

# Advocacy 101: Part 1 Generating a “Good” Idea

January 2019

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Hello and welcome to PedsCases. My name is Dr. Amelia Kellar, and I am here with two of my co-residents Dr. Katie Boone and Dr. Laura Betcherman. We are pediatric residents at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. This podcast series on Advocacy was developed with the help of Dr. Charlotte Moore-Hepburn, a pediatrician at SickKids and the Canadian Pediatric Society Director of Medical Affairs.

We have developed three introductory podcasts on advocacy work. The first podcast will introduce you to the concept of public policy advocacy while the second and third podcasts will address how to design, plan and implement your advocacy project.

## Definition of Advocacy

- What is advocacy?
  - Change in public policies, practices and institutions
- Why use advocacy?
  - Stimulate positive change
  - Make programs more sustainable (achieve widespread change)
  - Defend communities from adverse changes
  - Build and strengthen cooperation between organizations
  - Encourage participation of citizens in policy-making

*“Advocacy is putting a problem on the agenda, providing a solution to that problem, and building support for acting on both the problem and the solution” – R Sharma*

First, we will begin with a definition of advocacy. Advocacy revolves around the concept of generating change, in public policy, practice and/or health system design. It includes the set of activities required to influence decisions at all levels of government, as well as decisions at all levels within cultural and social systems, and both public and private institutions.

Next, let's consider why we advocate. There are many reasons that students, residents and physicians choose to advocate. Advocacy stimulates positive change, it can generate more sustainable programs, defend communities, build and strengthen cooperation amongst organizations and encourage participation of citizens in policy-making. Advocacy is essential for the health and well-being of children, youth and their families, and it is a tremendously rewarding activity for those who engage, are persistent, and prove ultimately successful.

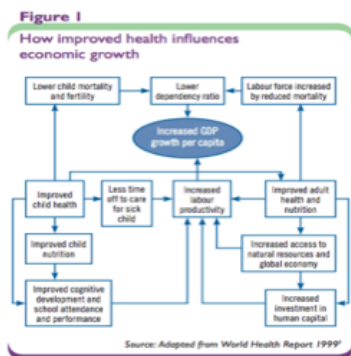
• “Ideas are great arrows, but there has to be a bow.

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Politics is the bow of idealism.”

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Bill Moyers

But where do we start? “Ideas are great arrows, but there has to be a bow. But what is the bow? Politics is the bow of idealism”, according to Bill Moyers (a famous American journalist and political commentator).

Essentially, to stimulate positive social change, we must activate our good ideas by engaging, inspiring and motivating politicians and community leaders. Creating change is not a passive activity – it requires smart and dedicated action, including the effective engagement of decision-makers, at all levels.



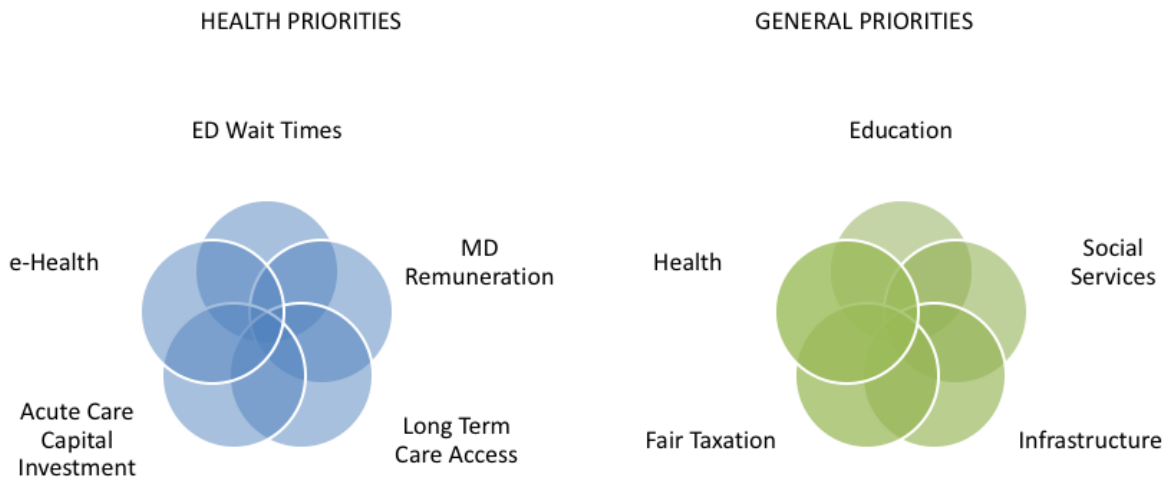
With regards to advocacy in Paediatrics- it all begins with the business of investing in children – investing in citizens early in their life course – if we think about it, this should be an obvious “best choice” for public funds.

