

*Connecting and Collaborating
to Develop Policy Capacity*



Planned Parenthood Federation of Canada

March 2005

Acknowledgements

Planned Parenthood Federation of Canada (PPFC) would like to acknowledge and thank the following individuals and organizations for their participation in this project and the information that they provided us with:

Melinda Aspell, Newfoundland and Labrador Sexual Health Centre
Heidi Deagle, Options for Sexual Health BC
Shanti Gidwani, Options for Sexual Health BC
Brenda Kitchen, Newfoundland and Labrador Sexual Health Centre
Terra Larence, Sexual and Reproductive Health Consultant
Judith Nolté, Social and Health Policy Consultant
Kathleen O'Grady, Canadian Women's Health Network
Kele Redmond, Women's Network PEI
Evelyn Reisner, Planned Parenthood Saskatoon
Cathy Steven, Sexuality Education Resource Centre (SERC) Brandon

Thank you to the Public Health Agency of Canada for funding this important project.

****Please note that the views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the official policy of the Public Health Agency of Canada****.

Executive Summary

This document is designed to help national voluntary organizations working in health (NVOWH's) investigate ***how policy is created in their field and to develop and strengthen policy capacity within their organization.*** This tool aims to help organizations find answers to the following questions:

- *Why get involved in policy?*
- *Who else is involved and how do we get connected?*
- *How can we work with others to develop policy?*
- *How do we stay connected and informed about policy changes in our field?*

This tool is intended for use by a range of health organizations, each of whom may have different knowledge levels in policy development. Based on experience and knowledge level, some organizations may find it beneficial to use this document in its entirety, and others may find only a few components helpful. As the policy tool is fairly basic, those organizations that have less policy experience may find it more helpful and practical for starting out than those who already have extensive knowledge and experience.

We encourage you to use this document as a tool, in the way that works best for you.

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I. INTRODUCTION: CREATING A TOOL FOR COLLABORATION

Concern about the health care system is high in Canada and the time for concerted action to address public concerns is urgent. National voluntary organizations working in health (NVOWH) are well-positioned to work collaboratively together and with government to influence the national debate on health care.

Strengthening the policy capacity of the health sector to increase their participation in the public policy process has been identified by both voluntary organizations working in health and Health Canada as a key priority for broader democratic engagement and public policy development.

However, a recent survey of voluntary organizations conducted by the Social Planning Council of BC found that only 38% of respondents said they understood the health policy process and 30% understood the best ways to be involved.

To help NVOWHs develop policy capacity Planned Parenthood Federation of Canada obtained funding from Health Canada for an innovative project entitled *Creating a Tool for Collaboration*.

The purpose of the project is to create a generic tool to enable voluntary health organizations to collect information about how health policy decisions are made in their jurisdictions and to develop and strengthen policy capacity within their organizations. The tool is flexible enough to be used by all voluntary health organizations, each of whom may have different knowledge levels in policy development.

It is envisaged that the process of using the tool will enhance participants' knowledge in health policy and their ability to influence it. For instance, if the same information is available for all provinces, organizations can compare similarities and differences, build on lessons learned, and assess the applicability of what is known to be effective within their jurisdiction.

For quick reference, there are some features of the tool that you may want to consult.

- Sample questions to Ask Like-Minded Organizations about Policy Pg. 8
- Sample Template for Meeting with Government Decision Makers Pg.10
- How can we work with others to develop policy? Pg.13
- Developing a Long-Term Strategy Pg.14

II. WHY SHOULD VOLUNTARY HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS GET INVOLVED IN POLICY?

Every year, governments make policy decisions that have a direct or indirect impact on the lives of Canadians. Increasingly, the voluntary sector (including voluntary health organizations) is involved in the process of influencing policy, and there has been continuing successful collaboration between the two sectors (government and voluntary sector).

Many levels of government make policy, and many include the public's input, and this includes input from voluntary organizations. Getting input from voluntary health organizations has become an important part of governments' role in fulfilling legislative mandates, delivering programs, launching initiatives, and building public trust. Participation from the public results in more informed decisions, and a greater understanding of public issues, concerns, priorities and solutions.

