



# Reflecting on System Competencies to Influence Healthy Public Policy

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Community Water Fluoridation (CWF) Case Study



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# Background



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- Reinstating/rebuilding healthy communities and partnership work
- Summer 2024: media coverage on harms of fluoride and water fluoridation (CWF) including a Florida court case
- Decided to dedicate staff time to unpack what was showing up in media and how studies were being used to position the issue of fluoride and CWF safety.
- Fall 2024 – Social Media Posts – Consents and Fluoride Varnish Program
- Town Decision to Remove Fluoride – not communicated to public health and community
- Uncovered more CWF withdrawal in the largest municipality without communication or connect to identify the health impacts

# Understanding the Policy Context

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- Critical thinking and decision making
  - Understand how the issue is being positioned in community and in media and deciding to move forward
  - Anticipate and then Prepare
- Critically appraising evidence: systematic review, technical reports, court proceedings/recommendations
- Monitoring, assessing and revisiting relevant research and information as it evolves
- Established an in depth understanding of what information/misinformation is driving the dialogue
- Completed a synthesis of research and other evidence
- What is the information saying and not saying- Not understating or overstating the findings
- Build and Maintain Credibility and Trust and Instill Confidence

# Internal Communication to Build Alignment and Understanding

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- Ensure there was alignment in interpretation of science, reports (policy analysis)
- Establish common key messages
- Support staff to be equipped to speak to the questions and opportunities that were emerging
- Front line staff:
  - Implementing a Fluoride Varnish Program in Schools → Dental Hygienists- Questions from Principals and Parents
  - Holding and Rebuilding Partnerships with Municipalities → Health Promoters -Being equipped to host conversations with Municipalities regarding their decision/the issue

# Communication

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## Internal tools

- Science Briefs – Two versions
- Key messages
- Frequently Asked Questions Tool- running list
- Webinar 1- Dental Hygienists and Managers
- Webinar 2- MOHs, Health Promoters, Managers and Policy and Social Action Consultants

## External Tools

- Infographic – CWF
- Infographic – Fluoride Varnish Program
- FAQ

# Communication

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- Understanding the dialogue on the issue and find ways to reframe: In conversation and In writing
- Writing skills: Science Brief- Academic writing; Plain language – Knowledge Translation
- Framing/Re-framing Techniques to Establish Plain Language Tools
- Understanding and application of Framing techniques (examples: Frameworks Institute, PHRASES, Berkley Media).
- Studying how the information and dialogue is being positioned by those with alternative views
- Knowing audience and who you are communicating to and why
- Webinars: Presentation tools/skills and using on-line mediums for training and communicating
  - Being a Reflective Practitioner – what worked, what didn't – try again

# Partnership/Collaboration

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- Invest in relationships and showing up
- Invest in Understanding Partners
  - structures and process- municipalities
  - mandate and context and priorities
- Understand Current Players and their Perspectives and their position on various issues
- Seek to understand, avoid assumptions about why policy decisions are being made

# Partnership/Collaboration

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- Maintenance of partners
- Art of difficult conversations and reframing of current dialogue to provide a health lens
- Balance addressing current issue/opportunity while also focusing on “the long game”
- Knowing how to raise concerns and provide a health in all policies perspective with the municipality without damaging relationships for additional/future work – for example: housing policy, equity and anti-racism plan etc.
- Development and maintenance of Partnership at different levels – Provincial and Local



# Leadership

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## Strategic Leadership and Partnerships

- MOHs
- Pediatric Dentistry– Children’s Hospital
- Nova Scotia Dental Association
- CMOH
- Department of Environment and Climate Change
- Doctors Nova Scotia

# Influence/Advocacy

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- **Ensuring a Foundation is in Place – Timing, Strategy, Patience**

For example: Policy Analysis/Understanding Policy Context/ Communication/Partnerships/Leadership

- **Working together as a system- Roles and Strategic Leadership**

- Provincial Partner Connects
- Local Healthy Communities Teams Understand Local Context- Advocacy Plans for each municipal context

**Flexibility and Partnerships-** Two different approaches were required

**Timing and Decision Making -** Being Able to Decide when to and not to take certain actions –