

## **WHAT IS ADVOCACY?**

This paper was written for the Advocacy initiative by Pieta Laut and has been supplemented by comments and contributions from attendees at the advocacy breakfast PHAA National Conference Perth 2005

## **1. What is Advocacy?**

Advocacy is organised influence. When we advocate we seek to influence the attitude of others in planned and organised ways. Advocacy is working to motivate others to undertake action on a specific issue.

Advocacy can work in many ways, depending on personal and organisational skills, style, resources, audiences and of course the issue.

The advocacy issues that we are examined in this paper are:

- How much data do we need to produce appropriate evidence based policies?
- How do we get evidenced based policy into the bureaucratic and political arenas?
- How can practitioners work with the media in order to make positive gains for public health?
- What are the critical mechanisms that are available to public health practitioners to advocate for better public health outcomes?

## **2. How much data do we need to produce appropriate evidence based policies?**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The basic questions that you need to address when thinking about what evidence base you have and whether it is sufficient to use in advocating for change are:

- How much of your policy is evidence based (be honest about what your data does and does not show);
- What is the quality and relevance of your evidence;
- For who are you developing the policy;
- Who will make the policy;
- What is their understanding of data;
- How is the data presented, how powerful is it in the overall argument for change;
- Who interprets it and how is it interpreted; and
- Can we find partners for our research efforts who have the capacity to translate results into policy.

There is a difference between the amount and type of evidence needed to initiate a policy and the amount and type needed to overturn a policy. It is important to know what is the worst case scenario, and the implications of getting it wrong. There may also be a difference between the data required to justify whether or not a policy change is needed, and what that change may need to be. Policy development windows are very often limited. It should be noted that we cannot always have policy supported by data.

As we determine our research, it is important to consider what some of the eventualities might be and to consult with the communities that we want to study and for whom we intend to develop policies and programs. While research is not generally undertaken specifically to inform policies, it is critical to the development of policies and programs, if these are to be effective. There is a strong argument to make some proportion of research more strategic and policy driven, although there are potentially dangers in doing so. These include issues around grant opportunities, the need for funding of strategically determined policy driven research and the connection of systemic reviews in policy relevant areas with strategically determined research priorities. High level political support for the research can readily carry into the advocacy arena.

It is important to scrutinize existing and proposed policies and see what quality of evidence is being used. Strategic networks (academic, political and community) provide the opportunity to understand current agendas, and allow you to think about where your proposal may fit.

## **2.2 Scientific evidence**

The time that goes past from when a researcher first identifies an issue to when there is public acceptance of its validity and the need to change something varies greatly from issue to issue. Sometimes it is dependent upon community acceptance and sometimes it's a question of both scientific acceptance of the research findings and community acceptance of the same. In some areas there is a plethora of data and evidence and advocacy doesn't require more evidence or the reinventing of the wheel.

It is very frustrating for policy development people to be provided with research, only to be told by the researchers that more data or evidence is needed. Consequently, it is important to balance the level of evidence needed for a policy change and scientific curiosity, and research profile and potential health impact. The community and politicians are the main determiners of when we act and consequently, how much evidence we collect. This is usually dependent on the seriousness of the problem, or community perceptions about its seriousness, but we need to be sure that we act as soon as we have appropriate evidence. The case for more research can be used to postpone action.

It is also important to ensure that longitudinal evidence and evidence at appropriate levels (eg national, State, local) be available. Sometimes we have to advocate for the continuing funding of the evidence base itself. On other occasions it is important for State levels not to duplicate work already undertaken in other States.

If an issue is critical (eg SARS) then the level of scientific evidence might be low, as the issue so important that action will be undertaken immediately even ahead of scientific evidence. This is a matter of how quickly the information is needed. If your evidence base is low, you need to have a highly credible reputation. Often policy questions cannot be answered to a research "gold standard" in the time period available (ie the window of opportunity). Use of international examples can be very important in these cases.

You need enough evidence that any proposed policy or program will be generally accepted amongst your peers. If you haven't published in an appropriate peer reviewed

journal then unless there is a significant emergency, you probably aren't ready to take your evidence forward to a policy program state. It will be particularly important to be able to provide evidence on "doing no harm" if you have a low evidence base.

The level of data required also depends on how controversial your research is, and the acceptance of your results by your peers. You need good data and also a good understanding of the context in which you will be advocating (eg. information about consumers, target groups, and politicians). It is also useful to have champions who know and understand your evidence base. It is also important to understand the advantages and limitations of the type of data you are using (eg there are significant differences between randomised controlled trials (RCT) and cost benefit analysis (CBA)).

It is important to determine whether your data/evidence needs to reflect different population groups (eg particular communities, state based breakdowns). You may need to advocate for the collection or continued collection of some data and for the appropriate level of analysis.

