

Using Your Voice
**ADVOCACY
TOOLKIT**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Purpose	2
Importance of advocacy	2
Analyzing the situation	4
Gaining support	7
Developing the strategy	8
Evaluating the efforts	10
Worksheets and samples	11

Take a look at the [Advocacy page](#) on our website for additional information, definitions and links to resources.

ARNM.CA

PURPOSE

This resource has been developed to support nurses in their advocacy efforts. It contains basic information about the advocacy process, provides nurses with guidance for planning advocacy initiatives, and includes techniques, tools and templates to simplify efforts.

IMPORTANCE OF ADVOCACY

- Advocacy is central to professional nursing practice and fundamental to the profession's social justice roots.
- Nurses are ideally prepared and ideally situated to exert influence and take on the advocacy role as they are seen to have high levels of credibility.
- The opportunity to make a positive difference on behalf of the profession, the population they serve, and the healthcare system is often why nurses choose to get involved in advocacy work.
- The Canadian Nurses Association Code of Ethics underpins the professional nurse's responsibility to advocate.

When polled in 2018, 91% of Canadians said they had a positive opinion of nurses compared to all other professions (Insights West, 2018).

Nurses endeavor, individually and collectively, to advocate for and work toward eliminating social inequities. They have an ethical responsibility "to advocate for evidence-informed decision-making in their practice including, for example, evidence for best practices in staffing and assignment, best care for particular health conditions and best approaches to health promotion" (Canadian Nurse Association, Code of Ethics, 2017).

Each and every nurse on this planet has a voice. Using that voice to make a difference in leadership and political activism is key to making your voice heard (International Council of Nursing, 2017).

Advocacy

The World Health Organization defines advocacy as "A combination of individual and social actions designed to gain political and community support for a particular goal. Action may be taken by, or on behalf of individuals and groups to create living conditions which promote health" (WHO, 2005).

Advocacy efforts include many different strategies to influence decision-making at a variety of levels to achieve change. These strategies range from speaking individually on behalf of patients and families to creating an organized movement to influence health policy on a political and global scale.

Examples of advocacy



Nurses have what it takes!

Due to their education and training, nurses are already well-versed in the skills necessary for advocacy and use them on a daily basis. This includes problem solving, communication, influence and collaboration.

Skills used in advocacy efforts

Problem Solving: Advocacy focuses on identifying issues or problems in need of a solution (Tomajan, 2012). Nurses are expert problem solvers, and are able to easily transfer these skills to advocacy efforts.

Communication: Clear, concise, factual communication helps to structure messages to ensure they reach the intended audience. Advocates should be skilled in verbal, written and electronic communication.

Influence: They must be able to alter, persuade or sway other's thoughts, beliefs, or actions. Influence is built on competence, credibility, and trustworthiness, characteristics nurses have in abundance.

Collaboration: Working with others using a common strategy helps to achieve a common goal. Collaboration is built on trust, mutual respect and credibility.

