

How to Strengthen Capacity to Influence Healthy Public Policies

SUMMARY

2025

FOREWORD

This publication presents an overview of the full report *[What Can Organizations Do to Enhance their Capacity to Promote Healthy Public Policies?](#)* It is intended for decision makers, managers, and public health professionals, and provides them with concrete examples and a directory of best practices for integrating Healthy Public Policies (HPPs) into their activities.

This publication was developed by the National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy (NCCHPP) as part of its regular scientific programming. The NCCHPP is financed by the Public Health Agency of Canada and hosted by the Institut national de santé publique du Québec.

KEY MESSAGES

- This document provides avenues for reflection and action that public health policy makers, managers and professionals can adapt to their specific contexts to more effectively influence and implement HPPs.
- The following five dimensions encompass key levers for strengthening the capacities of public health organizations to advance HPPs:
 - **Partnerships:** Collaborating with intersectoral actors is crucial to promoting the implementation of HPPs.
 - **Organizational structures and resources:** Sustainably financing public health initiatives and creating teams dedicated to HPPs are key activities for strengthening capacities.
 - **Workforce:** Training professionals to promote HPPs and fostering collaboration within teams are key factors for building capacity.
 - **Knowledge development:** Collecting local data and making information accessible helps influence policy decisions.
 - **Leadership and governance:** Fostering the commitment of leaders at all levels is essential to the success of HPP initiatives, with a focus on prioritizing health equity.



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Public Health Organizations: Key Actors Acting on HPPs

Promoting and implementing healthy public policies (HPPs) is one of the key health promotion strategies identified in the Ottawa Charter (World Health Organization [WHO], 1986). Such public policies extend beyond the boundaries of the health sector to include actions in other sectors, such as the economy, education, transportation, and the environment. The main objective of these policies is to improve the health of populations by influencing the social, economic, and environmental determinants of health. By creating environments that promote healthy living and reduce social health inequalities, these policies have a positive impact on the health of populations (WHO, 1986). Public health actors are essential to promoting the adoption of such policies, particularly due to their mandates, responsibilities, and expertise.

To support these actors in their efforts to promote HPPs, the NCCHPP has produced a report entitled *[What Can Organizations Do to Enhance Their Capacity to Promote Healthy Public Policies?](#)* The report offers a qualitative analysis of the scientific literature, identifying and categorizing a set of strategies and practical examples to help public health organizations promote HPPs in their respective contexts. It draws on the work of Aluttis et al. (2014) and focuses on five key dimensions: partnerships, organizational structures and resources, workforce, knowledge development, and leadership and governance. This document enables decision makers and professionals to mobilize the strategies described to strengthen their capacity to promote HPPs. Readers can draw inspiration from concrete examples of successful initiatives to adapt these strategies to their own contexts.

The present document, in the form of a table, summarizes the strategies and tools identified for each dimension of the analytical framework used in the report. These elements are complemented by practical reflections offering action-oriented suggestions for promoting HPPs. The table provides an overview of all the strategies identified in the literature and their associated tools, allowing readers to navigate the detailed findings of the full report with greater ease.

1.2 Overview of Strategies and Examples by Key Dimensions

SYNTHESIS OF STRATEGIES AND TOOLS			
DIMENSIONS	STRATEGIES	TOOLS	PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS
Partnerships	Inventory and map the ecosystem of actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder analysis • Network analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public health actors could benefit from adequately understanding the concerns and needs of stakeholders. This can lead to more effective integration of public health across all sectors, and greater consideration of population health and HPP implementation according to the specific interests of non-health actors. (Hoeijmakers et al., 2007). • Public health actors could benefit from prioritizing their role in supporting sectors or actors outside public health by adapting to sectoral objectives. This approach allows them to have a greater impact and, more importantly, “to support stakeholders who have the power to act” in support of HPPs. This support is important to ensuring these actors become more receptive to arguments and initiatives that align with their own objectives, achieve their equity goals, and promote the adoption of HPPs (Litvak et al., 2020, p. 69).
	Participate in or set up collaborative spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networks • Communities of practice • Alliances and coalitions 	
	Establish and maintain ongoing connections with actors outside public health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing an external perspective as a way to foster long-term relationships • Roundtables • Creating and sharing common objectives 	
	Use knowledge brokers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External consultants as knowledge brokers • Staff members as knowledge brokers • Organizations as knowledge brokers 	
	Prioritize participatory approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local committees • Workshops 	

