CDC's Policy Analytical Framework

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Suggested Citation: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *CDC's Policy Analytical Framework*. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, US Department of Health and Human Services; 2013.

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CS247166-A

This document provides a guide for identifying, analyzing, and prioritizing policies that can improve health. The policy analytical framework (Figure 1) expands on domains I, II and III of CDC's Policy Process (Problem Identification, Policy Analysis, and Strategy and Policy Development). The goals of this document are to:

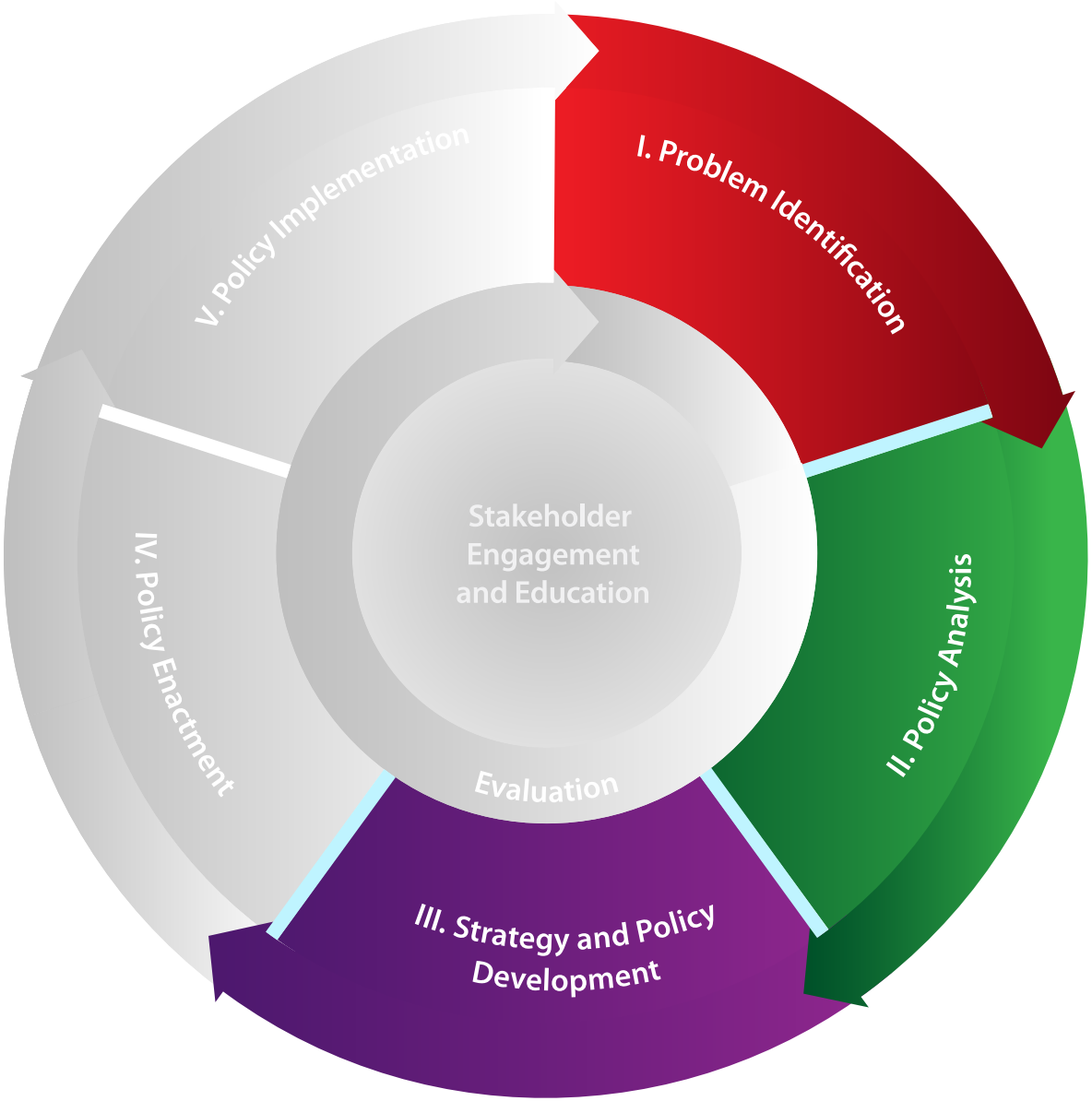
- Improve the analytic basis for identifying and prioritizing policies that can improve health
- Improve the strategic approach to identify and further the adoption of policy solutions.

The key steps include

1. Identify the problem or issue
2. Identify an appropriate policy solution
3. Identify and describe policy options
   a. Assess policy options
   b. Prioritize policy options
4. Develop a strategy for furthering adoption of a policy solution

CDC plays an important role in identifying and describing policy options to address public health problems, analyzing policies to understand their potential health, economic and budgetary impacts, and identifying evidence-based policy solutions and gaps in the evidence base. Note that federal law prohibits lobbying related activities by CDC at the federal, state and local level.