We know from the work of basic scientists– represented here in Figure 1) that there IS a unique and time-limited opportunity to significantly alter one’s lifetime health, wellbeing and productivity by investing in citizens as children.

Investing in children aligns with our public morals, our community ethics, and provides an otherwise exceedingly attractive political narrative. And investing in children provides, over an extended time horizon, a value return on investment. This is one of those precious and rare instances where evidence aligns with policy objectives.

This does not mean that child health public policy advocacy is easy, but it does mean that it is possible. It means that decision makers should, and are often open and receptive to good ideas, and that child and youth health advocacy can trigger significant positive social change.

## Competing with other Priorities



So, as we start to think about initiating an advocacy project, let's first begin by emphasizing the importance of choosing the "right idea".

At any given time, political leaders and other decision makers are faced with competing priorities that are articulated by energized stakeholders advocating for change in a number of different sectors. On any given day, the provincial government may be contemplating how to best allocate available resources within health, education, social services, transportation and the environment. All are important, and each sector could do "better" with more.

And at any given time, within each sector, ministries of health are faced with many competing priorities of their own. Should we spend more money to reduce emergency department wait times and relieve hospital over-crowding? Should we invest more in long-term care facilities to ease the "alternative level of care" problem? Would our health care system be more effective and efficient if we expedited the roll-out of electronic medical records? Do we need to spend more on newer, larger hospitals to accommodate for a growing population as well as the impending "silver tsunami?"

With so many competing priorities, both within the health sector and within public arena in general, it is vital to spend time defining the right topic, with the right scope, with the right team and at the right time. To be effective, your advocacy idea should

be chosen so as to “rise above” the competing noise, captivate time and attention and ultimately yield a positive change.

## Step 1: The RIGHT TOPIC

- What is your passion?
- A surplus of both important and urgent issues
- Find a topic that you are connected to personally
- Find a topic that affects and engages your peer groups and colleagues
- Look to the resources!

The first step is to pick a RIGHT topic! This is no easy feat as there are SO many important and urgent issues. Begin by choosing a topic that resonates with you. Advocacy is hard work, and it is best done when it is fueled by personal passion. It is also helpful to choose a topic that a group of your peers, colleagues or friends may also be passionate about.

## GENERATING YOUR TOPIC

- Resources:
  - Are We Doing Enough?
  - Political Platforms
  - Media
  - CPS Statements
  - Clinical experience
  - Personal experience



If you need a little inspiration...there are resources available to help. When considering issues focused on Child and Youth Health, a very helpful resource is Canadian Pediatrics Society "Are We Doing Enough?" This is a document generated by the CPS which reviews the current status of important health issues by province and provides an assessment of how each province is doing with regard to that issue. When a province falls below the national "average" (or the national standard as articulated by the national professional association of pediatricians), an advocate has a tremendous amount of leverage. No province likes to be the last or at the bottom. If your province is lagging behind the rest of the country in terms of a particular child and youth health issue, there is certainly an opportunity to create change.

Additional things to consider include issues articulated in political platforms – what have the leading and opposition parties pledged to do? Are they doing it? Could they be doing better? What is being discussed in the media? What health and social issues are the public interested in? Can that media attention be channeled for positive change? What about new data? Are there new CPS statements hot off the press that outline the need for a change at the federal, provincial, municipal or health system level? What about your clinical and personal experiences? How have these impacted the things you wish to advocate for? Again, the best ideas come from our personal experiences and can generate the passion and buy-in needed to gather support.



