What Is 'Policy, System and Environmental Change'?

Policy, system and environmental change is a way of thinking about how to effectively improve health in a community. Many traditional health programs have focused on individual behavior, assuming that if you teach people what will make them healthy, they will find a way to do it. Being healthy, however, is not just about individual choices.

Today, we're realizing that it's not enough to know how to be healthy – you need practical, readily available healthy options around you. That's where policy, system and environmental change comes in.

What Is Policy, System and Environmental Change?

Policy, system and environmental change is a way of modifying the environment to make healthy choices practical and available to all community members. By changing laws and shaping physical landscapes, a big impact can be made with little time and resources. By changing policies, systems and/or environments, communities can help tackle health issues such as obesity, chronic diseases, injuries, violence and substance abuse.

Why is Policy, System and Environmental Change Important?

Where you live affects how you live - you simply can't make healthy decisions if healthy options aren't available to you. Policy, system and environmental change makes healthier choices a real, feasible option for every community member by looking at the laws, rules and environments that impact our behavior.

What's the Difference Between Policy, System and Environmental Change and Traditional Programs?

Setting	Traditional Programs/Events	Policy, System, and Environmental Change
School	Celebrate national nutrition month	Add fruits and vegetables to the a la carte options at schools
	Assembly about the dangers of drinking and driving	Graduated driver licensing laws, including restrictions on night-time driving and number of passengers for young drivers
Community	Brochure about the dangers of second-hand smoke	Smoke-free workplace law
	Host a community fun run to raise awareness about diabetes	Add sidewalks, cross-walks, bike lanes, and bike racks to make walking and biking safer and more enjoyable
Worksite	Hold health screenings for staff	On-site fitness facilities and workplace policies that promote walking breaks
Hospital	Hold free breastfeeding courses for new moms	Implement the World Health Organization 10 Steps to Successful Breastfeeding and become a baby-friendly hospital
Clinic	Brochure describing dangers of prescription drug misuse	Connecting data systems so pharmacies and providers can track prescriptions and prevent "doctor shopping" for opiates

About Policy Change
- Policy change includes the passing of laws, ordinances, resolutions, mandates, regulations, or rules.
- Government bodies (federal, state, local level), school districts and schools, park districts, health-care organizations (hospitals, health systems), worksites and other community institutions (jails, daycare centers, senior living centers, faith institutions) all make policy change.
- Policies greatly influence the choices we make in our lives. Laws that are passed (like workplace policies, school policies) greatly influence the daily decisions we make about our health.
- Examples: Passing a law allowing residents to plant community gardens in vacant lots, schools establishing a policy that prohibits junk food in school fundraising drives, smoke-free workplace laws and 100 percent smoke-free school campus policies, laws requiring motorcycle or bicycle helmets

About System Change
- System change involves change made to the rules within an organization. System change and policy change often work hand-in-hand.
- System change impacts all elements of an organization. Often systems change focuses on changing infrastructure within a school, park, worksite or health setting.
- Examples: Incorporating health impact assessments into municipal project planning, creating a certification system for after-school program snacks to ensure they are in line with school wellness policy, WIC voucher reimbursement procedures for farmers' markets

About Environmental Change
- Environmental change is a change made to the physical environment.
- Environmental change can be as simple as installing bike signage on already established bike routes or as complex as sidewalk installation and pedestrian friendly intersections to promote walking and biking among its residents.
- Examples: Municipality undertakes a planning process to ensure better pedestrian and bicycle access to main roads and parks; water fluoridation

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About Us
The **Health Policy Institute of Ohio Wellness & Prevention Collaborative** is a coalition of Ohio prevention organizations working together to build skills, capacity, and coordination in order to communicate more effectively with public policymakers about the critical importance of investing in prevention and ensuring that all Ohioans live in healthy communities that support healthy behaviors.

Join Us
The Collaborative is open to all organizations in Ohio that work to promote health and prevent illness and disability. This includes government public health agencies, community-based organizations, trade associations, coalitions, health care providers, employers, philanthropies, grass-roots groups, and others who are working in the areas of prevention, wellness, population health, or health promotion. This work is sponsored by HPIO, email **astevens@healthpolicyohio.org** or visit **www.hpio.org** to learn more.