FIGURE 1: THE POLICY ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK (DOMAINS I, II, III OF CDC'S POLICY PROCESS)



Domain 1: Problem Identification

STEP 1: IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM OR ISSUE

The first step is to clearly identify the problem or issue you are trying to address. Synthesize data on the characteristics of the problem or issue, including the burden (how many people it affects), frequency (how often it occurs), severity (how serious of a problem is it), and scope (the range of outcomes it affects).

It helps to define the problem or issue as specifically as possible – for example "lack of access to fresh fruits and vegetables" (instead of "obesity") or "barriers to sustaining HIV treatment" (instead of "HIV/AIDS"). A way to look for these is as contributing factors or risk factors in the literature on the public health problem. This level of specificity can help you understand how best to address the problem. In addition, it is also useful to frame the problem in a way that helps illuminate possible policy solutions. For example, "providing safe places for people to be physically active in their communities" (which has clear policy solutions) instead of "increasing physical activity" (where the policy options are not as clear).

Domain 2: Policy Analysis

STEP 2A. IDENTIFY AND DESCRIBE POLICY OPTIONS

IDENTIFY

Research possible policy options relevant to the problem or issue you have identified and described. Potential strategies for gathering evidence include

- reviewing literature on the topic,
- surveying best practices (including best practices in other problem/issue areas), and
- conducting an environmental scan to understand what other jurisdictions are doing.

Be sure to collect evidence that addresses alternative and opposing points of view on the problem or issue and include the option of maintaining the status quo.

DESCRIBE (TABLE 1)

The first step is to describe each of the policy options you have identified. Answer the overarching questions to describe the process and structure as well as the questions for each of the three interrelated criteria: health impact, feasibility, and economic and budgetary impacts (Table 1). To focus attention on the key components of each criterion, we developed a list of sample questions for each. Not all questions are appropriate for all problems or issues; furthermore, questions beyond those noted here should sometimes be considered. Addressing these questions will enable you to assess policy options in Step 2b.

In answering the questions, it is possible to pull from different sources and types of evidence. Keep in mind that some sources and study design are of higher quality (see link—table showing varying strength of different types of evidence). If you find that data are lacking on the specific policy, consider data from similar policies used to address a different problem or issue.

TABLE 1: POLICY ANALYSIS: KEY QUESTIONS

FRAMING QUESTIONS
• What is the policy lever—is it legislative, administrative, regulatory, other? • What level of government or institution will implement? • How does the policy work/operate? (e.g., is it mandatory? Will enforcement be necessary? How is it funded? Who is responsible for administering the policy?) • What are the objectives of the policy? • What is the legal landscape surrounding the policy (e.g., court rulings, constitutionality)? • What is the historical context (e.g., has the policy been debated previously)? • What are the experiences of other jurisdictions? • What is the value-added of the policy? • What are the expected short, intermediate, and long-term outcomes? • What might be the unintended positive and negative consequences of the policy?

CRITERIA	*QUESTIONS*

Public health impact:
Potential for the policy to impact risk factors, quality of life, disparities, morbidity, and mortality
	• How does the policy address the problem or issue (e.g., increase access, protect from exposure)?
	• What are the magnitude, reach, and distribution of benefit and burden (including impact on risk factor, quality of life, morbidity and mortality)?
	  • What population will benefit? How much? When?
	  • What population will be negatively impacted? How much? When?
	• Will the policy impact health disparities / health equity? How?
	• Are there gaps in the data/evidence-base?

Feasibility*: **Likelihood that the policy can be successfully adopted and implemented**	***Political*** • What are the current political forces, including political history, environment, and policy debate? • Who are the stakeholders, including supporters and opponents? What are their interests and values? • What are the potential social, educational, and cultural perspectives associated with the policy option (e.g., lack of knowledge, fear of change, force of habit)? • What are the potential impacts of the policy on other sectors and high priority issues (e.g., sustainability, economic impact)? ***Operational*** • What are the resource, capacity, and technical needs developing, enacting, and implementing the policy? • How much time is needed for the policy to be enacted, implemented, and enforced? • How scalable, flexible, and transferable is the policy?

Economic and budgetary impacts:
Comparison of the costs to enact, implement, and enforce the policy with the value of the benefits
	Budget
	• What are the costs and benefits associated with the policy, from a budgetary perspective?
	  • e.g., for public (federal, state, local) and private entities to enact, implement, and enforce the policy?
	Economic
	• How do costs compare to benefits (e.g., cost-savings, costs averted, return on investments, cost-effectiveness, cost-benefit analysis, etc.)?
	  • How are costs and benefits distributed (e.g., for individuals, businesses, government)?
	  • What is the timeline for costs and benefits?
	• Where are there gaps in the data/evidence-base?

*In assessing feasibility, identifying critical barriers that will prevent the policy from being developed or adopted at the current time is important. For such policies, it may not be worthwhile to spend much time analyzing other factors (e.g., fiscal and economic impact). However, by identifying these critical barriers, you can be more readily able to identify when they shift and how to act quickly when there is a window of opportunity.