### **2.3 Economic evidence**

As a researcher dealing with public health issues you may not want to get involved in undertaking economic research, but you may need to work collaboratively with a health economist in order to bring together all the information that will be required to advocate for a change in policy or programs, or to put in place a new policy or programs.

The critical issue in undertaking economic research is making sure the assumptions are correct - this is especially the case in looking at discount factors. Discount rates can be used in such a way as to dismiss long term changes in health by implying that the future benefit is worth less than the current costs. We need to mount strong and consistent arguments as to why economic discounting should not be applied to public health issues.

It is important to ensure that in undertaking economic analysis fallacious arguments such as "savings made by improved public health actions make no change to the costs of the public health system because people just use the public health system for other medical issue" are challenged with evidence of real savings, not discounted savings.

Financial and economic evidence are not the same thing and should be addressed separately. Many governments function in a "zero budget" – ie what funding is allocated to can change but the overall budget amount for a portfolio cannot. Consequently, it is important to consider not just what you want to have happen and its costs, but also to think about where the funds could come from to address your issue. If you can indicate an area of budget savings, as well as economic impact, you have a more powerful argument than if you argue on economic issues alone.

### **2.4 Other types of evidence**

In advocating for a particular issue it is critical to be able to provide politicians with evidence about the issue that matters to them. So, in addition to scientific and economic evidence you need to have evidence about issue such as – who is affected, where are they located, what have other countries/states done about this issue, and which socioeconomic groups are affected, depending on the particular issue. It is also

important to realize that politicians by the very nature of belonging to political parties are driven by ideology and may not take your research evidence into account if it conflicts with their ideologies. Opinion polls are of particular interest to politicians. The wider your network of participants in your research and advocacy the better.

While not strictly evidence, it is important to have data on the impact of your proposal and the impact of doing nothing. It is absolutely essential to know what is already happening about your issue nationally and in each of the states/territories. There is nothing worse than meeting with a Minister or other politician, putting a proposal on the table, only to be told that it is already happening – at least to some extent. You must know the specifics of what is already happening and any data on evaluating its effectiveness. It may also be important to look at issues that are broader than strictly health issues (eg the up stream determinants of health such as income, employment, educational status).

It is important to know what it is that you want to do and which mechanisms you want to achieve the outcome you are after. If a government is busy deregulating markets, you may need to look of mechanisms other than regulation to achieve the outcomes that you are after.

Sometimes evidence isn't the main issue – for example if the lives of even a very small number of children are threatened, political will to change something or implement a policy or program can be generated very rapidly, without much scientific basis. This is the politician's litmus test of community acceptability. It is more 'gut' than 'evidence' focused.

The types and amount of evidence will vary depending of whether you are advocating from a research base to politicians/bureaucracies or coming from a community (grass roots ) base and advocating upwards.

## **2.5 Australian versus overseas evidence**

This is a vexed issue and can be argued either way depending on the circumstances. Local evidence is very important on specific issues (eg the numbers of people affected by a specific issue such as access to fluoridated water). Overseas evidence is important where it either backs up the local statistics (similar rates of a particular disease or similar trends) and is very important in helping politicians and others develop their understanding of solutions that are available to address specific issues. It is important, however, to be cautious of the use of information, data, policy options that are based on overseas research where underlying conditions vary substantially from our own (eg US research on the need for fluoride in water would vary considerably from the need in Australia due to much higher environmental levels of fluoride in the US).

## **2.6 Community acceptance**

Its important to remember that politicians constantly think about how their decisions will be accepted in their electorates. Consequently, if a politician is to be convinced that a set of evidence and a proposed policy/program is appropriate, he/she will hold the proposal against a community acceptance yardstick. It's important to know where your proposal sits in terms of general community acceptance.

It is important to develop community acceptance of your research before the results are available. Communities much prefer to be involved with the development of the research rather than be the subject of someone else's research project. This is particularly important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Any social research that has been undertaken on the acceptance of your proposal is always welcomed. If a proposal is about education campaigns or mass media, social marketing research is important. The Australian Government puts all its media campaigns through a Parliamentary Committee (the Government Communications Unit). They question both the acceptability of messages and the targeting of particular segments of the Australian community. It is worth having private discussions with some of their members before approaching your primary political targets.

### **2.7 What works one time won't necessarily work on another occasion**

It's important to ensure that the type of evidence and the data that you develop is appropriate to both the science and the policy/program development you want to have taken up. You must recognise the context in which a proposal is being placed before government or the private sector. If a government is operating in a budget deficit which it avows it wants to get out of, then data around economic and financial issues will be critical. If a government has shown a very clear focus on a particular issue or population segment (eg rural and remote populations) then it is important to ensure you have data on the effect of your proposal on this issue or population.

