



**The Power of Public Policy as a Catalyst for Systemic Change
CAEH 2023**

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Introduction to Public Policy

What is Public Policy?

Public Policy generally denotes both the general purpose of government action and the views on the best or preferred means of carrying it out; more specifically it refers to government actions designed to achieve one or more objectives.*

Therefore...

Public policy can be seen as an instrument or tool to tackle issues of concern by the citizenry (aka, political community) via a government body.

*The Canadian Encyclopedia

Said Another Way...

“At its simplest, a choice made by government to undertake some course of action [even if that’s the decision of inaction].”

- Howlett, Ramesh, & Perl (2009, p.5)

“The general character of public policy, therefore, is that it is a guide to action, a plan, a framework, a course of action or inaction designed to deal with problems.”

- Pal (2014, p. 5)

What's the Difference Between Public Policy vs. Law?

Public Policy...

"Policy is the outline of what a government is going to do and what it can achieve for the society as a whole. Policy also means what a government does not intend to do. It also evolves the principles that are needed for achieving the goal. Policies are only documents and not law, but these policies can lead to new laws."

Law...

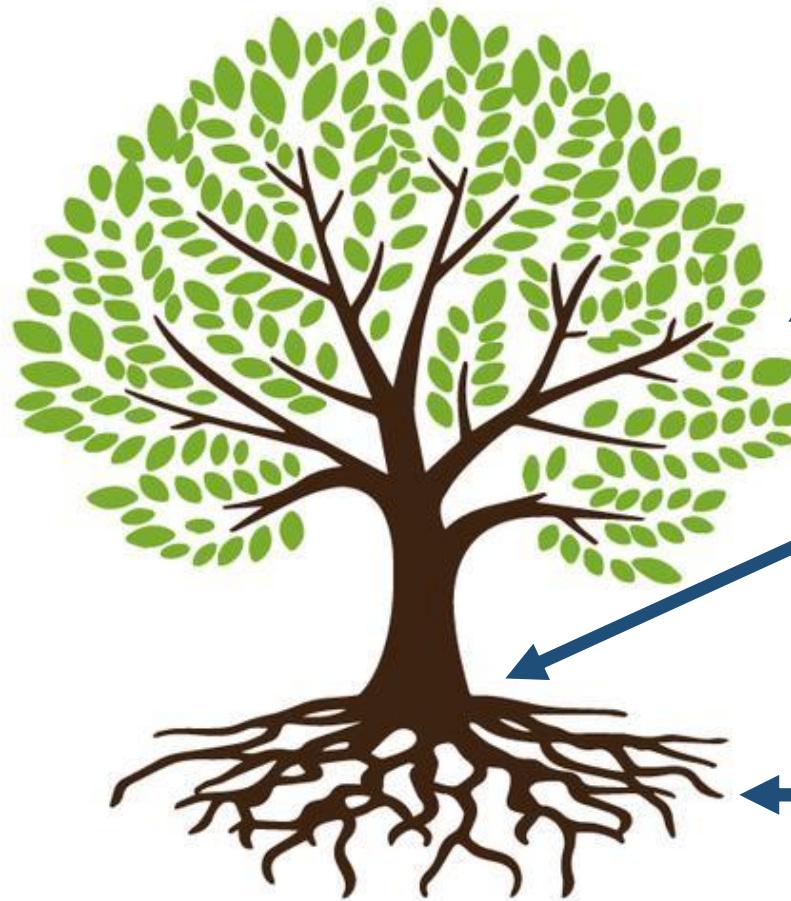
"Laws are set standards, principles, and procedures that must be followed in society. Law is mainly made for implementing justice in the society. There are various types of laws framed like criminal laws, civil laws, and international laws. While a law is framed for bringing justice to the society, a policy is framed for achieving certain goals."

Where Does Regulation Fit In?

Regulation - A rule with a law that specifies how the ideas of the law are going to be implemented.

Law - A policy written into legal language and passed by our elected officials.

Policy - A course or principle of action adopted or proposed by a government.



Regulation
Branches of the tree - an authoritative rule dealing with regulations and/or procedures.

Law (aka, Act)
Trunk of the tree - the legislation that creates rules that govern our society and may be enforced by the imposition of penalties (force & effect / consequences).

Policy
The seeds we plant - an idea that we have envisioned to improve our surroundings.

Why is Public Policy Important?

The Importance of Public Policy...