STEP 2B: ASSESS POLICY OPTIONS

Use the answers to the questions from Table 1 to rate the policy options. Also, for each criterion, note whether there are concerns about the amount or quality of data.

At this step, assess each option independently against the criteria included in the Table 2. If appropriate, include "no policy change" as an option. Although the ratings you provide should be grounded in data and evidence, they are inherently subjective. Table 2 is intended to be a guide. To justify your ratings, it may be helpful to systematically document the evidence, data, and reasoning you used to assign the rating in a separate matrix.

Note about scoring: If possible and appropriate, consider ways to quantify the rankings. For simplicity sake, we have presented a basic option here – rating as "low," "medium" or "high". For clarity, the economic and budgetary descriptors are "less favorable," "favorable," or "more favorable." However, as available, you may be able to use more robust, empirical data (cost-effectiveness, lives saved, etc.)

TABLE 2: POLICY ANALYSIS TABLE

CRITERIA	PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT	FEASIBILITY	ECONOMIC AND BUDGETARY IMPACT	
Scoring Definitions	**Low:** small reach, effect size, and impact on disparate populations **Medium:** small reach with large effect size or large reach with small effect size **High:** large reach, effect size, and impact on disparate populations	**Low:** No/small likelihood of being enacted **Medium:** Moderate likelihood of being enacted **High:** High likelihood of being enacted	**Less favorable:** High costs to implement **Favorable:** Moderate costs to implement **More favorable:** Low costs to implement	**Less favorable:** costs are high relative to benefits **Favorable:** costs are moderate relative to benefits (benefits justify costs) **More favorable:** costs are low relative to benefits
			BUDGET	*ECONOMIC*
Policy 1	❑ Low ❑ Medium ❑ High Concerns about the amount or quality of data? (Yes / No)	❑ Low ❑ Medium ❑ High Concerns about the amount or quality of data? (Yes / No)	❑ Less favorable ❑ Favorable ❑ More favorable Concerns about the amount or quality of data? (Yes / No)	❑ Less favorable ❑ Favorable ❑ More favorable Concerns about the amount or quality of data? (Yes / No)
Policy 2	❑ Low ❑ Medium ❑ High Concerns about the amount or quality of data? (Yes / No)	❑ Low ❑ Medium ❑ High Concerns about the amount or quality of data? (Yes / No)	❑ Less favorable ❑ Favorable ❑ More favorable Concerns about the amount or quality of data? (Yes / No)	❑ Less favorable ❑ Favorable ❑ More favorable Concerns about the amount or quality of data? (Yes / No)
Policy 3	❑ Low ❑ Medium ❑ High Concerns about the amount or quality of data? (Yes / No)	❑ Low ❑ Medium ❑ High Concerns about the amount or quality of data? (Yes / No)	❑ Less favorable ❑ Favorable ❑ More favorable Concerns about the amount or quality of data? (Yes / No)	❑ Less favorable ❑ Favorable ❑ More favorable Concerns about the amount or quality of data? (Yes / No)

NOTE: Scoring is subjective and this table is intended to be used as an organizational guide.

STEP 2C: PRIORITIZE POLICY OPTIONS

On the basis of the ratings you assigned in Step 2b, evaluate policy alternative against each other and prioritize the policy option. Criteria are not intended to be examined in isolation. Which policy you prioritize will depend on the weight you place on the three criteria and the overall analysis.

Domain 3: Strategy and Policy Development

STEP 3: DEVELOP A STRATEGY FOR FURTHERING ADOPTION OF THE POLICY SOLUTION

Once a policy solution has been prioritized, the next step is to define a strategy for getting the policy enacted and implemented. For CDC, this process will include clarifying operational issues, identifying and educating stakeholders and sharing relevant information, and conducting additional analyses as appropriate to support adoption, implementation and evaluation.

CLARIFYING OPERATIONAL ISSUES

Identify how the policy will operate and what steps are needed for policy implementation. Identify considerations and assistance for those who will adopt the policy (e.g., state/local government, organizations), taking into account jurisdictional context and information needs.

SHARING INFORMATION

To help describe and disseminate the results of the analysis, you will want to share relevant information with key stakeholder groups, including state, tribal, local, and territorial governments, other federal agencies, community-based organizations or groups, and decision-makers.

In developing products, keep in mind the stakeholders' information needs and preferred ways of receiving information. Potential products might include

- A background white paper that summarizes data related to health impact, feasibility, and budget and economic impact of prioritized policy
- A bibliography and data compendium
- A presentation of policy priorities or recommendations
- A policy brief or multiple policy briefs that summarize policy options or recommend actions

CONDUCTING ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND WORK

If policy is not prioritized or ready for "prime time" (e.g., because it has low feasibility, insufficient data on health impact, insufficient stakeholder support), there may be other steps you can take. If data are insufficient, consider developing a policy research agenda that identifies key questions that need to be addressed. Also, consider a more incremental policy to address the problem or issue.