The context in which you are going to present your proposal or undertake your advocacy is everything. Where you can advocate in such a way as to reinforce or at least not "shoot across the bows" of those you are asking to take on your issue you are likely to do better.

### **2.8 Where and when you take your evidence matters**

Advocacy is all about developing a ground swell of people and organisations that believe that your issue, its evidence and potential impact of policy/program changes are not just needed but are a very high priority. One approach with all of the best evidence available to one politician is unlikely to provide the maximum outcome. Taking evidence forward to your peers, appropriate non-government organisations, the public sector and critical high profile individuals is at least as valuable as taking it to individual politicians. They can all affect outcomes over time. Government isn't always the only institution that can affect change in public health.

Evidence, data, propositions can be used very effectively in submissions to Parliamentary Committees, in think tanks that may or may not involve government and in local communities to engender local action. There are times when local media campaigns (releases, letters to editors etc) can be very effective in bring a politicians attention to an issue and to the importance with which his/her constituents hold it.

If you are making a budgetary submission, it needs to be made in about July of one year to have any hope of being included in a May budget of the next year. Most budgetary issues are largely settled by end December the year before the announcement, with only minor adjustments being made in the budget year.

### **3. How do we get evidenced based policy into the bureaucratic and political arenas?**

#### **3.1 Identify your issue and your proposed solutions**

Know what it is that you really want to have happen. It is not enough to present an elected official or a bureaucrat with information about a problem – you need to be known as a “solution finder”. This is your opportunity to establish your reputation. The science of your issue may be interesting, especially to you, but it is the outcome (eg. numbers of people affected, cost savings) and the mechanisms that you propose should be used to achieve the outcomes, that will be of interest to the politicians.

Consequently, you need to articulate your ideas in both a way people without your scientific background can understand and in the terms about which they are concerned.

If your organisation has more than one issue, know the priority of your issues. You also need to know the balance between priority and likelihood of achieving an outcome in order to ensure you get some runs on the board – these are important in developing your on-going relationship and sufficient ‘clout’ to open doors. You need to develop “radar” – anticipating issues that will arise, rather than reacting to issues when they arise.

Make sure that all parties are aware of your issues at least 12-18 months ahead of an election – that’s their policy development phase.

#### **3.2 Determine the appropriate level of government to address the issue**

In Australia we have three levels of government that each have different (but sometimes overlapping) responsibilities. It is critical to determine the level of government that holds responsibility for:

- the issue that you want to raise;
- the mechanism that you want to use to achieve your outcome.

Be aware of the current state of play on your issue. There is no point seeking the Australian Government to institute a universal program for a particular issue if all but one or two states have programs already. Lobby the appropriate states. If the issue is national standards, then be specific about which standards need to be homogenized and the target you have for that standard.

Know the policy development processes and legislative process applicable to the level of government you are approaching on your specific issue.

#### **3.3 Bring the implications of the issue home to the politician**

Numbers are vital to politicians and policy makers. Be able to articulate the issue from a large scale population basis to a community basis, and if at all possible be able to articulate what it means in that particular politicians electorate. Without making threats, make the elected official/bureaucrat aware of the implications of failure to address the issue. Some politicians respond to anecdotes, stories and the media. The more you know about the philosophies and interests of the politicians that you are lobbying, the more you can personalize your advocacy messages and the greater your ability to target politicians who will become “champions” for you. Reading maiden speeches and other speeches will help to inform you of the particular politicians’ priorities. Most have web-sites that are easily accessed.

### **3.4 Join forces with other organisations in order to increase impact.**

The more people supporting the cause, the proposed solution and the proposed mechanisms, the better. You need cohesion amongst industry bodies, non-government organizations and community groups to carry weight. Approach groups and organisations that have similar interests and join forces over those issues where you have common ground. Advocacy requires collaboration and cooperation if it is to be successful – turf wars and jealousies take energy, thought and action away from the issue. It is also important to help community groups develop their own advocacy around specific issues. They are more likely to affect change via local members of parliament than a national organization on some issues. Personal invitations to Ministers, shadow ministers and other spokespeople to meet and address local communities can be very effective.

When advocating, determine whether or not the issue is likely to be one for which there will be bi-partisan agreement. If it is likely, then you can advance part or all of your issue relatively easily and put resources into the parts of issues over which there will be disagreements between parties.

### **3.5 Be prepared to discuss the issue, its impact, your proposed solutions and if possible costs**

Stay focused on the issue, avoid being distracted by other issues or by too much detail. While it is appropriate to have an expert in the issue as part of a delegation, it is also critical to have a strategic thinker and to have discussed who will take responsibility for articulating which parts of the issue you are raising. It is important to have had a ‘dry run’ in front of a critical mind before presenting to an elected official or a bureaucrat. Be consistent in your values (eg reducing inequalities).