- Public policy is important because it *impacts everyone's daily life*.
- Utilized in response to an issue or problem identified by the citizenry.
- Addresses a wide range of issues including both social and economic issues.
- Those who are marginalized are likely marginalized as a result of both personal circumstance and **poor public policy**.

*If the goal of the social services sector is to reduce (perhaps even eliminate) the needs for programs and services by fostering a fair and equitable society for all, then **public policy is the answer**.*

TEDx

The Influence of Policy
Amy Hanauer

(17 min., 28 sec.)



Public Policy Theory

Key Elements of Public Policy...

- Clear course of action *or* inaction adopted by public authorities.
- Provides both:
 - Guidance for government officials.
 - Accountability to the citizenry.
- It is 'public' policy because:
 - Impacts the citizenry.
 - Requires the use of public resources.
 - Involves a public policy governing body (Councils, Legislatures, Parliaments, etc.).

Remembering it's About the Public Interest (aka, Citizenry)...

- Public interests are defined as such only in relations to goals or values that the actors hold.
- Different political actors will define the public interests in different ways but will typically justify their policy recommendations by a standard (generally, ideological).
- Basic orientations stress some balance of:
 - Majority views.
 - Common interest with the citizenry (e.g., clean water and safe streets).
 - Bidding values (e.g., respect of minorities).

Special Notations

- Engaging in public policy – whether it’s advocating for new public policy or public policy revisions – is a great way to build your organizations *social and political capital*.
- As advocates and thought leaders engaging with public policy provides opportunities for *your voice to be heard*.
 - Over time you may find yourself being invited to the table as you transition from *influencers* to *pressure makers* to de-facto *decision makers*.
 - By being at the table you also form relationships with key stakeholders – including government officials who make both policy and financial allocation decisions.

Public Policy Methodology

Ally vs. Advocacy vs. Activism

Which Methodology Works for You?

Ally: "One that is associated with another as a helper; a person or group that **provides assistance and support** in an ongoing effort, activity or struggle."

Advocate: "One who pleads the cause of another; one who defends or maintains a cause or proposal; one who supports or promotes the interests of a cause or group." An advocate can also "be involved in controversial activities or issues, but because they are speaking on behalf of a group, they tend to be more likely to follow the paths of **lobbying** and **legislation**." This definition implies that advocacy is mostly about formal or legal activity.

Activist: "One who advocates or practices activism; a person who uses or supports strong actions (such as public protests) in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue."

CHV Methodology...

- At Covenant House Vancouver we believe in **ADVOCACY**.
- Given we use an advocacy methodology we tend to be less vocal publicly.
- Despite being less vocal publicly, we are (and have been) very much engaged in key public policy issues by sitting at various tables.

Boards / Committees:

First Call
Homelessness Services Association of BC
TRRUST Collective
BC Coalition to End Youth Homelessness
The Federation of Community Social Services
Greater Vancouver Board of Trade Regional & Civil Affairs Cmte.