## STEP 2: The RIGHT SCOPE

- CONSIDER SCOPE
  - What is your specific “ask”? Is it “do-able”?
- CONSIDER STAKEHOLDERS
  - Local, Regional, Provincial, National?
  - Can your stakeholders come to agreement on why this is important for child health?
    - Public Health
    - Early Intervention
    - Chronic Disease
    - Rare Disease
    - Acute Care
    - Primary Care
    - Palliative Care

Now that we have the right topic, let’s consider the scope. It is important to define your advocacy agenda to be something specific and do-able. If you try to “boil to ocean” you will likely NOT be successful. However, if you outline a clear “ask” – something that can be understood by the relevant audiences, and something that can be executed within a reasonable timeframe and budget, you may be. For example, advocating for “excellent child and youth mental health for all” is vague, and is more of a vision than an outcome. However, advocating for “timely access to psycho-educational assessments for all children and youth in a specific province” is both specific and doable with appropriate resources. An advocacy agenda with a well defined scope is essential to ultimate success.

Next, let’s consider your stakeholders. Will you be talking to a community, a province or the entire country? Will your change be meaningful to doctors, nurses, teachers, recreation staff, industry or others? It’s important to engage and align all of the relevant voices, to ensure that – on your topic – the community of stakeholders is talking with a shared voice. Determining the common ground involves everyone agreeing on a shared element of the advocacy agenda. We must work together to move this issue to the top of the “to-do” list for the decision makers and political leaders. Remember, this is true for stakeholders both within and outside healthcare.

## Step 2: THE RIGHT scope

- Well-defined issue
- Achievable given time/budget constraints
- Targeted, clear recommendations
- Know when to move on...



Next, you need to articulate your agenda. Start with a well-defined topic. What specific changes need to be made? You should have clear recommendations for action and a clear “target” as a way of defining success. For example- if your topic was injury prevention, it would not be sufficient to say “reduce rates of childhood injury”. After you clarify your scope and align the relevant stakeholder, an advocacy agenda would include something like “Decrease ED visits and hospitalizations associated with air guns by regulating their purchase and use under the consumer product safety act”. If there is no clear path forward and you’re not able to articulate specific recommendations for action, it may be better to go back to the drawing board for other ideas!

## STEP 3: The RIGHT TIME

- Evaluate your momentum
- Align with:
  - Political platform commitment
  - New and/or emerging scientific evidence
  - Strategic objectives of powerful partners

Again, know when to move on...

Now that you have established the right topic and narrowed your scope, it's important to consider your timing. Even great ideas can fall flat if they are presented at the wrong time. Important considerations are whether or not you are aligned with a political platform- is it close to or approaching an election? Is this an issue up for debate that a particular party will take a stance on?

Also consider new or emerging scientific evidence to support your campaign. If pertinent research is highlighted in the media, this can greatly increase community and stakeholder investment.

## Other CONSIDERATIONS: MEDIA ATTENTION

- Will there be buy-in?
- Consider what is important to your population of interest
- What is important to stakeholders?
- Where is the funding allocated?
- Is there already media/attention and investment or do you have to do the groundwork?



In narrowing your scope, you need to get buy-in and investment from others, whether it be on the community level, provincial level or the national/international level. What are some of the keys to success? The idea has to be meaningful to the stakeholders.

Consider ideas that are aligned with the strategic objectives of your stakeholder organizations. One great example of this is aligning your ideas with the new CPS strategic framework, released for 2017 and active until 2022: The 5 priorities of the strategic framework are:

- Health Equity for Inuit, Metis children and youth
- Nurture early childhood development
- Expanding access to medications and therapeutics
- Strengthen mental healthcare
- Advancing social paediatrics.

As with all organizations, the strategic plan of the CPS details those areas being given special attention, time and resources. To align with the interests of other powerful organizations will give lift to your topic, and will continue to fuel the efforts of stakeholder groups. We are always able to achieve more when we work together.

## STEP 4: The RIGHT TIME CONTINUED

- Evaluate the landscape from “the policy perspective”
- Understand the current Canadian context
  - Level of government
  - Variation across jurisdictions (“leaders vs laggards”)
  - Levels of change (existing legislation, regulation and budget cycles)
- Understand the medical context
- Understand the international context (if relevant)

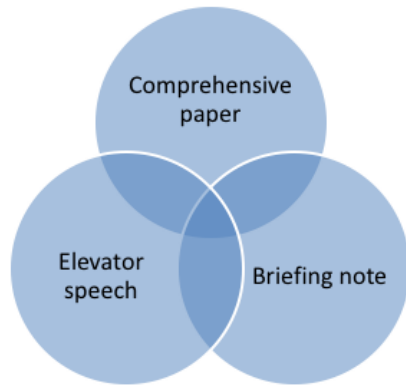
When determining whether it is the right time to launch your advocacy campaign, it's essential to evaluate the landscape from a public policy perspective. Start with a fundamental understanding of the level of government that your issue is addressing (we will have more on this in the 2<sup>nd</sup> podcast), then look at the variation amongst jurisdictions- who are the leaders on this issue and who is lagging behind? Are any other jurisdictions planning to move on this issues? How can you use this information to your advantage?

