Vancouver Coastal Health Population Health: Advocacy Guideline and Resources

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) staff with guidelines, parameters and resources for undertaking population health advocacy within our health authority.

What is Population Health Advocacy?

Advocacy represents the strategies devised, actions taken and solutions proposed to influence decision-making on a particular cause/issue. The purpose of advocacy is to create positive change for people and their environments. Individuals, organizations, businesses and governments can all engage in advocacy activities. As seen in Appendix 1, advocacy efforts range from those on behalf of an individual to efforts directed at bringing about policy change.

Population health advocacy is directed at actions to improve the overall health of a population. Generally, this is done through addressing the many social conditions that impact the health of populations, such as early child development, income, education, gender, etc. These conditions are often referred to as the *non-medical or social determinants of health (1).*

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1 http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ph-sp/phdd/pdf/overview_implications/01_overview_e.pdf

Why is Advocacy important within Vancouver Coastal Health?

Many Vancouver Coastal Health employees already integrate advocacy into their day-to-day activities. Population health advocacy is mandated and supported through the following VCH resources/initiatives:

- The VCH vision statement identifies a role for community level health action: *"We are committed to **supporting healthy lives in healthy communities** with our partners through care, education and research".*

- The Ministry of Health directed Core Functions Framework Implementation project highlights advocacy as a key component in several public health core programs. (See: www.vch.ca/public/pip.htm).

- Advocacy is a key component of the newly released *Core Competencies for Public Health in Canada* (See: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ccph-cesp/pdfs/cc-manual-eng090407.pdf)

All of these resources and initiatives support VCH employees in providing a credible voice in advocating for healthy public policies around issues related to the social determinants of health. For example, this might be a public health nurse describing the health impacts of poverty on children at a press release or the Chief Medical Health Officer writing a letter to the Minster of Health calling for a ban on Trans Fats.

What are the Principles of Advocacy?

Although VCH has a mandate to advocate on population health issues, we must still work within our organizational and administrative policies. The following principles can guide staff in choosing advocacy topics and activities.

Topics or activities should:

- Provide a non-partisan viewpoint.

- Adhere to the professional standards of your occupation.

- Focus on the health impacts of an issue.

Individuals undertaking an advocacy topic or activity should:

- Be respectful of stakeholders/partners and ensure that they have been consulted on the appropriate issues.

- Consider the expertise on an issue and ensure a response is based on research/best practices whenever possible.

- Identify advocacy activities that are part of the VCH mandate, sustainable and within the capacity of staff.

- Ensure approval of managers for advocacy activities and keep managers informed throughout the advocacy process.

- Follow VCH communications guidelines (See Appendix 2).

Advocacy Resources

In addition to the descriptions of advocacy (Appendix 1) and communication guidelines (Appendix 2), the VCH Population Health Advocacy Framework lists key questions that can assist in advocacy decision-making (e.g., topic selection, activity selection). The Advocacy Framework is found in Appendix 3A and 3B. Appendix 4 provides additional resources for population health advocacy work.

The materials and resources listed in this document are provided as a starting point for undertaking advocacy within VCH. If you have additional questions regarding population health or advocacy, please direct inquiries to Vancouver Coastal Health Population Health (PopulationHealth@vch.ca).

VCH Population Health:
http://www.vch.ca/public-health/healthy-communities-population-health

Appendix 1: Types of Advocacy

Self-Advocacy	Speaking or acting on our own behalf and standing up for our rights (e.g., asking to see a store manager if not treated appropriately)
Natural Advocacy	Speaking up in the moment, when one notices that something is not right or unfair and others are not able to speak up for themselves (e.g., seeing someone being hurt and intervening)
Peer Advocacy	Encouraging and supporting other individuals to speak or act for themselves (e.g., assisting people to discuss their health issues with their family physician)
Service Advocacy	Working within systems to assist individuals and families in ensuring their needs are met (e.g., referral to a community agency for postpartum depression support)
Program Advocacy	Working to support a program or prevent its demise (e.g., writing to stakeholders to keep childcare programs from closing)
Cause/Issue Advocacy	Working with other advocates to influence politicians/senior bureaucrats at all levels of government to change legislation or policies that affect large numbers of people (e.g., engaging in joint initiatives with education advocates to enact change re child poverty, increasing childcare spaces in VCH). Advocacy targets may also be private businesses or governance bodies.

Appendix 2: Communications and Advocacy

The Public Affairs and Communications Department at Vancouver Coastal Health can provide you with guidelines and resources for your advocacy initiatives involving the media. If you wish to speak to the media on behalf of VCH as an advocate (e.g., letter to the editor, media interview, etc.), please contact VCH Communications to review the content. Prior to contacting Communications, please ensure that:

1) Someone in your department has checked the content for accuracy.

2) All relevant personnel (i.e., managers) in your department are aware of the initiative.

Communications will review the material through the political/media lens and provide feedback. The material you have prepared does not necessarily need to agree with VCH on a topic. However, if changes are suggested and you choose not to accept them then you are asked to submit the material as a private citizen, rather than as a VCH advocate.

