information on topics such as zoning, transportation (bicycle lanes, sidewalks, trails, public transportation, streets, and crosswalks), public safety (street lighting), parks/open space, and schools (playgrounds).

Inviting representatives from policy-making entities to speak to your coalition can be helpful in helping your group understand the processes in your community. While staff from policy-making entities or elected officials are usually precluded from being formal members of your coalition, often they can be invited to serve as an advisory member and be of invaluable assistance in helping you understand processes and procedures for advocating for change.

Social marketing programs can do well in motivating individual behavior change, but that is difficult to sustain unless the environment they're in supports that change for the long run. Often, policy change is needed.

– Nedra Weinreich  
Weinreich Communications



## Non-governmental policy

In addition to public policy that is put into place by lawmakers and regulatory agencies, policy can also be implemented by community institutions such as businesses and industries. You might consider working with business and industry leaders to address physical activity for their employees. Similar tactics to working with public policy officials generally work – one-on-one or small meetings and customized fact sheets that address the importance of physical activity from the employer's standpoint.

When addressing the importance of physical activity, employers will often be interested in “Return On Investment” data or ROI.

The following facts might be useful when talking with business leaders.

- ◆ Michael P. O'Donnell, editor of the *American Journal of Health Promotion*, notes that health promotion activities are likely to yield greater returns from increased employee productivity than from medical care cost-savings.<sup>7</sup>
- ◆ Worksite wellness programs improve productivity through:<sup>8</sup>
  - Reduced absenteeism/lost time
  - Improved on-the-job decision-making and time utilization
  - Improved employee morale
  - Stronger organizational commitments
  - Reduced organizational conflict by building a reservoir of goodwill toward management
  - Reduced employee turnover
- ◆ Partnership for Prevention notes that employees are more likely to be on the job and performing well when they are in optimal health. The indirect costs of poor health, which include absenteeism and presenteeism, can be two to three times the direct medical cost.<sup>9</sup> (The American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine defines absenteeism as the number of days missed from the workplace, while presenteeism is the health-related productivity loss while at work. Presenteeism describes an employee who is present at work but limited in some aspect of job performance by health-related problem[s].<sup>10</sup> )
- ◆ How significant are healthcare costs? The National Health Expenditure Data<sup>11</sup> from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services indicate that:
  - Growth in national health expenditures was expected to remain steady at 6.7% in 2007 and average 6.7% per year over the projection period (2006–2017).
  - The health share of GDP was estimated to be 16.3% in 2007 and 19.5% by 2017.
  - Private spending on health expenditures was projected to grow 6.3% in 2007 and average 6.2% per year over the projection period.
  - Spending on prescription drugs was projected to grow 6.7% in 2007 to \$231 billion. Average growth of 8.2% per year is expected for the entire projection period.
- ◆ Wellness and health are key components of top 20 corporate responsibility reports and “Best Places to Work” rankings.<sup>12</sup>
- ◆ Wellness initiatives can help employers attract and retain new staff, and ensure that older workers remain healthy.<sup>11</sup> *Fortune* magazine’s annual ranking of the *U.S. Best 100 Companies to Work For* indicates healthcare benefits and a company’s commitment to help staff achieve work-life balance are important to keep employees and attract new ones.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> O'Donnell M. *Health Promotion in the Workplace*. 3rd ed; 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Partnership for Prevention, *Healthy Workforce 2010*.

[http://www.prevent.org/images/stories/Files/publications/Healthy\\_Workforce\\_2010.pdf](http://www.prevent.org/images/stories/Files/publications/Healthy_Workforce_2010.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Partnership for Prevention. Worksite Health. <http://www.prevent.org/content/view/29/39/>.

<sup>10</sup> American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. *Elements of health-related productivity measures*. <http://www.acoem.org/HealthProductivityMeasurements.aspx>.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. National Health Expenditure data. <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/>

<sup>12</sup> World Economic Forum. *Working Toward Wellness*. PricewaterhouseCoopers. 2007.

<sup>13</sup> [http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/bestcompanies/2006/best\\_benefits/health\\_care.html](http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/bestcompanies/2006/best_benefits/health_care.html)

## Advocacy tools and resources

### **Active Community Environments Initiative**

([http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/health\\_professionals/active\\_environments/aces.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/health_professionals/active_environments/aces.htm)). This CDC website includes physical activity recommendations and guidelines, fact sheets, and easy-to-understand data.