Think about the available levels for change. What is the existing legislation? Does your advocacy agenda require legislative change? What regulations are currently in place? Are changes in existing regulations required? Are there unenforced regulations that need appropriate enforcement? Does your ask require funding? If so, consider the budget cycles and understand when critical decisions are made within that cycle.

We as medical professionals also understand the medical context of our idea. Has new data been recently released? Is there a major conference that can facilitate an important advocacy announcement? We can offer a unique contribution to the discussion. How can your unique perspective be best highlighted?

Also consider if it's relevant to consider the international context of your idea- do you need to perform a cross jurisdictional scan? If relevant, international data can be very compelling.

## STEP 5 & 6: ARTICULATE YOUR ARGUMENT and CHOOSE THE RIGHT TEAM



Be succinct!

Find your partners/mentors!

In our final steps of idea generation, you want to clearly articulate your advocacy argument. This can be done in a succinct policy paper, detailing your “ask” with a description of the current state, the available evidence for best practice and your recommendations for change. Particularly with regard to government leadership, you have a very limited time to get your point across so you need to get to the point and emphasize why your idea is one they should invest in. A helpful way to think about this is what you would be able to say to someone if you only had enough time for a short elevator ride. If you would have difficulty articulating your idea and your ask in this setting then it might be worth re-evaluating your idea. It is also useful to prepare a 1-pager, that distills your key messages down to the most salient facts. The comprehensive paper, the 1-pager “briefing note” and your “elevator speech” complete a package that means you are ready for prime time.

Finally, you need to gather your team. As we discussed earlier, it is important to find team members who are knowledgeable and passionate about your idea to share the message, leverage their networks, and join with you as you pursue positive change.

## MENTORSHIP

- Specialist in the area of interest or multiple
- Government Contact: What level? (Institutional, Municipal, Provincial or National implementation)
- Build a team

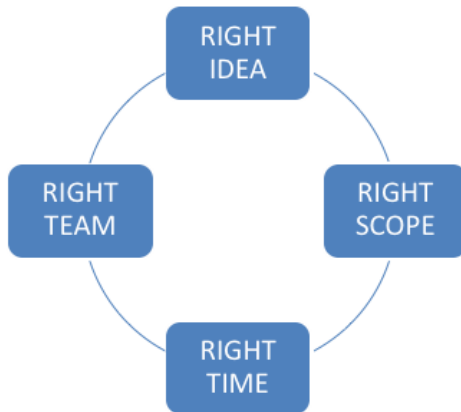


A team is essential to accomplish your goals. You will need a team with a diverse skillset to compliment each other to get things done. You will also need a realistic timeline and tangible/attainable goals.

Firstly, consider which level of government you will be appealing to and working with.

1. Find a government liaison or expert, someone who has experience with lobbying government and working with government to make meaningful change.
2. Consider a team member who is a clinical expert in the area/research/translational/clinical- help you to set and establish tangible and realistic goals
3. Find a marketing expert, if media needs to be involved or collaborated with- which is highly likely to effectively accomplish your goals, then this partnership is key!
4. Find other motivated team members who are well versed and passionate about your cause.

## SUMMARY



- Right idea: personal connection and passion
- Right scope: well defined, do-able
- Right time: momentum, level of government, media involvement
- Right team: passion, expertise and diversity

In summary, we have covered how to generate and evaluate the right idea. Next, we reviewed how to outline an appropriate scope. You want an idea that is well defined and doable. Once you have the right idea and scope, it's essential to consider your timing. What level of government do you need to address? Where is the momentum for change? Is there media attention surrounding the issue? Lastly, you need to assemble your team. A team should have members with diverse and complimentary skillsets. As we reviewed, it is vital to have a team member with experience in government, whether it be municipal, provincial or federal. As well, marketing expertise can be an important asset to garner more investment and collaboration. We hope you have enjoyed this introductory PedsCases podcast to advocacy, in the next podcast we will discuss designing, planning and implementing your advocacy project. Thanks for listening!