

Section 1: Understanding Public Health Advocacy

What is public health advocacy?

Public health advocacy is the primary tool for effectively communicating with local officials, media and the public about important public health issues in your community. It is the process that assists public health professionals in overcoming barriers and opposition against public health goals.

Examples of public health advocacy

- Speaking to civic groups about important local health issues
- Writing an editorial in the local paper about smoking prevention
- Reporting to county/city leaders the results of current health promotion projects
- Placing a public service announcement on local television and radio to advertise free stroke screenings offered by the health department

What is the goal of public health advocacy?

The goal of any advocacy campaign is to increase the abilities and willingness of communities to actively participate in identifying important health issues and developing and implementing strategies to best meet these health needs.

(Wallack, Dorfman, Jernigan and Themba, 1993)

What do you want to say through your advocacy campaign?

First, you want to ensure you get the right message to the right people in a variety of ways. Start by brainstorming about what you hope your public health advocacy campaign will accomplish. Do you want to raise awareness about an issue, call on the community for action, or both? Or, do you want to bring attention to specific programs your organization offers?

You should focus on and emphasize the most important messages of your public health advocacy campaign. Effective messages are concise, easy to remember, believable and relatable to your audience(s).

Answering the three questions below will help you think about and clarify what your message should be:

1. What makes your public health advocacy campaign unique or important to the community?
2. What is the overall goal you hope to accomplish with your public health advocacy campaign?
3. Why are you advocating for this issue or program? Why should local officials, the media, and the community support it?

Helpful Hints:

- Keep your message to fifteen (15) words or less or three (3) sentences.
- Keep any slogans for your public health campaign to six (6) words or less.

(Communicating with Policy Makers, Module Two, W.K. Kellogg Foundation)

Whom do you want to reach?

A successful public health advocacy campaign identifies specific audiences to reach through its message. Remember to ask yourself the following questions when trying to decide how to get your public health advocacy message out to the public:

1. What group(s) have you targeted in the past for similar issues?
2. What group(s) in the community need to know more about your advocacy campaign and its message than others?
3. What other group(s) might have an interest in the message you are trying to promote?
4. What group(s) will be most receptive to your message?

(NACCHO, Media Outreach Guide)

Steps for creating a public health advocacy campaign

- 1. Identify an important local health issue(s).** Choosing an issue the community values can help create partnerships with other agencies and encourage community members to help develop solutions. It is important you carefully define the issue you want to advocate for in order to influence public opinion and create policy changes.
- 2. Research the issue and gather community data.** Use reports you already have on hand such as your community health assessments or information from your local Healthy Carolinians to support your issue. Also, the North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics can provide you with additional county-level data.
- 3. Develop goals and objectives.** Your goal is what you hope to achieve with your advocacy plan, and your objectives identify short-term, measurable steps within a designated time-frame that will help you achieve your goal. (see worksheets 1 & 2)
- 4. Identify strategies and action steps for targeting local officials and media representatives.** Strategies broadly outline how you reach the objectives outlined in your advocacy plan. Action steps identify: what will happen, who will be responsible, when will the task be completed, what resources are needed for completion, what obstacles need to be overcome, and who can help you achieve your objectives. (see worksheet 3)
- 5. Use your strategic alliances with local officials, media representatives, and other community partnerships to build support for the issue.** Your strategic alliances should already be established before beginning any type of advocacy campaign!
- 6. Develop clear and concise public health messages to frame the issue.** Be consistent and create a message your audience will find credible and can easily understand.
- 7. Identify methods for effectively communicating with local officials and media in your area.** Know when and how local officials and media like to receive information (i.e. telephone, email, face-to-face meeting, written documents, etc.).
- 8. Develop strategies to overcome barriers and local opposition.** Anticipating problems areas will allow you respond more effectively to any type of opposition.
- 9. Develop an evaluation tool to measure the success of the public health advocacy plan.** Evaluation helps you clarify your plan, improve your message, and gather the feedback necessary for improvement. More importantly, it helps you determine why certain actions or steps in your advocacy plan worked or did not work as intended. (see worksheet 4)

How to Develop an Advocacy Plan
A Brief Example

Worksheet 1: Goals

Chose a Public Health Issue in Your Community	Develop Your Advocacy Goal	Where Will You Get Your Information?
The number of overweight children in North Carolina is growing at a fast rate. Our community is very concerned about the lack of physical activity children get during the day.	To increase the amount of physical exercise children get during regular school hours.	Statistics from Eat Smart, Move More NC, the CDC, and NC State Center for Health Statistics. Interviews with teachers and school officials. Report from health department nutritionist.