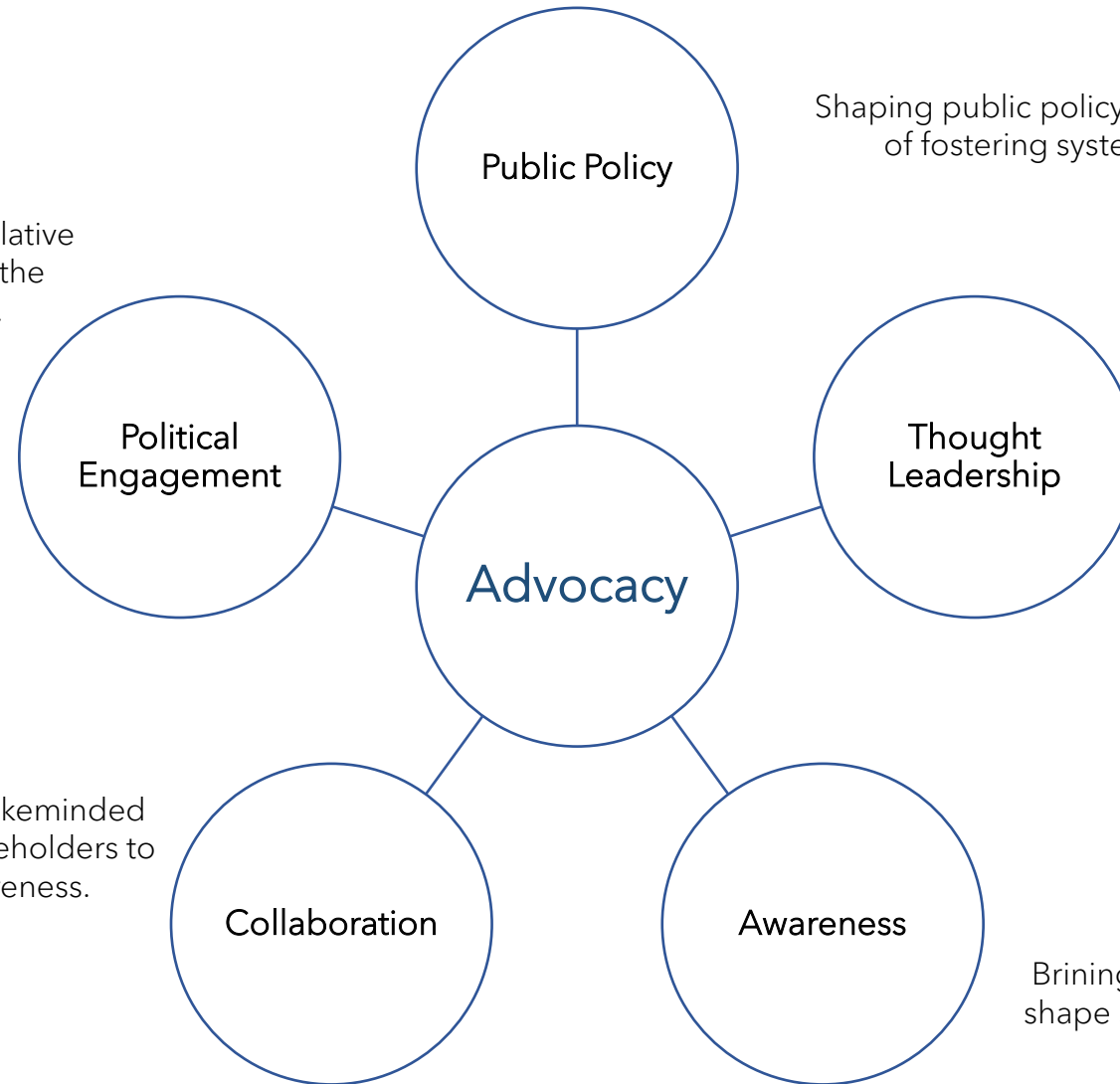
Affiliations / Campaigns:

Aboriginal Housing Management Association
Greater Vancouver Board of Trade
Imagine Canada
Vote Housing

Advocacy...

Influencing public policy and legislative decisions, as well as influencing the electorate during an election.

Working with likeminded partners & stakeholders to foster awareness.



