Communication Strategies to Influence Policy Makers: The Role of Media Advocacy in Policy and Social Change

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2007 APHA Annual Meeting
Nov. 6, 2007

Thank you to the other session's co-authors/HCWG colleagues

- **Carin E. Upstill, B.A.**
  Foundation for Healthy Living
- **Carol Girard, M.A.**
  Massachusetts Department of Public Health
- **Gary Black, B.A.**
  Mecklenburg County Health Department

Media Advocacy Defined

" The strategic use of mass media to support community organizing to advance a social or policy initiative."

Dorfman and Wallack, 1996

"The strategic use of mass media and its tools, in combination with community organizing, to advance healthy public policies. The primary focus is on the role of the news media, with secondary attention to the use of paid advertising."

IOM, The Future of Public Health in the 21st Century, 2002

Media Advocacy Defined

- A strategic area of health communication
- Relies on true understanding of:
  - Health issues, situations, needs and audiences
  - Media relations dos and don'ts
- Uses standard PR/public affairs/advertising tools/other communication models/techniques
- Aims at affecting social and policy change/ building key constituencies around health issues
  - <u>Ultimate outcome</u>: changing the behavior of policy makers/community/organizational leaders, so they will adopt/implement new policies/social norms
- Often more effective when precedes other efforts and/or used in combination with other health communication activities/areas/types of "media"

Source: Schiavo R., Health Communication: From Theory to Practice, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, April 2007.

Why Media Advocacy?

To gain public and policymaker support for policy goals	To contribute to changes in social /organizational norms and practices
To create political willingness/ help set public debate/agenda	To create a critical mass in support of policy/social change
To provide public voice to key constituencies	To engage/empower communities in communication/ advocacy process

Sources: Schiavo, R., 2007
Hoover, S. CPI, 2005

Why Media Advocacy?

- Documented impact on several areas (in combination with other health communication areas/interventions):
    - Decreased social acceptability of youth binge drinking
    - Immunization rates, policies and practices
    - International access to essential medications
    - Tobacco control
    - Regulatory processes for the approval of treatment options for life-threatening diseases
    - Removal of transfat acids from food products
    - Climate change
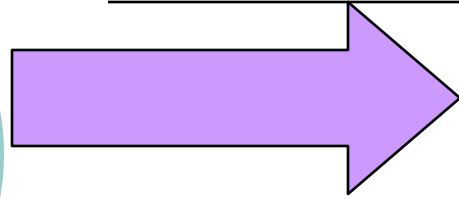   - Etc. etc., etc.

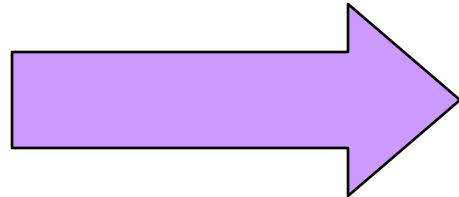Select references: Yanovitzky, I. and Stryker, J, 2001; Porter et al, 2000

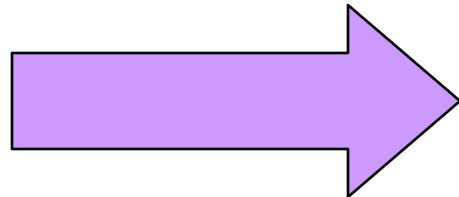# Some Key Questions for Strategic Media Advocacy Planning

What is the health issue? What kind of policy or social behavior change can address it?

Who are key decision makers in regard to new policies and/or implementation of new social norms/organizational practices? (e.g., federal government, community leaders, etc.)

Who can influence them? (e.g., voters, professional membership, consumers, etc.)
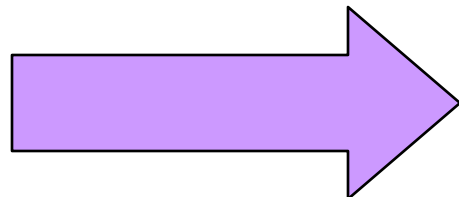
Does formative research suggest that media advocacy can play a role? If yes, what media can effectively reach/help mobilize key decision makers/ those who influence them? What are key messages /tools? How to approach specific journalists?
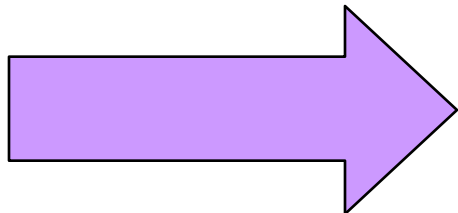
What other kinds of health communication/public health interventions are needed to affect change?

Adapted from Schiavo, R. 2007 and Hoover, S., CPI, 2005

Key Elements of Successful Media Advocacy Programs

- Integrated approach with other health communication areas (e.g., interpersonal communications, community mobilization, professional medical communications, etc.)
- Behavior-oriented/research-based planning process
  - Focus on audience's needs/wants/current behavior
  - Reputable spokespeople; recognized leaders among communities advocacy effort seeks to engage/mobilize
  - What do we want key decision makers to do?
- Evidence-based information/messages
- Audience-/-issue specific media mix
- Media-specific messages, materials, and tools
  - Newsworthiness/timeliness key factors in media outreach
  - Simple answers to the "So What?"/"What is in there for me?" questions
  - Clear call to action to champion, adopt, implement new policy/ social behavior
- Rigorous evaluation/monitoring process vis-à-vis social and policy outcomes/process indicators

Source: Schiavo, R., 2007

"Communication, and more specifically health communication, is a common part of social exchanges and contexts, from personal and professional encounters to the mass media and traditional forms of expressions such as theater and poetry, as well as informal conversations in barber shops, churches, restaurants, markets, and other public places.[1,2]." Health communications plans "should reflect this diversity of communications approaches and channels to match how communications actually takes place." [1,2]

Sources: Adapted from 1) Exchange, 2006
in 2) Schiavo, R., Health Communication: From
Theory to Practice, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007