There are a number of resources that address the question of "Why get involved?". **YMCA's Be H.I.P.P. (Have Influence on Public Policy)** provides some excellent examples *of why voluntary health organizations should get involved in policy.*

- **Voluntary health organizations are the best educators.**
You know your business best. Governments need informed input for sound policy-making. They rely on knowledgeable experts who are close to the communities with which they work and recognize the valuable experience and insights that the health sector can bring to improve policy development.
- **If you don't, your competition will!**
Many interests are competing for a prominent place on the government agenda. Without input from you governments may introduce policies that negatively affect your target population. There is a real risk that government understanding of the issue could be ill informed.
- **Mandate for government to engage citizens in decision-making process.**
Over the past decade, the demand for more openness and transparency in government decision-making has increased. Health Canada, for example, devotes a portion of its website to a Joint Action Plan between the Federal Government and the National Voluntary Sector. Its Action Plan is based on principles such as transparency, inclusiveness and two-way communication.
- **Being active in public policy today is an investment in the future health of Canadians.**
Government policies affect the lives of individuals living in their communities. National voluntary health organizations advocate on behalf of individuals to improve the health of Canadians. A solid, persistent approach to influencing public policy is an important legacy.

III. WHO ELSE IS INVOLVED AND HOW DO WE GET CONNECTED?

Often, organizations have a good understanding of *why they should get involved*, but the task seems so overwhelming that it is hard to know *where to begin*. The most common place to start is to find out ***whom else is involved in policy in your field and what their role is***. This tool aims to help voluntary health organizations identify the key players and improve their understanding of how policy is made in their field.

Before you begin, do some initial fact-finding. It is always a good idea to know what policies exist, what organizations you might ask for advice, or who the key players are in the government. For a brief description of the difference between federal and provincial/territorial governmental roles and background information on the public policy cycle that will help you to start to identify key players, please see Annex I at the back of the document.

It is helpful to know that this step in the process can be very time-consuming and it is not always easy to connect up with others in your field, so be *persistent*.

TO FIND OUT WHO ELSE IS INVOLVED:

1. Talk to others in your field and find out what they know about the key players
2. Check the Internet to find information about like-minded organizations
3. Check the Internet to find information about key players in the government
4. Scan documents and resources such as *BE HIPPI* to find information
5. Meet with other organizations
6. Join a list-serve in your field

HOW DO WE GET CONNECTED ?

This document will focus on two ways to get connected. The *first* is getting connected with like-minded organizations, and the *second* is getting connected with government.

Getting connected with similar/like-minded organizations

1. Meet with like-minded organizations or someone who you might consider to be a “mentor” in your health field (*see next page for sample questions to consider when meeting with them*)
2. Call other similar organizations and introduce yourself
3. Attend conferences, meetings or training sessions on policy in your field
4. Join a policy committee
5. Coordinate advocacy efforts with other organizations
6. Create and hold an event alone or with other organizations

This is just a sample of ideas of how to get connected with others involved in policy in your field to help you get started. There are many ways to do this.

Here are some sample questions to ask when meeting with another organization regarding policy:

Questions to ask like-minded organizations about policy in your field:

- What has your experience regarding policy been like?
- What has been going on around policy development in the field in the last few years/months? (What is the historical context for policy development?)
- What are the opportunities and barriers right now?
- Who makes the decisions around policy in your area? Who are the key players? Do they interact with the voluntary sector?
- How are the actual decisions made? If a voluntary organization wants to change policy, what is the best way to accomplish this, in your experience? Have you been successful in any policy changes? What was your success story?
- Once policy is made, how does it play out? What does the policy include? Are goals attached to the policy? What are the expectations? Are there measurable outcomes?
- Have dollar amount towards our issues increased or decreased in recent years? Who looks after how the money is spent?
- What are the links between local/municipal and provincial policy development?
- Are there other partners in addition to the federal or provincial governments?

By asking these questions, you may find key players who have lots of experience and who are willing to help you affect change. You may find allies you didn't know you had. You may also find that others are working on the same issues as you, and that joining forces will make your voices stronger.

HOW DO WE GET CONNECTED WITH GOVERNMENT POLICY AND/OR DECISION-MAKERS?

After you have gained information and advice from people working in the field, including like-minded organizations as referenced above, one of the most important tools needed to have an impact on public policy is an *active* relationship with government policy and/or decision makers.

