



A-Z OF HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

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

P - POLITICAL COMMITMENT

“Many would be surprised to learn that the greatest contribution to the health of the nation over the past 150 years was made, not by doctors or hospitals, but by local governments. Our lack of appreciation of the role of our cities in establishing the health of the nation is largely due to the fact that so little has been written about it.”

Dr. Jessie Parfitt, in *Healthy cities and communities: Past present and future*. National Civic Review, Spring '97. Vol.86, Issue 1, p.11

WHAT IS POLITICAL COMMITMENT?

Political commitment is explicit “commitment to a healthy community by providing leadership and decision-making that considers health and well-being in policy decisions and planning.”¹

WHY IS POLITICAL COMMITMENT IMPORTANT?

One of the core strategies of the Healthy Communities Approach,² political commitment to a healthy community can be demonstrated when local government provides leadership and decision-making that considers health and well-being in policy decisions, partnerships and planning.³ Attaining official political support from local government and decision makers is important to the success of community-wide efforts. For example, officials can provide momentum and resources to publicize efforts and pass laws and regulations.⁴ Policies can have a powerful effect on health. They can help to make healthier choices more convenient, attractive and economical.⁵ When community members show support for ideas, it produces an atmosphere that makes it easier for policymakers to support those ideas—because they know the public is behind them.⁶

Involving the community in local governance is not easy, and there are often frustrations on both sides. There are also clear benefits to both, including:

Municipal councillors and staff:

- gain access to the experience, knowledge and expertise within the community;
- receive a wide range of public opinion on issues;
- obtain rapid feedback on policies, plans and programs; and
- have opportunities and venues for educating the public about issues and government constraints.

Community members:

- become more knowledgeable about community issues and affairs;
- increase their awareness of resources and opportunities;
- learn how their local government works;
- have a training ground from which new civic leaders can emerge;
- strengthen their voice at city hall; and
- may establish liaisons with various government advisory bodies.

As the relationship between community members and their local governments is strengthened, the sense of “us” vs. “them” tends to fall away. Through greater understanding, the sharing of responsibilities, increased accountability and collaborative activities, “us” and “them” become integrated into “we.”

REFERENCES

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3. World Health Organization (2016). *Health promotion, healthy cities, good governance for healthy cities programmes*.
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5. Sallis, J. F., Owen, N., & Fisher, E. (2015). *Ecological models of health behavior. Health behavior: theory, research, and practice*. 5th ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 43–64.
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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.