Where possible, provide a brief framework or a context for your issue. Politicians gain knowledge incrementally and without a framework on which to hang their knowledge, their potential impact is strictly limited. Remember, it’s hard to sell a counter intuitive message and the use of “caveats” is often difficult for both politicians and bureaucrats.

### **3.6 Leave a briefing note for both the politician and their staff**

It is important to take your message to both politicians and bureaucrats. Identify the “gatekeepers” and develop good relationships with them. Frequently, politicians will seek advice from their bureaucrats as to whether or not they should meet with someone, and it is the bureaucrats who will write a briefing paper for the politician on you, your organisation and your proposal.

When meeting with a politician or bureaucrat provide them with a one to two page brief that clearly states:

- the purpose of your lobbying/advocacy;
- key evidence about your issue;
- at least one appropriate example of the effects of the issue you are raising;
- other organisations that are concerned about the same issue.

Ensure the briefing note has the contact details of all the groups involved attached to it but provide one central contact person who is available to discuss the issues raised 24-7-52. Develop relationships with staffers and use them as a conduit to politicians. They

can then persuade the politician for you. Be aware of the type of evidence that the politician you are targeting likes (eg statistics, personal stories). Maintain contacts so that when opportunities arise you are able to take advantage of them.

### **3.7 Follow up**

Establish channels for on-going contact. If a politician or staffer has asked for additional material on any subject, make sure you follow up by providing the information requested. Be an authority that they can depend on, even if you have to go out of your way to find an expert with whom they can talk.

Even if you are unlikely to get the outcome you wanted, follow up with a phone call or email thanking the politician or staffer for their time – this is how you build on-going relationships. It also lets your elected officials and bureaucrats know that you are in for the long haul and are willing to undertake a sustained effort to achieve your goals. Be persistent and creative in your contacts and use email networks, personal contacts and the telephone.

### **3.8 Be nice to everyone**

The Secretary/diary keeper is also the gatekeeper to the elected official or bureaucrat and your interactions will affect your on-going relationship. It is important to remember that a staffer in one political term may be a member for parliament in another. Get to know staffers as well as politicians and bureaucrats and discuss long term, important but not urgent issues with them.

Don't 'bag' a political party publicly unless you have used every behind the scenes approach possible. You will only get people offside.

Be positive even when expressing significant problems. Bureaucrats and elected officials are looking for solutions not more problems. Be respectful of the opinions that the elected officials and bureaucrats express even when you need to argue against their premise. Make them feel as if they can be the leader solving the problem.

### **3.9 Lobby everyone**

While you need to be strategic about timing, it is important to lobby all sides of politics and the bureaucracy. There are a great many sensitivities amongst political parties, and it is frequently politic to both lobby all parties and to tell each party that this is what you are doing. There may be times when you are able to negotiate an outcome with one party and under those circumstances it may be strategic to remain silent on that issue with the other parties. That is a question of judgment. All advocacy is about networking and relationship building. It is important not to slight today someone you may need to depend on in the future. There are issues that can be agreed on a non-partisan approach. Lobby political parties well ahead of elections so that your issues/solutions can be included in policy statements. Remember that it's getting the outcome that matters, not who achieved it.

Remember that the Minister is not the only politician with whom you need to interact. Facilitate interactions with backbenchers and with committees. Their judgments carry weight in the party rooms, they can raise questions in question time and in committees, and committees are usually responsible for 'ticking off'. Backbench committees are very important, especially where they are substantially cross parties. Invite members of

appropriate committees and their staff to seminars, workshops etc. Public Health issues frequently cross portfolio boundaries, so it is important to raise issues with all the appropriate portfolios.

Make use of all committees – if you cannot put in a submission, put in a list of questions for which the Committee should seek answers. Place questions with politicians who are on committees, especially the estimates committee. This approach is especially critical during a period when the Government has control of both the upper and lower houses. It is also a way of creating champions for your cause who are working from within the system.

Don't let local politicians get away with the "I've never heard of it" response. In order to gain angst and then action on an issue, the issue must be expressed to local members via members of their electorate. Many members will not respond to correspondence from outside their electorate. Make sure your issue is raised in local newspapers – make it a local issue. The more frequently an issue comes up in a local paper, the more likely a member of parliament is to identify that issue with their electorate. Send out information to radio stations and newspapers – help them give your issue a local flavour. Gain traction in communities and make your issue a politicians "soft spot". Make sure in doing this you are offering a means by which the politician can look good in their electorate (ie offer to help them with a positive media event).

Prior to an election it may be possible to develop MOUs with different parties on specific issues. A generalised MOU gives a promise of action but also gives the party time to sort out the details providing they are generally consistent with the MOU.

Seek political mentors – who can open political doors for you and who can help you strategise around your issue.

