



A-Z of Healthy Communities

A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT OF ONTARIO HEALTHY COMMUNITIES COALITION & BC HEALTHY COMMUNITIES SOCIETY

H - HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICY

THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN CREATING HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICIES

Local governments routinely make decisions and allocate resources for transportation, community design, housing, parks and recreation, and community services. Many local governments also adopt policies related to food security, social planning and tobacco use in public areas. These decisions all contribute profoundly to the health and well-being of citizens.⁵ It is therefore important for decision makers to consider a 'health lens' when developing public policies, as the health of a population is determined by much more than just the health sector. Education, transportation, housing, environment and urban planning are just a few examples of non-health sectors whose policies have an impact on the health of a community and its citizens.

WHAT IS PUBLIC POLICY?

Public policies are decisions made by municipal, provincial or federal governments that impact the social, environmental, political and economic conditions of society.¹

WHAT IS A HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICY?

The concept of building healthy public policy was first introduced in the [Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion](#), and refers to policy development in non-health sectors (e.g., transportation or housing) that intentionally considers and seeks to improve health.

Healthy public policy is characterized by an explicit concern for health and equity in all areas of policy development, with an aim to create a supportive environment that enables people to live healthy lives.²

WHY IS HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICY IMPORTANT FOR A HEALTHY COMMUNITY?

Healthy public policy is a key building block of the healthy communities approach,³ and is named as one of the five health promotion action areas in the 1986 Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion.⁴ Healthy public policy is especially important at the local level because many influences on our health—transportation options, community design, recreation opportunities, and access to healthy food choices—occur in our communities where we live, work and play.³

WHAT METHODS AND TOOLS CAN SUPPORT LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN DEVELOPING HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICIES?

A collaborative approach between local governments and key partners from other sectors is essential to creating healthy public policies that foster greater equity and population health outcomes in any community. Joint action across sectors contributes to a range of outcomes such as safer and healthier public services, affordable and accessible housing options, and cleaner, more enjoyable environments.⁴ For example, when approaching the issue of housing development, it is important to consider how families, lower-income populations and persons with disabilities will be able to access affordable transportation options, safe community green spaces, medical services and affordable childcare as well, all of which exist outside the realm of 'housing.' Taking these elements into consideration requires coordination and partnership development across multiple sectors to create a supportive, inclusive community for all.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICY

[National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy](#)
[Winnipeg Regional Health Authority \(2017\). Healthy public policy toolkit: Understanding and engaging in healthy public policy.](#)
[Metro Vancouver \(n.d.\). Health impact assessment of transportation and land use activities: Guidebook and toolkit](#)
[PlanH \(2017\). The big picture: Who can build healthy communities?](#)
[Morestin, F. \(2012\). A framework for analyzing public policies: Practical guide. National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy.](#)

REFERENCES

- [1 Winnipeg Regional Health Authority \(2017\). Healthy public policy toolkit: Understanding and engaging in healthy public policy.](#)
- [2 Morestin, F. \(2012\). A framework for analyzing public policies: Practical guide. National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy.](#)
- [3 BC Healthy Communities \(2018\). Our approach: Healthy communities movement.](#)
- [4 World Health Organization \(1986\). Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion.](#)
- [5 PlanH \(2017\). The big picture: Who can build healthy communities?](#)



Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition
Coalition des Communautés en santé de l'Ontario



BC Healthy Communities
People. Place. Potential.



OHCC enables communities to create and sustain positive change through equitable community engagement, intersectoral partnerships, political commitment, healthy public policy, and asset-based community development. **BC Healthy Communities** supports multi-sectoral groups to build their capacity to create healthy communities.