Worksheet 2: Objectives

Develop Your Advocacy Objectives	
What do you want to accomplish or change?	There is a need to increase the amount of physical activity children have during the day at school.
Is this issue important to your community? Why?	Yes. Over the past 20 years, the number of overweight children in NC has tripled. Children who are overweight are more likely to be at risk for additional health problems, such as cardiovascular problems and emotional stress.
Who will be responsible for the change?	School officials and the community outreach coordinator at the health department.
How much change do you want?	Need to increase physical activity during the day by at least 15 minutes, including physical activities during normal class time.
How will this objective be measured?	By obtaining a grant to fund teachers with the Take10! curriculum materials.
Can you reasonably achieve this objective?	Probably, but not by the end of the current school year.
By when should you achieve this objective?	By the end of the 2008-2009 school year.
FINAL OBJECTIVE	By August 2009, the County School System will implement the Take10! program to increase the amount of physical activity children receive during the school day.

Worksheet 3: Strategies and Action Steps

Strategy #1: Increase physical activity for children at school by obtaining outside funding to support the Take10! Program.			
Action	By Whom	By When	Resources and support needed
Research possible grant sources.	Community Outreach Coordinator	August 30, 2008	Access to internet
Schedule a meeting with School Board Members	Community Outreach Coordinator and Health Director	January 31, 2009	Develop takeaway materials regarding the lack of physical activity in schools and its impact on children's health.
Write a letter to the editor	Board of Health member	November 30, 2008	Develop a list of all local newspapers with addresses and submission guidelines.

Worksheet 4: Evaluation Plan

Specific Plan to be Evaluated:		
What step or action of the plan will you evaluate?	How will you measure success?	Success Indicators
Efforts to engage school board members	Personal meetings with school board members by community outreach coordinator and/or health director	Have all the school board members listed in the advocacy plan been contacted at least once by the community outreach coordinator and/or health director?
Communication with teachers about the Take10! Program	Interviews with teachers about the Take10! Program Short question given to teachers about the level of interest for the program	Do a majority of teachers indicate children do not get enough physical activity at school? Do a majority of teachers indicate they will implement the Take10! Program if it is available to them?
The advocacy message	Review newspaper articles published about the lack of physical activity at school and your organization's efforts to implement the Take10! Program.	Is the local media accurately reporting your message? Has there been any letters to the editor indicating community support for the program?

How to Develop an Advocacy Plan

Worksheet 1: Goals

Chose a Public Health Issue in Your Community	Develop Your Advocacy Goal	Where Will You Get Your Information?

Worksheet 2: Objectives

Develop Your Advocacy Objectives	
What do you want to accomplish or change?	
Is this issue important to your community? Why?	
Who will be responsible for the change?	
How much change do you want?	
How will this objective be measured?	
Can you reasonably achieve this objective?	
By when should you achieve this objective?	
FINAL OBJECTIVE	

Worksheet 3: Strategies and Action Steps

Strategy #1:			
Action	By Whom	By When	Resources and support needed

Worksheet 4: Evaluation Plan

Specific Plan to be Evaluated:		
What step or action of the plan will you evaluate?	How will you measure success?	Success Indicators

Resources

Community Tool Box. (2000). Lawrence KS: University of Kansas Work Group on Health Promotion. Available [online] <http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu>.

National Association of County & City Managers. *Media Outreach Guide*. Available [online] <http://www.naccho.org>

W. K. Kellogg Foundation. *Sustaining Community-Based Initiatives*. “Communicating with Policy Makers”. Module Two.

Wallack, L. Dorfman, L., Jernigan, D., & Themba, M. (1993). *Media Advocacy and Public Health: Power for Prevention*. Sage Publications, Inc.: Newbury Park.