Make use of international fora to advance acceptance of your research and advocacy actions. Where ever possible seek the help of other individuals who are concerned about similar or the same issues in these fora, so that the issues are advance in other countries as well as Australia. This can build momentum for change. Sometimes the fora may not appear to be obvious as arenas for change in public health. For example, the World Trade Organisation has potentially a significant capacity to advance, or destroy, public health efforts. Other fora, such as the World Health Organisation can be lobbied to advance an issue (eg the Framework Convention for Tobacco Control) and their effort will promote the issue within nations (external pressure).

Where it is appropriate raise the awareness of politicians and the community about your issue via the media. However, if you extend your awareness campaign to level criticism at a politician or political party ahead of talking the issue over with the appropriate Minister, you will probably find it hard to get time with the Minister, or to get them on-side. Public criticism is most useful after a politician has ruled out undertaking the changes you are seeking.

### **3.10 Don't**

Don't make hollow threats.

Don't miscalculate your support or the impact of your issue.

Don't fight battles that you cannot win (except where there is a significant need for the symbolic stance. Sometimes you have to fight particular battles for your members even when a win is not on the board).

Don't take a stance on an issue that will 'taint' you.

Don't use the email for letter campaigns, as most politicians won't reply to cyber campaigns.

Don't engage in issues for which you are not prepared.

### **3.11 Listen and Reflect**

Listen to what the elected official says to you and reflect on all of its nuances. If you need to repackage your issue to make it fit with current political priorities, do so, don't be stuck on your own words of one particular framework if that's going to make achieving your outcome difficult.

## **4. How can practitioners work with the media in order to make positive gains for public health?**

### **4.1 Purpose of the media**

The purpose of the media is frequently debated – is it a voice, a reflector of community values and issues, a seeker of truth, or the watchdog of society, the controller, the regulator or creator of public opinion. Whatever the answer the mass media does have an effect on public attitudes and public perceptions. This is why voicing issues in the media, and getting good media coverage for your issue can be helpful in challenging elected officials and bureaucrats public stances on specific issues.

If you want to have an effective interaction with the media, get appropriate media training.

### **4.2 How to get the media interested**

Prepare a strategy for media on your issue. It may be only one part of an overall communications strategy. Where possible, use professional media consultants – then have professional knowledge that you won't have. Be creative in generating ways to get the media interested in your issue/story. A visual idea usually works best. Actions you take to publicise an issue should not overstep the mark and become sensational stunts. (Remember the reaction to the British Minister who had his child eat a hamburger to show there was no problem with British beef during the mad cow disease crisis).

If you are going to undertake an action to promote your story, do it in a controlled and organised way, that explains or emphasises the point you are making. News needs a focal point or climax so make it direct and to the point. Human interest stories work well.

Make sure the material is easy to read. When sending material, follow up by ringing the editor or journalist, but don't become a telephone pest. Remember timing is critical to the media and it's important that you know the critical deadlines if you want your efforts taken up.

If the media are not interested, either, you have not got your message across effectively, or your story is not of sufficient interest to media outlet in the context of other stories

available at the time. It may be possible to bring your message forward at a later time, especially if you find a different “angle”. Simple messages are usually best – main point, why it’s important and an example. Keep perspective about the importance of your particular issue.

Check the bylines on interesting articles to build a database of journalists interested in your issue (s). Invite them to your organization for a familiarity briefing.

Remain apolitical in presenting your issue unless there is something specific that needs to be raised, praised or condemned, and make sure you have told elected officials before they see the issue in the media. Maintain your integrity, values and the science behind your issue in all dealings with the media.

Do not comment on issues best left to others with better expertise.

#### **4.3 If the media contacts you**

The media is always searching for good issues, and will frequently have a predetermined angle they wish to take. Be aware of this and when talking to the media take the time to prepare. Things you might want to have at your fingertips include interesting facts and figures, a press release from your own angle, different angles on the one issue, critical messages, contacts for personal examples, (other) experts. Being available, and able to provide good “media grabs” makes you a good source for media personnel. Be prepared to make the best and most appropriate “expert” on the particular issue available.

It’s important to establish an ongoing relationship with individual journalists. You have to develop trust and confidence. This cannot be done if you regard the journalists as hostile. You also need to ensure that the journalist accessing you or your material interprets it in the right way. Where possible, ask to see articles going into print, especially if the science is complex.

#### **4.4 Work in coalitions**

It spreads the effort and the media is more likely to take up two media releases coming from different angles and from two different organisations than two from the same organisation. It is important to maintain diversity in stories if you are working in a coalition. A wide variety of perspectives creates a broader and more holistic picture and enhances both the media’s and the consumer’s perception that the issue is significant. It also strengthens outreach, impact and increases credibility. Working in coalitions can help to share workloads and resources as well. Where possible, use local networks for community stories.