Once you have tried connecting with like-minded organizations, you may want to tackle meeting and/or connecting in various ways with government policy makers in your field. This can open the door to communicate at both the bureaucratic and political levels, and you will become a valued resource for them. By keeping this relationship active, it is more likely that when you

wish to express views they will be heard and seriously listened to, and hopefully, you will be included in decision-making. Remember, that getting connected with government policy/decision makers is not always easy and can be time consuming. This is a long-term process that will hopefully lead to more communication and understanding between your organization and the government regarding the policy goals in your field.

Getting connected with government policy and/or decision makers

1. Once you have identified the key players, set up a meeting with them (please see pages 9-11 for a template of questions to consider and ask during the meeting).
2. Write a letter expressing your organization's view on a certain policy and ask for a response from the policy makers
3. Write letters to MPs expressing your views who will in turn take your concerns to the appropriate decision-making committee or body (for more information on how to meet with your MP, please consult this link: <http://www.bpw.ca/meeting-mp.doc>.)
4. Let government policy/decision makers know when events are happening in your field so that they can support you
5. Attend conferences, meetings, training sessions where you can connect with government policy/decision makers

Please keep in mind that these are just some of the ways in which you can connect with government decision makers. On the following pages, you will find a template that your organization may find useful when meeting with government policy and/or decision makers in your field.

Template for meeting with government policy and/or decision makers

Step 1: Preparation

The key to setting up successful meetings with government is to prepare before the meeting. This includes identifying whom to meet with and learning as much as you can about how public policy is made in your jurisdiction before meeting with bureaucrats. ***Remember, a lot of people meet with government and some of them are very skilled lobbyists. If you want to establish a productive, ongoing relationship – be prepared.***

1. Search the Internet

Tracking the key websites of the department(s) central to your mandate will help identify whom you should meet with and obtain background information on major government policy announcements, recent shifts in government policies and programs as well as organization charts of key personnel in both the Ministers' Offices and departments.

But, be forewarned. Government websites are not always straightforward and the research can be time consuming. You may need to dig through many sites and be creative in your search. Making a list of possibilities is a key step. So too is looking at the departmental organizational chart and noting possible names and titles.

(As part of your preparation, you may find it useful to contact other organizations or networks that share the similar concerns as your organization. Set up phone discussions or meetings with them. These contacts may be able to help you work your way through the bureaucratic maze!)

2. Ask yourself these questions:

- What can you find about policy online? What on-line information exists through departmental websites?
- Where is the departmental structure, key contact information, title and background information?
- Is there a primary Branch or Secretariat devoted to your issue? If so, where is it located in the departmental structure?
- Does a government department have a strategy around your issue(s)?
- Who makes the decisions? Who are the key players? How do they interact with the voluntary sector (if at all)?

3. Equip yourself with a plan:

- **What's your short and long-term goal for meeting with government at this time? What 2-3 issues do you plan to cover, with what objective(s)?**
- **What's your "script" for the meeting? Who speaks to which issue? Have you rehearsed possible Qs you want to ask and possible Qs and As you will be asked?**

Step 2: Meeting with Government Officials

Once a solid base of research has been completed and you have identified the people to meet with, you are ready to plan the approach to government. **Remember, the people you are meeting with are busy and meetings can be rescheduled at short notice so it is important that schedules are flexible enough to accommodate shifts in timing. The meeting should be “scripted” in advance, and should last no longer than 30-45 minutes.** However, do not be disappointed if you do not get to cover all of the topics that you would like in this short period of time. It may take a series of meetings to get answers to all the questions you have.

Some thought needs to be given to who attends the meeting with the government representative. Who is the best suited depends on the issues to be covered. **Remember to invite a note-taker to the meeting, as comprehensive notes will be key to a complete report. Professionalism, dress and manner should be the guidelines for all meeting attendees.**

Successful meetings are generally ones in which there was a constructive dialogue and follow the following format:

1. The purpose of the meeting is to obtain information on the policy making process. Use the template to ensure you cover all topics.
2. Also consider this an opportunity to share your expertise with government. Don't hesitate to promote your organization positively. Strive to be both natural and professional.
3. Be upfront about your agenda for the meeting. Identify the 2 or 3 areas you want to cover during the meeting. Be succinct. Make the connection between your positions and policies of the department.
4. Be prepared to address opposition views directly and factually.
5. Provide short leave-behinds. At the end of the meeting, sum up with the key decisions or points that have emerged.
6. Follow-up with a short, personal, thank-you letter or email. Send additional information if requested.