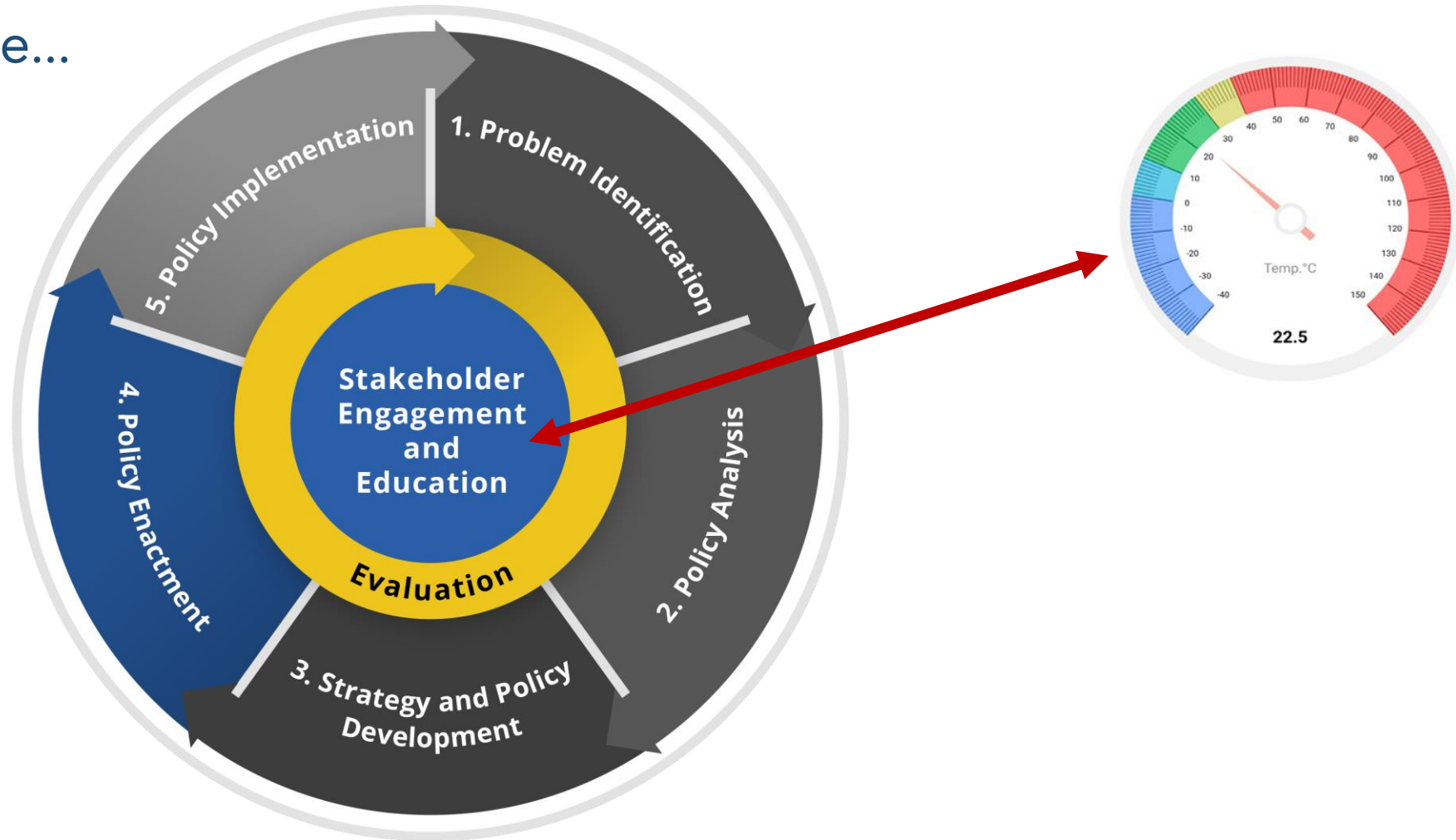
Shaping public policy for the purposes of fostering systemic change.

Creating and sharing knowledge that can be used to influence key actors.

Brining issues to light to shape societal discourse.

Understanding the Public Policy Process

The Policy Cycle...



Creating a Plan...

1. Problem Identification

- What are the unrealized needs, values, or opportunities for improvement?
- What does 'solving the problem' look like?

2. Policy Analysis

- What are the realities?
 - Societal
 - Political
 - Financial
 - Etc.

3. Strategy and Policy Development

- Who are the key actors?
- Are there opportunities to improve current policy (instead of create something new)?
- What kinds of stakeholder activities will we undertake during each step of the policy cycle?

Creating a Plan...

4. Policy Enactment

- Who are the decision makers?
- What factors may influence their decision?
- What do we need to provide them to ensure they're fully informed?

5. Policy Implementation

- How do we roll-out this policy?
- What will the metrics for success look like?
- How will we measure those metrics?

Stakeholder Engagement & Education...

- Public policy is all about serving the citizenry.
 - As government it means serving everyone.
 - As a non-profit it's about serving a specific demographic in **partnership** with government.
- Key to serving the citizenry are elements of engagement and education.
 - **Engagement** = Creating opportunities to hear from the citizenry.
 - **Education** = Helping the citizenry be fully informed about all sides of an issue.
- Critical to engagement is ensuring that those with lived experience are at the table and afforded the opportunity to make their voices heard without fear of judgment.

Evaluation...

- Even the most well-thought-out public policies can fall short of their objective!
- Evaluation - based on pre-determined metrics - will be key to monitoring success or failure.
- Often a policy will land somewhere in the middle thus requiring some “tweaking”.
- Never forget that public policy should always be treated as *fluid* so it can adapt to new and evolving circumstances (including shifts in the values and priorities of the citizenry).

Equation for Success...

Methodology + Engagement + Evaluation = Strong Public Policy

What Does It Actually Look Like?
(Remember the Policy Cycle)

Action Items...