Adhering to this process provides Communications with an opportunity to supply additional information that may assist you in your initiative. Communications can include the information in their daily communications summary in case the media calls about a particular issue.

Contact Information:
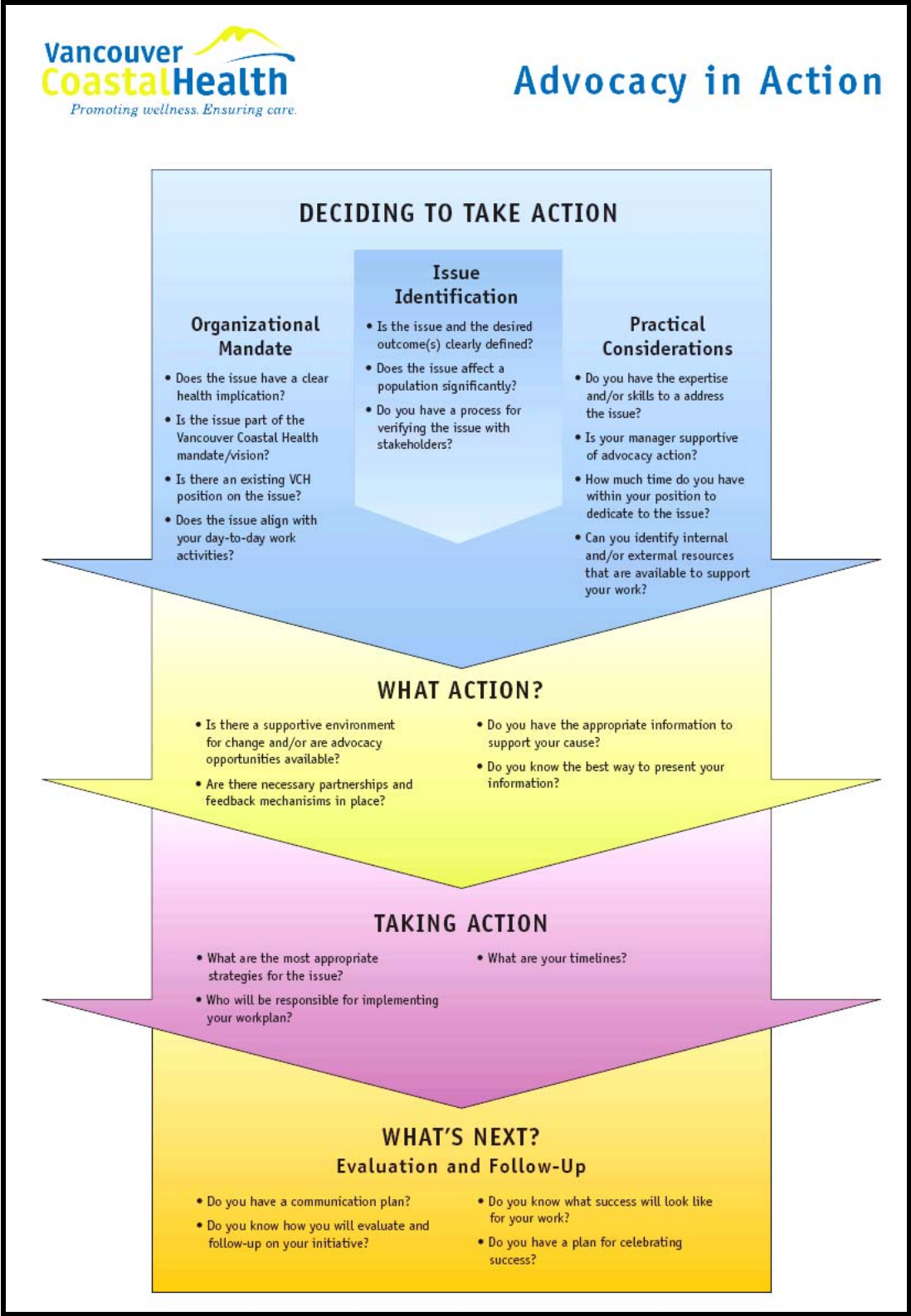Gavin Wilson (Gavin.Wilson@vch.ca)
(Please cc James Nesbitt – James.Nesbitt@vch.ca)

Communications Toolkit:
Media guidelines and other communications planning tools are available in the VCH Communications toolkit located on VCH Connect:
http://vchconnect.vch.ca/programs_services/communications/cmns_toolkit/page_19249.htm

Appendix 3A: Advocacy Framework

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Advocacy in Action

DECIDING TO TAKE ACTION

Issue Identification
- Is the issue and the desired outcome(s) clearly defined?
- Does the issue affect a population significantly?
- Do you have a process for verifying the issue with stakeholders?

Organizational Mandate
- Does the issue have a clear health implication?
- Is the issue part of the Vancouver Coastal Health mandate/vision?
- Is there an existing VCH position on the issue?
- Does the issue align with your day-to-day work activities?