#### **4.5 Write/talk to inspire**

Public support is required to move almost any issue forward. Consequently, media information must have the capacity to inspire, firstly the journalist to take up the issue, secondly community members to take grass roots action and thirdly elected officials and bureaucrats to develop/implement solutions. Advocacy is essentially a rhetorical act.

#### **4.6 Determine your critical audience(s)**

You need to know what it is that you want your audience to do once they have heard your message (goals). If you don’t know who you want as an audience for your issue, it

will be hard to target them effectively. You need to determine which segment of the public is in the best position to hear and act effectively upon the critical message. You may need to use 'reflective' media on some issues, and time critical media on other issues.

#### **4.7 Tailor your language for your audience**

The language that can be used in a peer reviewed journal is significantly different to that which you need to use in a newspaper article. Consequently, you may have to write a variety of messages using different language to effectively communicate your message to a variety of audiences.

#### **4.8 Determine appropriate media for target audiences**

The media type you target on your issue must be appropriate to the message you are trying to convey. The media you use will also be affected by the resources at your disposal (good messages, graphic artists, web-savvy specialists, motivating speakers).

#### **4.9 Review and revise your media strategy**

Take the time to review media uptake of the issue every few months. Review your objectives in light of media response and audience action. What is working? What is not working? Should any part of the strategy be dropped, or a new part added. Do you need to change approach? Remember that advocacy needs time to gather momentum and if an anticipated result is not happening it does not necessarily mean that a strategy should be dropped.

#### **4.10 Provide resources**

Providing media with resources is essential if you want them to take up your message. Resources can be a spokesperson, an expert, a family who can provide a case study to provide human interest to a story, timely access to articles in peer reviewed journals. If a local resource can be identified all the better for local radio and television. Have a spokesperson available 24-7-52.

#### **4.11 Be credible**

It is vital that all information provided to the media is credible. You must be professional in your approach, and work quickly to line up exclusives on important issues.

#### **4.12 Negative is news**

The unfortunate reality is that negative or bad news makes headlines and short of curing cancer, good news rarely does. Be aware of this in developing your media information. However, it is critical to balance your advocacy by providing praise for the good things that have been achieved.

#### **4.13 Preparation is everything**

If you are asked for an interview, ask if you can ring back in ten minutes and spend the intervening time working out the critical points that you want to get across on the issue. If you have developed a media strategy, these should have been developed as part of the strategy. If the issue does not have a current strategy, consider using a format that provides the main point you want to get across, a statement that begins along the lines of 'this is important because...' and then follow up with an example illustrating your main point.

If you have been invited to a radio interview, provide the interviewer with a set of questions and answers that you think would adequately address the issue the day before the interview so that the interviewer can be well prepared. Arrive early to the interview (15 minutes) and be prepared for questions not on your list.

Provide press releases by faxing or mailing your release directly to a journalist and follow-up with a personal phone call. Ensure the press release has at least two contacts who will definitely be available over the coming 48 hours. Provide additional material such as statistics as attachments to the press release. Write the press release as closely to an article as possible in order to minimise the journalists work.

If you are invited for an interview with the press or television, be prepared with your main points and don't deviate from the topic unless you are well prepared. Dress appropriately, be considerate of the interviewer – that way you will build a relationship with them for future occasions. Remember that television only wants quick grabs for a voice over so prepare short grabs that sums up your story and where appropriate use examples of the effects of the issue you are discussing on real people. Make your points authoritatively. Don't be disappointed that a lot of what you say will be edited out. If you are successful, other media may also want to interview you, as media monitors other outlets constantly.

#### **4.14 Print media**

The best person to contact at local papers is the editor. Always address written releases to the News Editor. To request a reporter to cover an event or meeting contact the Chief of staff. If a newspaper has a specialist health reporter, go to them directly.

#### **4.15 Television**

Television news departments usually prefer you to contact the news director or senior supervisor and coordinator of news. Press releases should be directed to the news director. Assignment of journalists to stories is handled by the Chief of Staff, so if you are looking for a journalist to cover an event/conference, you need to address the request to them. It is not a poor option to talk to a research assistant because if they like an idea they will push it with the producer.

#### **4.16 Radio**

Always contact the News Editor unless you are contacting a community radio station in which case the presenter is usually the contact. Contacting the news anchor usually doesn't work as they only present, not determine the content. It is not a poor option to talk to a research assistant because if they like an idea they will push it with the producer.

#### **4.17 What, when , where, how, who, why**

These remain the golden rules for getting a message across. Nearly every story covers each of these elements. However, it is important to look for an appropriate and saleable "angle" for each interaction with the media. In an on-going advocacy campaign of strategy it will be necessary to think of a variety of angles on your issue. Its important not to get caught always writing to your own taste, attitude or intellectual capacity – you must consider your audience. Write simply, use common words, avoid jargon technical terms or words that could be misinterpreted because they have a specialised meaning in

the context of your issue. (The Herald –Sun is written for the average ten year old and the Age is written for a University Student, so write accordingly).