- Most often, the **citizenry** dictates priorities. Other times, the government dictates priorities (election platforms / promises, mandate letters, etc.). Generally, the two intersect.
- In the social services sector, priorities - regardless of their origin - are already clear as they are the reason an organization exists (Ex: Indigenous injustices, youth homelessness, mental health & addictions, immigrant services, etc.).
- Once your issue / concern has been identified it's important to begin by **researching current public policies**. As you conduct your research, you'll come to one of three conclusions:
 - There is public policy and it's **sufficient**, thus there is no need to engage.
 - There is public policy but it's **insufficient**, thus there is a need for improvement.
 - There is **no** public policy, thus **new** public policy must be introduced.
- Consider authoring a SWOT Analysis and a Stakeholder Map.
 - Authoring these documents will help give you a sense of the **issue** and the **actors**.

Action Items (Continued)...

- Just when you thought you were done researching, **keep researching!**
 - Good public policy is rooted in **evidence-based** reasoning / decision making.
- Begin crafting your policy.
 - Subject matter experts.
 - People with lived experience.
 - Scholarly sources.
- Create a stakeholder engagement strategy.
 - One-one-one meetings, community forums, open houses, online surveys, social media, etc.
- As your undertaking your general stakeholder engagement activities create action items targeted at specific stakeholders:
 - Influencers - Those who can shape the narrative / bring attention to an issue.
 - Pressure Makers - Those who have access to decision makers / are de-facto decision makers.
 - Decision Makers - Those who are the decision makers (i.e., they have the authority through structure).

Action Items (Continued)...

- Use feedback from your stakeholder engagement activities to finalize your public policy recommendation(s).
- If appropriate, consider creating a coalition (formal or informal) who will agree to act as your champions.
- Present your public policy recommendations to the appropriate parties.
 - Senior bureaucrats.
 - Elected officials.
- Partner with the appropriate parties to implement the policy.

Case Studies

Practical Examples of How Public Policy Has Enhanced Equity...



(17 min., 28 sec.)

Canadian Case Study I of II: Heart & Stroke (*Top 5*)

By influencing public policy through advocacy:

- Eliminated dangerous trans fats from our food supply.
- Made public spaces in Canada smoke-free.
- Reduced tobacco's appeal with standardized plain packaging and more impactful warnings.
- Protected vulnerable youth by removing many flavored tobacco products from the market.
- Worked with the federal government to place automated external defibrillators (AEDs) in recreation facilities across Canada – greatly increasing survival rates from cardiac arrest.

Advocacy is a key to the Heart & Stroke vision of healthy lives free of heart disease and stroke.

Canadian Case Study II of II: Canadian Cancer Society (*E-Cigarettes*)

By influencing public policy through advocacy:

- **Advertising restrictions:** In 2020, the federal government adopted new regulations restricting e-cigarette advertising to places only where youth do not have access. Many provinces and territories also have restrictions on e-cigarette advertising and promotion.
- **Maximum nicotine levels:** In 2020, British Columbia and Nova Scotia implemented a maximum nicotine concentration level of 20 mg/ml for e-cigarettes. CCS advocates for maximum nicotine levels as one measure to help prevent another generation from being addicted to nicotine.
- **Flavored e-cigarette bans:** Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island have regulations banning flavors (except tobacco) in e-cigarettes. Flavors make e-cigarette more attractive to youth.
- **Restricting where e-cigarettes can be sold:** In 2020, Prince Edward Island required that e-cigarettes be sold only in specialty stores accessible only to those aged 21+. Also, in 2020, British Columbia required flavored e-cigarettes to be sold in adult-only premises, and Ontario required higher nicotine e-cigarettes and most flavored e-cigarettes to be sold only in adult-only specialty stores
- **E-cigarette tax:** Three provinces - British Columbia, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador have adopted a tax on e-cigarettes. Alberta has also announced a tax with implementation pending.

Conclusion

A Few Final Thoughts...

- Most social service providers have historically been focused on service delivery and only engage with public policy in a *reactionary* fashion (i.e., when something goes wrong).
- To truly address societal inequities the social services sector must become more proactive relative to matters of public policy.
- Public policy is not the same as political activism during election cycles - rather, a sustained effort year-round.
- Engaging in public policy allows you to not only exercise influence, but also work alongside decision makers which brings additional benefits that your organization can leverage.
- Public policy is the only way to foster long-term, systemic change.



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Thank you! Questions?

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