Practical Considerations
- Do you have the expertise and/or skills to a address the issue?
- Is your manager supportive of advocacy action?
- How much time do you have within your position to dedicate to the issue?
- Can you identify internal and/or external resources that are available to support your work?

WHAT ACTION?
- Is there a supportive environment for change and/or are advocacy opportunities available?
- Are there necessary partnerships and feedback mechanisims in place?
- Do you have the appropriate information to support your cause?
- Do you know the best way to present your information?

TAKING ACTION
- What are the most appropriate strategies for the issue?
- Who will be responsible for implementing your workplan?
- What are your timelines?

WHAT'S NEXT?
Evaluation and Follow-Up
- Do you have a communication plan?
- Do you know how you will evaluate and follow-up on your initiative?
- Do you know what success will look like for your work?
- Do you have a plan for celebrating success?

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Appendix 3B: Framework Worksheet

Issue/Position:	
Defining the Issue o Is the issue and desired outcome(s) clearly defined? o Does the issue affect a significant population? o Do you have a process for verifying the issue with stakeholders?	
Organizational Mandate o Does the issue have a clear health implication? o Is the issue part of the Vancouver Coastal Health mandate/vision? o Is there an existing VCH position on the issue? o Does the issue align with your day-to-day work activities?	
Practical Considerations o How much time do you have within your position to dedicate to the issue? o Do you have the expertise and/or skills to address the issue? o Is your manager supportive of advocacy action? o Can you identify internal and/or external resources that are available to support your work?	

What action is possible? o Is there a supportive environment for change and/or are advocacy opportunities available? o Are there necessary partnerships and feedback mechanisms in place? o Do you have the appropriate information to support your cause? o Do you know the best way to present your information?	
What action are you going to take? o What are the most appropriate advocacy strategies for the issue? o Who will be responsible for implementing your workplan? o What are your timelines?	
What's Next? Communication and Evaluation o Do you have a communication plan? o Do you know what success will look like for your work? o Do you know how you will evaluate and follow-up on your initiative?	

Appendix 4: Advocacy Strategies

How do you select an issue/position?

- An issue may be identified when it has been brought to the attention of the public and becomes a public concern and/or you may see a situation that creates difficulty or hardship for an individual or group.

- Understand what resources are available to you (Human, Financial, Evidence, Tools and Partners).

- Identify Opportunities: Are you responding to a policy change? Is there an opportunity to participate in a consultation process (e.g., Conversation on Health)? Is there public appeal for the issue? Timing may be critical for taking action on your issue.

- Once you have selected an issue, ensure that you define your position and issue so it is easily understood and mobilizes people to act through the selection of clear, well-defined goals.

For more information on Identifying and Understanding your Issue:
ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/sub_section_main_1200.htm

What are some key advocacy strategies?

Direct Meetings with Decision-Makers.

- Identify gate-keepers.

- Learn as much as you can before initial contact (i.e., biography, previous positions on similar issues).

- Position yourself as a resource to the decision-maker.

Letters to the Editor

- Respond to trigger pieces.

- Refer to previous articles or statements, acknowledge what was said and add to or challenge.

- Respond quickly (within 3 days).

- Be brief and state most important points first.

- Copy to legislators as appropriate.

- Be aware of VCH policies and resources that might already exist on an issue.

Supporting Partners

- Provide health information on an issue.

- Encourage partners to speak out on the issue/cause.

- Provide partners with an opportunity to have their voices heard in a non-threatening and supportive environment.

- Prepare a policy brief or position paper.

- Help sponsor a meeting on an issue/cause.

- Serve on a policy working group to provide a health perspective.

- Participate in meda events to provide a health perspective.

- Write a letter (in support of a policy issue)
  - Explain the problem and provide evidence on the health impacts of the issue.
  - Propose a solution and identify exactly what you want to have happen.
  - End the letter respectfully, thanking the reader for his/her time and encouraging him/her to take care of the problem.

Media Advocacy

- Media advocacy is the process of working with the media to influence healthy public policies through shaping debate about the topic.

- Successful media advocacy ensures that issues include a public health perspective, emphasizes the social, cultural, economic and political dimensions of health problems, and stresses the importance of participation and empowerment in health promotion.

- Be aware of VCH Communications policies and resources (See: Appendix 2).

- Resources: www.thcu.ca/infoandresources/media_advocacy.htm

Information Sources

Canadian Public Health Association: Policy and Advocacy
http://www.cpha.ca/en/programs.aspx

Public Health Association of British Columbia - Advocacy
www.phabc.org/modules.php?name=Contentpub&pa=viewdoc&cid=16

Advocacy for Healthy Public Policy as a Health Promotion Technology
www.utoronto.ca/chp/download/2ndSymposium/McCubbin,%20Labonte,%20Dallaire.
doc

8 Steps to Develop a Policy Evaluation Plan
www.innonet.org/client_docs/File/aep_8steps.pdf

Community Tool Box – Principles of Advocacy
http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/chapter_1030.htm

Media Advocacy Resources
www.thcu.ca/infoandresources/media_advocacy.htm

Survival Skills for Advocates
http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/sub_section_main_1198.htm

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