Questions you might want to ask at the meeting:

- How are decisions made? If a voluntary organization wants to change policy, what is the best way to accomplish this?
- Once policy is made, how does it play out? What does the policy include? Are goals attached to the policy? What are the expectations? Are there measurable outcomes?
- Who coordinates the program(s)? What are the policies of the programs?
- Are the programs purely federal or provincial or joint?

- What are the specific dollar amounts? Have these increased or decreased in recent years?
- Who delivers the services? Are there other partners in addition to the federal or provincial governments?
- What are the key priorities of the department? What is coming up?
- Are there any opportunities for collaboration with the voluntary health sector?
- What current policies are being developed and how can the voluntary sector contribute to policy development?
- Are there any upcoming consultation processes that invite public participation? When do these occur?
- What is the format? (i.e. group meeting, website feedback, written submission)
- Is there an annual cycle of meetings? Is there a timetable?
- How can we participate?
- Ask unanswered questions from Questions to ask like-minded organizations. Confirm information you have obtained from other organizations*
- What is their reaction to any priority areas for action that you raise?*
- Where are there areas for greatest collaboration? How can your organization stay engaged? *
- Can you provide further information to any issues raised during the meeting?*

* indicates questions to think about during and after the meeting

Step 3: Following the Meeting

Did we achieve our goals for the meeting? Once we have agreed on outcomes, have we written, emailed or faxed a thank-you letter with outcomes and follow up to the government official?

How do we convey the outcomes of the meeting to board, staff and client groups?

Do we contact other like-minded organizations to share the outcomes of the meeting and/or discuss possible alliances for further approaches to government?

Is ongoing collaboration possible?

IV. DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS: HOW CAN WE WORK WITH OTHERS TO DEVELOP POLICY?

Collaborative relationships between the voluntary health sector and government are an ongoing and important feature of the Canadian system. This may be due to the fact that the people involved in government and the voluntary sector can change so quickly. Despite the fact that there may be a number of different people working in government, usually no matter who the individual is, there are targets and goals that must be met. Therefore, to meet their needs, governments usually appreciate working with organizations who are consistent, have well-thought-out positions, demonstrate a good knowledge of government, are professional and factual in their approach, show they understand various points of view, can demonstrate the relevance of their positions and have developed strong networks of like-minded organizations.

Here are some ways in which your organization can work with others to develop policy:

1. Maintain good contact with key players in your field (i.e. like-minded organizations and government)

The more an organization *maintains good contact* with key players and policy makers, the greater the chances of being heard and that your views will be reflected in public health policy. Contact with like-minded organizations and government should be well researched and regularly re-evaluated to seek new opportunities to put forward the organization's positions.

2. Have a "toolbox" of ways to ensure maximum public involvement and engagement

3. Make internal policies available externally in order to: allow people to adapt them, influence policy in a broad sense, and let other organizations know that this issue is important

4. Write letters to MPs or influential community people to motivate change with another organization

5. Write a joint article or policy brief on an issue of concern to your organization in collaboration with another like-minded organization

6. Respond to articles and policy briefs written by policy/decision makers with other organizations

7. Construct joint media releases with other organizations

8. Form a coalition to advance several organizations' position on a certain policy or policies

V. DEVELOPING A LONG-TERM STRATEGY: HOW DO WE STAY CONNECTED AND INFORMED ABOUT POLICY IN OUR FIELD AND ULTIMATELY AFFECT CHANGE?

In order to meet the original objectives of this tool, we wanted to find out *how policy is created, meet the key players in our field, develop and strengthen policy capacity in your organization, and stay connected to other like-minded organizations as well as stay informed about policy changes in the field.*

We have learned throughout this document that collaboration and connecting with others that are working on similar issues is key to meeting these objectives. No one organization can do it all. Voluntary health organizations tend to be small and have limited budgets and therefore cannot be everywhere at once. Neither can government decision makers, so they need voluntary health organizations to provide expertise about current issues in their field.

In the long term, the ideal situation for any voluntary health organization would be to have staff specifically assigned to the task of creating policy and keeping informed about policy changes in your field. As budgets are often limited, most small organizations do not have the capacity to do this.