#### **4.19 Be patient and persist**

Advocacy can be very frustrating to those who want immediate results, but most change is brought about by persistent long term effort. An issue may not be taken up by the media at one particular time due to the perception that other issues are of more immediate newsworthiness. However, persistence will pay off over time. Effective media interaction and advocacy does not necessarily move in a straight line towards a predetermined result.

#### **4.19 Know your media**

It does pay, to the extent that it is possible, to try to choose moments that will give your issue the greatest possible coverage. You need to know, for example, which days particular newspaper have specialist pages on your subjects and who are the particular radio personalities that will take up health messages.

#### **4.20 What does not work**

Complaining about availability of money for a special project.

Shrillness and stridency, especially where there is little to recommend a story.

Quantity rather than quality.

## **What are the critical mechanisms that are available to public health practitioners to advocate for better public health outcomes?**

### **Journals, conferences and scientific meetings**

Each of these is important as a mechanism via which your research, propositions and opinions can be voiced, and in particular, voiced to an audience of your peers. This is an essential first step in advocacy – obtaining consensus amongst our peers, and providing the opportunity for policy developers and program managers to interact over specific issues. However, each of these mechanisms is of limited value in taking most issues forward through to changing policy or developing new programs. By and large that requires interaction with bureaucrats and politicians, usually in smaller meetings.

### **Working Groups, committees etc**

Advocacy for a policy or a program doesn't have to be a confrontation. It can simply mean the development policy, programs etc where none has existed before. Working groups, committees, and other smaller fora offer the opportunity to advance ideas. These can be convened by you or by others to advance a particular issue. Playing an active role in developing ideas and programs via these mechanisms can be very rewarding, but it's important to understand the context of the group. Some groups are driven by evidence, others by consensus, some by both, and some are deliberately meant to be a convenient way to keep people talking but away from the media. You have to look carefully at the terms of reference, the committee members and who the committee reports to in order to determine what you or your organisation might get out of participating.

If you want to move an issue along, a first approach to both a departmental area and any formal committee usually gets some degree of response, whereas it may be much harder to get a direct interaction with a Minister. This is particularly true where you are seeking to influence a national agenda via an all of government committee.

NGOs frequently have working groups of various names that operate to advance a particular issue. It is essential to know which NGOs will be cooperative on which issues and what can be gained outside the political process. For example, if you are seeking to raise the profile and understanding of a particular disease, it may be that several organisations can get together and produce guidelines for GPs (specialist NGO, Royal College of GPs, AMA), without need to refer to government. By achieving outcomes outside of government, you have a much stronger case for drawing government in with following steps (eg a campaign to raise public awareness of the particular disease).

### **Appropriate sphere of government**

It is tempting to assume that all issues are of national importance and should therefore be tackled on a national basis by the national government. However, it is important to distinguish which levels of government are responsible for which issues. Unless you target your advocacy at the right level, the most likely outcome is that one way or another you will be told that the issue you have raised is the responsibility of another level of government. This isn't just buck passing. It is set out in the Constitution and in the practice and negotiation of responsibilities and funds between the Australian Government and the State and Territory Governments, and is set in State/Territory legislation and regulations for local government.

There are a myriad of committees and other groups that operate at the bureaucratic and political levels to allow discussion between levels of government. If the issue that you are raising does need a national focus, while being the responsibility of state/territory governments, then you need to use the state based representatives to have the issue placed upon the agenda. If a majority of states/Territories take up the issue it is hard for such groups to ignore the issue.

However, many issues should and can be dealt with more appropriately at State/Territory and even local government levels. Success in one State/Territory always make success in others more likely.

If it's at all possible its is useful to know which factions your local members belongs to and how important that faction is to your issue.

The mechanisms available to government to produce change are limited. They can:

- inform;
- educate;
- regulate;
- provide funding;
- charge – take money away;
- coordinate and provide emergency help.

All the rest is variation on a theme.

### **Budget cycles**

Budget cycles are one of the most critical processes in the development of policy and programs and the allocation of resources to particular issues. By and large advocates enter into the process far too late to have any effect on budgets. For a May budget, the initial thinking of large themes and policy sub themes commences in July the previous year at the latest. By the end of September most portfolios will have their themes and major policy/program sub-themes agreed with their Minister and will have first costings developed. By the end of November the Minister will have held discussions with his representative in cabinet or with cabinet (if a member) and be locked into themes, cost savings and a maximum budget (usually less than that proposed). December is allocated to minor changes and obtaining the agreement of the Department of Finance to all costings. On occasion, requests to find particular savings can come through at this stage and whole policies and programs can be dropped out. By mid January the Department of Finance has locked in the policies and funding and only minor changes are undertaken, unless a crisis arises that requires major adjustments to the proposed budgets.

