



Rainbow Health Ontario

Doing Health Policy

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Presentation:

Trans Health Advocacy Summit
Oral Presentation
London, Ontario, Canada
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Agenda

- About Rainbow Health Ontario
- What is policy?
- Steps in advocating for policy change
- Start small and build
- Discussion





About Sherbourne Health Centre

- Sherbourne Health Centre, located in downtown Toronto, is home to Canada's largest and most comprehensive primary health care program for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) communities.
- It has been providing services since 2002: family health care, counselling, support groups, as well as community development programs for youth and LGBT families. SHC has over 4,000 registered LGBT clients including 700+ trans clients.
- Rainbow Health Ontario is based at Sherbourne Health Centre.



About Rainbow Health Ontario

- RHO is committed to improving access to services and to promoting the health of Ontario's LGBT communities through education, research, outreach and public policy.
- We work with LGBT communities, service providers, researchers, policy makers and government representatives in three main areas:
 - **Information and Consultation**
 - **Education and Training**
 - **Research and Policy**



What is Social Policy?

- **Social policy** primarily refers to guidelines, principles, legislation and activities that affect the living conditions conducive to human welfare.
- The Malcolm Wiener Center for Social Policy at Harvard University describes it as "public policy and practice in the areas of health care, human services, criminal justice, inequality, education, and labour."



Because LGBT health **matters**

One more definition...

- **Public policy:** Public policy is the broad framework of ideas and values within which decisions are taken and action, or inaction, is pursued by governments in relation to some issue or problem.. (Brooks, 1989, p. 16)



Common Factors in Developing Public Policy

- **Public interest:** What is in the best interest of society as a whole? How is the common good balanced against any private or special interests? Is the process fully inclusive, especially of those who are often overlooked or unable to participate?
- **Effectiveness:** How well a policy achieves its stated goals.
- **Efficiency:** How well resources are utilized in achieving goals and implementing policy.



Common Factors in Developing Public Policy

- **Consistency:** Degree of alignment with broader goals and strategies of government, with constitutional, legislative and regulatory regime.
- **Fairness and equity:** Degree to which the policy increases equity of all members and sectors of society. This may link directly to consideration of public interest.
- **Reflective:** Of other values of society and/or the community, such as freedom, security, diversity, communality, choice, and privacy.



Policy also operates at a more local level when:

A group or organization decides:

- What goods or services will or will not be provided
- Who will have access to goods or access the services
- The rules governing access



Steps in planning policy change



- Define the problem. What is it that you want and why?
- Is the change a one-time event or will it have broader and lasting benefits?
- Find out who controls access to the goods, services or makes the decisions that you want changed?



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Building your case using their language

- Look for existing legislation, policy directives, value statements that reflect the approach or situation you are seeking. Examples:
- Ontario's Excellent Care for All Act
<http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/ms/ecfa/pro/about/act.aspx>
- Health Equity Impact Assessment Tool (Ontario hospitals)
<http://health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/heia/docs/workbook.pdf>



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Other intelligence gathering

- Your local LHIN – planning body and funder for health care in your region. They have guidelines, reports, value statements and mandatory community engagement responsibilities.
- If your concern is with an agency, look at their website or other materials for their stated values or principles. See what they say they do or who they serve, e.g. “we serve underserved or communities, we break down barriers to care...”



Scoping your action

- The kind of change you are seeking for will shape the methods you use.
- You may want to plot out actions on a continuum from least to most complex or costly.
- Start with a simple and direct request to the right person or organization. If you are turned down ask for the reasons – in writing if possible.



The Direct Approach

- Ask for a meeting with someone in authority to discuss the situation and to look for options. Take one or two others. Use it to explain your issue again and to learn what is creating the barrier:
 - values (prejudice), fears, legislation, lack of resources, lack of knowledge, some combination of factors?
- Ask what would have to happen to get the change you are after.
- Take notes, analyze the meeting. What have you learned?



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Taking action and engaging others

- If you decide to take action to change a policy or practice you will need to develop the support of others:
 - Those directly affected by the issue
 - Others who may care – family or friends, allies whose struggles have been similar, other social justice groups, associations fighting similar battles
 - Consider politicians – they often want to be seen to be supporting constituents. Try your local MPP or counsellor first - go to the right level of government. It can be useful to lobby all parties.
- Toby's Law (guaranteeing protections on the basis of gender identity and expression) was endorsed by all parties when it finally passed.



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Tactics



- Letters and meetings to explain your case and ask for change.
- Briefs to present research or community evidence and provide recommendations. Can be distributed online.
- Town halls to present and discuss community experiences.
- Media stories – must be a compelling story – usually centres around an individual's experience.



Building momentum and authority

- Building support and keeping supporters informed is key.
- Use social media like listservs, face book, Twitter to network, inform about actions, solicit support.
- Keep the tone and information factual and respectful. You can never control who will see your messages. It is always better to say things the way you would say them directly.
- Discuss the tone you want to use with others. Decide together how to use your anger or other emotions for change.



Moving from collaboration to confrontation - tactics

- This is a strategic shift. It is harder to move back to collaboration once you have moved to confrontation.
 - Complaint to a higher level (Board, Ombudsman, Human Rights Commission)
 - Legal lawsuit (expensive unless taken on by an advocacy agency)
 - Demonstration or other form of protest – can be angry, creative, artful, moving. May take place once or repeatedly...
- What is the emotional and behavioural reaction that you are seeking from the group that you are protesting against? How can they save face? Build in opportunities for discussion and resolution.



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Trans PULSE

Trans Health

- Sherbourne Health Centre quickly built services for trans people in Toronto. By 2005 there were 500+ trans clients.
- Trans people across Ontario were unable to find health care – general, hormones, supportive counselling, surgery
- No data to show how bad things were for trans people across the province.
- SHC and trans community members got a seed grant which allowed us to set up partnerships with researchers (Greta and Robb).
- From that beginning the Trans PULSE Study was developed largest study of trans people in Canada.



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LGBTQ
**Parenting
Network**

A Program of Sherbourne Health Centre

LGBT Parenting

- LGBTQ Parenting Network and researchers have carried out studies of LGBT parents, access to support, stress, etc. These studies have informed
 - Programs for prospective parents and LGBT families
 - Training for fertility clinics, daycares, schools
 - Series of 8 brochures on family formation, legal issues, insemination, co-parenting, trans parents. etc.
- Network offered itself as consultation group to the National Working Group of the **Assisted Human Reproduction Act** to ensure the needs and concerns of LGBT families are considered.



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