### **Alliance for a Healthy Generation**

(<http://www.healthiergeneration.org/>). Offers information and resources for healthy schools programs.

### **Charting and Changing the Policy Landscape: Promoting Physical Activity & Reversing Physical Inactivity through Policy Solutions**

([http://www.physicalactivityplan.org/resources/Policy\\_Brief.pdf](http://www.physicalactivityplan.org/resources/Policy_Brief.pdf)). An executive summary from a policy roundtable discussion comprised of national leaders in public health industries. During this roundtable discussion, the concept of national physical activity guidelines and a national plan for implementation of these guidelines emerged.

### **Community Health Living Index**

(<http://www.ymca.net/>). Contact your local YMCA and inquire about this tool that assesses community environments for opportunities for physical activity and healthy eating and helps schools, worksites, neighborhoods and the larger community make needed healthy living changes.

### **Complete Streets Laws and Ordinances**

(Early Success Stories. <http://www.walkinginfo.org/library/details.cfm?id=3968>). National Complete Streets Coalition of the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center offers sample policies, ordinances, and design manuals.

### **Cost Effectiveness of Community-Based Physical Activity Interventions**

([http://www.ajpm-online.net/article/S0749-3797\(08\)00770-8/abstract](http://www.ajpm-online.net/article/S0749-3797(08)00770-8/abstract)). Roux L. et. al. *American Journal of Public Health*. December, 2008.

### **Designing & Building Healthy Places**

(<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/default.htm>). Promotes healthy community design. The interaction between people and their environments, natural as well as human-made, continues to emerge as a major issue concerning public health.

### **Environmental Change Strategies to Promote Physical Activity Quick Start**

([http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/pdf/pa\\_qs\\_environmental\\_change.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/pdf/pa_qs_environmental_change.pdf)). This resource provides key references, tools, and components for the planning, implementation, evaluation, and maintenance of environmental interventions to promote physical activity.

### **Physical Activity and the Built Environment**

(<http://www.fitness.gov/digests/December2006Digest.pdf>). From the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, this Research Digest discusses research in the field of physical activity and the built environment.

### **SmartGrowth Online: Create Walkable Communities**

(<http://www.smartgrowth.org/about/principles/principles.asp?prin=4&res=1400>). This is a comprehensive website that includes resources such as a guidebook, tools, suggested funding sources, and fact sheets.

### **State-based Physical Activity Program Directory**

(<http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/DNPAProg/>). This site is useful for research, idea generation, and resource sharing. It provides information about physical activity programs involving state departments of health.

### **Task Force on Community Preventive Services Community Guide – Promoting Physical Activity: Environmental and Policy Approaches**

(<http://www.thecommunityguide.org/pa/environmental-policy/index.html>). This guide offers resources and detailed reference information.

### **Tips for Evaluating Advocacy**

(<http://www.afj.org/assets/resources/nap/evaluation-tips-for-both.pdf>). These tips from The Alliance for Justice are helpful for both grantee organizations and funders.

### **University of Kansas Community Toolbox.**

Chapter 5: Choosing Strategies to Promote Community Health and Development ([www.ctb.ku.edu/](http://www.ctb.ku.edu/)). This section of the toolkit addresses getting issues on the public policy agenda.

### **WalkScore**

([www.walkscore.com](http://www.walkscore.com)). WalkScore ranks 2,508 neighborhoods in the largest 40 U.S. cities on walkability.

### **What is Social Marketing?**

(<http://www.social-marketing.com/Whatis.html>) by Nedra Kline Weinreich (Weinreich Communications) this website offers an easy-to-understand overview of the elements of social marketing, including policy.

### **Worksite Walkability Audit Tool**

([http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/hwi/toolkits/walkability/audit\\_tool.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/hwi/toolkits/walkability/audit_tool.htm)). A walkability audit broadly assesses pedestrian facilities, destinations, and surroundings along and near a walking route and identifies specific improvements that would make the route more attractive and useful to pedestrians. Using CDC's Walkability Audit from this site can help you assess the safety or attractiveness of walking routes.