

What is Advocacy?

- ♦ Advocacy is the deliberate process of influencing those who make policy decisions.
- ♦ Advocacy is about creation or reform of policies but also about effective implementation, enforcement and evaluation of policies. A policy is a plan, course of action or set of regulations adopted by government, business or an institution designed to influence and determine decisions or procedures.
- ♦ Advocacy is a means to an end, another way to address the problems that we aim to solve through other programming strategies.

FIRST, advocacy is about *influencing* those who make policy decisions. Many people start with a preconception that advocacy is about “being confrontational” and “shouting at the government.” One of the most important messages is that advocacy does not have to be confrontational. There is a wide range of advocacy approaches to choose from, e.g. a public vs. a private approach, engagement vs. confrontation and working alone or on a coalition with others.

SECOND, advocacy is a *deliberate* process, involving intentional actions. Therefore, before implementing advocacy strategies it must be clear who you are trying to influence and what policy you wish to change.

THIRD, *policymakers* can encompass many types of decision makers. Advocacy is not restricted to those policymakers who work for the government. There are policymakers who work for the private sector and who wield enormous influence in their communities. It is important to keep in mind that *policymakers are always human beings* not institutions. Advocacy is used to influence the choices and actions of those who make laws and regulations, and those who distribute resources and make other decisions that affect the well-being of many people.

Helpful Hints for Advocating

1. Learn the state legislative and local policymaking processes and understand them well.
2. Get to know your policymakers — their districts and constituents, voting records, personal schedules, opinions, expertise and interests. Understand his or her concerns, priorities and perspectives.
3. Acquaint yourself with the staff members for the policymakers, committees and resource officials with whom you will be working. These people are essential sources of information and have significant influence.
4. Identify fellow advocates and partners in the public health community to work with.
5. Reach out to groups and other policymakers with whom you may need to negotiate for changes in legislation.
6. Foster and strengthen relationships with allies and work with policymakers who are flexible and tend to keep an open mind.