So to make the best of their resources in the long term, voluntary health organizations should endeavor to try out some of these strategies:

Long-term strategies for policy development in voluntary health organizations:

1) Advocate for a certain issue to evoke change

- Coordinate advocacy efforts with other organizations
- Keep issues at the forefront by writing articles, responding to articles and editorials, reiterating mandate and services, constructing joint media releases, sending mail outs, displaying posters and information even if the issues are not threatened at that time
- Create and hold an event alone or with another organization

2) Influence policy by being present

- Go to committee meetings, youth forums, city hall, etc
- Let other organizations know when there are meetings and events going on
- Create and hold an event
- Write letters to MPs or influential community people to motivate change
- Send someone (volunteer or staff) to meetings that is knowledgeable, committed, and comfortable in the setting and with the issue

3) Self-evaluation of policy (on an organizational basis)

- Schedule evaluation of policy on a regular basis
- Have external evaluation of policy
- Review each other policies for incompatible philosophies that may affect partnership
- Look for flaws in policy and review for necessary changes

4) Make advocacy a priority no matter how big or small

- Encourage staff to vote and be aware of what Trustees, MPs, MLAs and Health districts are doing
- Educate staff around advocacy issues
- Value and support advocacy efforts in each other's organizations
- Keep informal discussions going regarding HIV and SRH issues
- Use staff meetings as an educational tool- talk about important issues and present on new findings
- Talk openly about where you work/volunteer-you are the voice of the organization
- Use posters, brochures, pins, stickers, etc. to keep the issues visible

5) Make internal policies available externally in order to: allow people to adapt them, influence policy in a broad sense, and let other organizations know that this issue is important

- Look at another organization's policy and borrow ideas
- Enlist volunteer's help
- Formulate key messages first in order to create policy
- Create policy together with other organizations

We hope that this tool will help national voluntary organizations working in health (NVOWH), as well as others, to better connect and collaborate with others working in their policy field and in the long term give them some strategies to develop policy capacity within their own organization. It is a place to start for those organizations looking to connect with others in their field and become involved with creating policy.

ANNEX 1

Here is a brief description of the difference between federal and provincial/territorial governmental roles.

The federal government is responsible for:

- Setting and administering national principles or standards for the system through the Canada Health Act.
- Assisting in the financing of provincial health care services through fiscal transfer;
- Delivering direct health services to specific groups including veterans, native Canadians living on reserves, military personnel, inmates of federal penitentiaries and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police; and
- Fulfilling other health-related functions such as health protection, disease prevention, and health promotion.

The provincial and territorial governments are responsible for:

- Managing and delivering insured health services
- Planning, financing, and evaluating the provision of health care, physician and allied health care services; and
- Managing some aspects of prescription care and public health.

Each provincial and territorial government has a different way to describe its approach to health care and health policy. For instance, in many provinces *regional health authorities* make many of the decisions about allocation about how health care dollars are spent. More information about the cycle of public policy is included at the end of this document.

Cycle of Public Policy Making

To the uninitiated, government decision-making can seem like a bewildering maze. But, in fact, governments follow specific decision-making processes including electoral platforms, government priority setting and budgetary cycles. In theory there are three key “windows” or opportune times to influence public policy and this tool will help you determine what the process is in your jurisdiction. Some of these windows are constantly changing, but some of them are the same every time around. Here are a few examples of places to get involved:

- The electoral cycle is a time when many interest groups (including voluntary organizations) try to influence the platforms, or public statements, of the people running in an election. Both individuals and political parties looking to win an election government make commitments that, if elected, they promise to follow through on.
- Government priority setting occurs early in the mandate of a new government. The new government sets its priorities. The government often consults with lobby groups, key players, think tanks, and other levels of government. Once priorities are set, government departments work to make sure the priorities are looked after.
- The budgetary cycle of a government is another opportunity to influence public policy. Most governments have meetings (both informal or formal) with organizations before the

budget is finalized. This time period is also used to look at priorities, and make sure existing resources to meet the commitments already made.

Elected politicians tend to be most involved in agenda setting while policy creation is driven more by bureaucrats (non-elected people who work in government).

National health organizations are encouraged to constantly monitor the public policy process and be prepared to change strategies for working with government. This may include a change in strategy if the government suddenly makes changes in direction.

A typical cycle of the Public Policy Process is shown below:

