

Public Health Practice Stories from the Field



National Public Health Improvement Initiative in New York City

Building a Framework for Policy Development

Enhanced

health department capacity by establishing a Bureau for Policy Development and hiring a public health lawyer, policy analyst, and health economist

Developed

an agency-wide policy agenda

Identified

strategic opportunities for policy development from an agency-wide policy inventory

Passed

an amendment to the city's Smoke Free Air Act

Environmental improvements can have the broadest reach and greatest potential impact on today's most pressing health problems. Most often, these improvements require policy or legal changes.

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene identified several areas offering strategic opportunities for policy change in its comprehensive policy agenda — Take Care New York. The priorities identified included being tobacco free, promoting physical activity and healthy eating, and reducing risky alcohol use and drug dependence.

Funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Public Health Improvement Initiative (NPHII) allowed the health department to expand and institutionalize the needed expertise to support future policy development and ensure continued innovation in this arena.



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What We Did

CDC's NPHII funding was central to the capacity and workforce development of the new Bureau of Policy Development. In year one, funds were used to

- Hire a public health lawyer, policy analyst, and health economist
- Develop the health department's policy agenda
- Conduct an agency-wide policy inventory
- Identify key stakeholders and strategic opportunities for policy change
- Coordinate creation and dissemination of the Take Care New York two-year progress report

What We Accomplished

We were able to move forward on several fronts to implement our policy agenda. In year one, we were able to

- Pass an amendment to the city's Smoke Free Air Act to make public parks and beaches smoke free
- Submit a waiver proposal to the U.S. Department of Agriculture to restrict purchase of sugar-sweetened beverages using Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits
- Advocate for introduction of legislation to restrict the sale of alcopops — sweetened alcoholic beverages — to liquor stores only (legislation did not pass, but the health department is working to reintroduce this issue)

What We Learned

Lessons learned in year one included

- Effecting policy change is subject to contextual factors such as the prevailing political and economic climate, public awareness and salience of the policy issue, impact of the proposal on revenues or expenditures, and resistance from potentially affected parties (e.g., food, alcohol, and tobacco industries)
- Recruiting staff members and planning for long-term policy development goals is challenging due to the uncertainty over continued NPHII funding
- Conducting evidence-based research and having staff with requisite expertise are critical to effect policy change

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