Consequently, formal budget submission made in January and later are of limited value. Such a submission does have value if the Government is putting forth policy to “test the waters” and you need to advocate strongly for or against the specific policy.

### **Senate Committees**

Senate committees are one of the few mechanisms available to directly affect the opinion of backbenchers. It is critical to be able to affect backbenchers in times when

government holds both the upper and lower houses of Parliament. Where a Government has a monopoly on power, unrest by backbenchers is one of the few ways to influence the sense of “mandate to rule”.

Senate committees take both submissions and undertake formal hearings. While it is important to get submissions into committees on time (they are rarely able to provide extensions), it is even more important to attend hearings as a witness if you are asked to do so. The hearings provide the opportunity for discussion around specific issues and provide you with the capacity to emphasise important points, and provide additional material which can be tabled or read into the minutes. In addition, via discussion many points are made clearer to members of the committee. Examples of current projects or capacities being undertaken in one locale but having wider relevance are always useful.

The Parliament House website keeps an up to date list of all Senate Committees, their inquiries and terms of reference.

### **Local media**

Most Members of Parliament are acutely aware of the issues in their electorates. One way that they keep across issues is to read the local newspapers and listen to local radio. Consequently, it is possible to get members interested in a specific issue by ensuring that it is raised frequently in the local media, preferably by more than one person and more than one means (letters to editor, professional article, opinion pieces). This is especially effective if you can develop local statistics that indicate how important this issue is in his/her electorate. Local campaigns, such as letter writing also helps raise awareness, but must be done by people in the electorate to have greatest effect, and in general do not raise awareness of your issue in the electorate as a whole.

### **Private sector**

When people think of advocacy they usually think of conflict, in particular with government. However, there is a great deal of advocacy that is undertaken with the public sector. It can range from advocating for funds to spend for example on a specific research project, sponsorship for on-going conferences (eg the PHAA Immunisation Conference); seeking changes to the way some part of the private sector operates, the development of local support for the implementation of specific programs (eg local sports programs). All of these things can advance an issue in public health, and shouldn't be underestimated. Where Government sees private funding, it is often more likely to provide additional funds. The private sector prefers to undertake projects in local communities. Larger companies are being subject to pressures to acknowledge corporate responsibilities to the wider community.

The private sector can also be a great partner in the advocating of better outcomes for public health with government. However, it is important to understand the degree of self interest that may be at play and how this will be interpreted. Philanthropic organisations can be a source of funding as well as providing networks, and influence.

### **Community Action**

Local community action on a specific issue will tend to galvanise a local politicians response to the issue. Community groups can take public health messages and distribute them in a variety of ways, (eg community theatre, health and arts programs). They also keep the actions well grounded.

## **Unions**

Advocacy including unions as partners, has been used more in the past than is currently the case. However, they retain considerable capacity to affect change, especially change on public health issues at the work “coal face”. With the issues of industrial relations gaining political momentum, and workplace health becoming important economically, unions may provide a “window of opportunity” for advancing a variety of public health issues eg (injury prevention, management of diabetes).

## **Other NGOs**

Other NGO’s are one of the best and most available partners and supporters in advocacy. The early NGOs interact and the stronger the voice that is developed the greater the impetus that can be gained. Issues such as sharing of resources and time needed to gain approvals are all small compared to the power of multiple NGO action. This is particularly the case in Public Health, where we have had our voice spread thin by having a plethora of different organisations – disease specialists, training/education, policy development and advocacy, etc all with smaller voices. The bringing together of these voices can make for a very loud push, provided, of course, that we can all agree on an advocacy strategy around any specific issue.

The service organisations are an often overlooked arena for presenting information about public health issues. They are always looking for speakers and are usually populated by influential people in local communities. With the ageing of the Australian population, there is an increasing number of professional retirees and their importance as a lobby group is growing. Networks of retirees can be used to help with letter writing campaigns to politicians and the media and with direct lobbying.

## **Champions**

Champions can be cultivated on specific issues under specific circumstances. However, it is important to ensure that the issue remains the centre of attention, not the champion. Champions must be inspirational and able to motivate themselves and others.

## **Communication Technology**

Maintaining websites with a high level of credibility and current information is useful as a first level interaction for the media and the wider community. Open bulletin boards give people opportunities to comment on possible policies and on advocacy work that is currently being undertaken. Websites can be a credible source of background information for educating the public as well as the media and political staffers.

**JOIN PHAA. IT IS A CREDIBLE ORGANISATION THAT UNDERTAKES COORDINATED ADVOCACY ACTION ON PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUES.**