SYNTHESIS OF STRATEGIES AND TOOLS			
DIMENSIONS	STRATEGIES	TOOLS	PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS
Organizational structures and resources	Create teams or positions dedicated to HPPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting up a team dedicated to HPPs • Establishing a multidisciplinary team • Creating a position dedicated to promoting HPPs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public health actors could benefit from devoting financial and human resources to supporting strategies that enhance the capacity to act on HPPs (Minke et al. 2007, p. 489). • The strategies identified in the literature, across all dimensions, are supported by dedicated, sustainable resources and by organizational structures that support the implementation of HPPs. For example, regarding the workforce, Minke et al. stress the importance of funding in these terms: Funding determines the number of health promotion practitioners in an organization, their job priorities, and the availability of professional development opportunities. Inadequate or short-term funding has been linked with the loss of skilled health promotion practitioners in health organizations, as well as increasingly divergent job descriptions in which health promotion is not a priority (Minke et al. 2007, p. 489).
	Promote sustainable funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retaining qualified personnel • Creating permanent positions • Protecting dedicated funding for long-term initiatives promoting HPPs 	

SYNTHESIS OF STRATEGIES AND TOOLS			
DIMENSIONS	STRATEGIES	TOOLS	PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS
Workforce	Map actors within organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social network analysis • Focus groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public health actors could benefit from acquiring core competencies tied to influencing public-policy outcomes and from undergoing training to better promote HPPs. • Public health organizations benefit from fostering professional autonomy in order to allow for as much flexibility of action as possible. Not only does flexibility granted to professionals within the context of intersectoral collaborations have positive impacts, but also, the intersectoral and multidisciplinary nature of HPPs requires public health professionals to continuously adapt to changing contexts and to the diverse needs and characteristics of multiple partners.
	Support boundary spanning initiatives within organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointing local coordinators by allocating resources • Creating spaces for discussion and sharing among professionals 	
	Train professionals to improve their competencies tied to HPP promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and fostering the acquisition of essential competencies that enable public health professionals to influence public policy outcomes, notably by proposing relevant training • Offering thematic training focused on HPP development 	

SYNTHESIS OF STRATEGIES AND TOOLS			
DIMENSIONS	STRATEGIES	TOOLS	PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS
Knowledge development	Collect meaningful local data in support of HPPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collecting local data to help inform or influence key actors Conducting local vulnerability assessments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public health actors could benefit from reflecting on their use of data and its potential impact. Data and knowledge collected and shared by public health organizations serves multiple functions, catering to a wide range of audiences, including researchers, policymakers, citizens, stakeholders, etc. It may therefore be beneficial for public health organizations to carefully consider the implications and potential outcomes of data and knowledge they put forward so as to maximize the benefits and minimize the risks inherent in their use.
	Use relevant indicators to leverage data in support of HPPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measuring What Matters process Nutritious Food Basket indicator Heat Vulnerability Index 	
	Make public health data and knowledge in support of HPPs accessible and usable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual platforms Visual aids 	
	Develop tools enabling other actors to promote HPPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing guides and toolkits Producing customized tools for partners 	
	Inform decision-making and influence the political agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Producing summaries Mobilizing knowledge to support an approach or policy Communicating strategically to strengthen political commitment Customizing data to reach the public and stakeholders Using health impact assessments (HIA) to inform decision-making 	

SYNTHESIS OF STRATEGIES AND TOOLS			
DIMENSIONS	STRATEGIES	TOOLS	PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS
Leadership and governance	Prioritize health equity in organizational governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including health equity both as an explicit public health function and in official documents • Adopting a framework to guide and promote health equity initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic orientations, organizational values, and the role and approaches of decision makers have an impact on all the dimensions covered in this report. • Public health actors, when possible, should leverage the legitimacy of public health. Establishing how this legitimacy relates to HPPs can provide support for their actions. Public health authorities are not always comfortable with participating in the development of public policy, or do not consider this to be a clear part of their work (Guyon, 2012, p. 460). The aim is to recognize and take full advantage of public health's ability to influence decision-making by recognizing the types of legitimacy (theoretical, legislative, administrative and scientific) that it possesses through which to act, including political levers. Guyon suggests establishing "the legitimacy of public health authorities" as regards HPPs (Guyon, 2012, p. 460).
	Clarify public health's roles with respect to HPPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a typology of public health interventions 	
	Involve leaders committed to HPPs within an organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing clear and coherent communication among leaders at all levels of an organization 	
	Assign value to public health's advocacy role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defending specific HPP positions • Making direct representations to decision makers or influential actors 	

The strategies described in this document are intended to inspire and equip public health organizations in their efforts to promote HPPs. The report [*What Can Organizations Do to Enhance Their Capacity to Promote Healthy Public Policies?*](#) from which this summary is drawn, delves deeper into each of these strategies and provides more detailed examples. We recommend consulting the full report to deepen your knowledge.

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