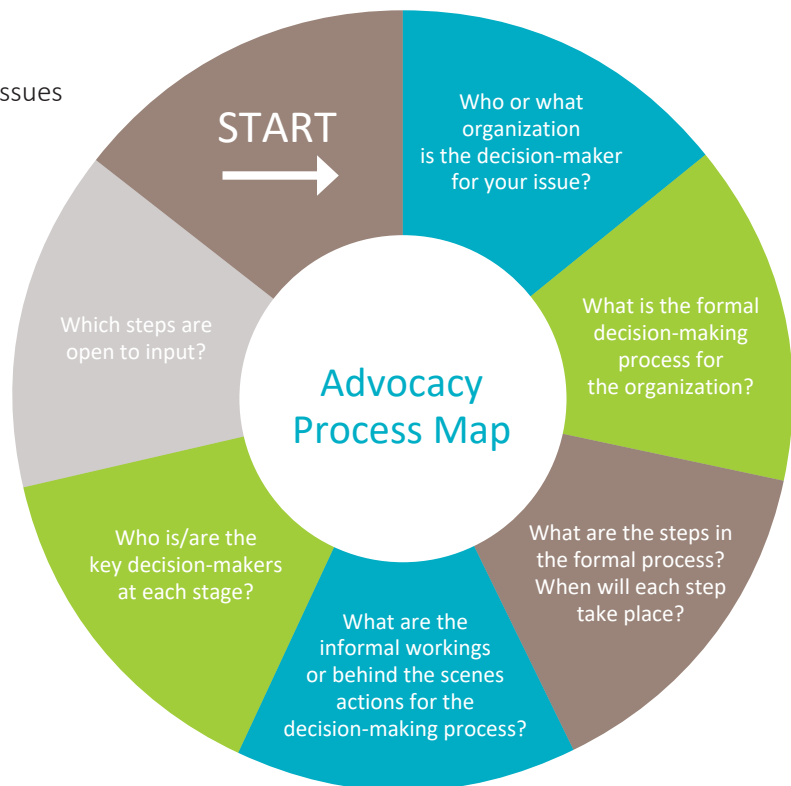
ANALYZING THE SITUATION

Identifying the issue

Advocacy can seem daunting. Choosing issues that are important to you, are current or chronic, and that the public understands will provide opportunities to act and increase the likelihood of your message being heard.

If you can identify an issue, and can identify why it is important, then you must consider your role, and whether you see an opportunity to advocate for change. Consider:

- What is important to you?
- What is important to your colleagues, neighbours, family, community?
- What is important to your patients/clients?



Frame your issue

It is helpful to use a standardized process to communicate the issue and desired result.

- 1. Clearly define the issue you are addressing.** You should be able to do this in a few short sentences. If you can't, your audience won't be clear on what your focus is.
- 2. Explain your expertise.** Whether you are a subject matter expert or someone who has personally experienced the issue you are addressing, be able to explain why you are the one speaking about the issue.
- 3. Define your desired outcome.** Understand what you are trying to achieve. What needs to happen for you to feel like the issue has been resolved?
- 4. Identify the solution you are bringing forward.** You will get further if you can present specific solutions or at least a starting point for addressing the issue. The more work you do, the less you are asking of your target audience and the easier it may be for decision-makers to support your plan.

Identify the evidence

Evidence is the bedrock of all advocacy efforts. Evidence changes and evolves, so ensure you gather the best available evidence grounded in solid research. Consider:

- Does the evidence highlight the cause of the problem, and offer realistic solutions?
- Are inequalities, disparities, and marginalization considered?
- Is the evidence easily disseminated?
- What are the risks in using evidence within a wider context?

Personal stories and anecdotes are powerful examples that put a human face to your issue and illustrate its impact.

Assess the environment

Your issue doesn't exist in a bubble. Your chances of success are influenced by many things including competing issues, the beliefs of your audience(s), public perception and fiscal constraints. If you understand the landscape your issue exists within, you have a better chance of properly positioning your advocacy effort.

Environmental scan

An environmental scan will help inform you of the current and emerging factors that could affect your issue both positively and negatively.

1. **Identify how your issue is perceived** by both decision-makers and the public.
2. **Identify stakeholders affected by your issue.** Determine who will be supportive and engage them. Understand why other stakeholders may oppose you.
3. **Identify other issues** currently affecting the landscape and their potential impact on your success.
4. **Understand the existing fiscal, operational, political and social landscape** depending on the level at which you are planning to forward your issue. You may need to consider this just within your work site or you may need to look at the national or international level.
5. **Identify decision-makers.** Who are they? How much influence do they have? What issues are they interested in or passionate about?
6. **Evaluate current trends in healthcare.** What are people focused on right now? What changes are happening? What isn't happening?

SWOT analysis

A SWOT analysis is one tool used to understand the strengths and weaknesses of your issue and strategy, identify opportunities and recognize the threats you may face with your advocacy effort.



Understanding potential impacts

It can be helpful to understand whether your desired outcome and proposed solution could result in other potential impacts that may be perceived as negative or positive.

For example, research has identified safe injection sites a positive harm reduction strategy, however there may be potential resistance from residents of the neighbourhood who may have safety concerns.

By being aware of potential negative impacts, you can address them if they arise in your conversations and demonstrate that you have a full understanding of both your issue and the landscape it exists within.

GAINING SUPPORT

Advocates constantly build networks among people or coalitions within or among organizations to bring about change. It is integral to identify the individuals and/or groups that are impacted by the issue, as well as those who need to be involved in the advocacy efforts.

Identify stakeholders

- What are their interests in the advocacy efforts?
- Who will gain or be negatively impacted?
- What is their support or opposition?
- What is their influence or the power?
- Who are the primary and secondary stakeholders?
- What are the relationships between individuals, groups, institutions?
- What is their importance? (To achieve support, it is necessary to understand how important a particular stakeholder is to include in the effort.)

Ask

Approaching people to participate, ideally in person, is a great way to involve others. Keep the “ask” simple, ensuring you answer why they should care about the issue. Guide them about how they can be involved and how much time will be required.

Seek a mix of resources

Gather a group of people with different levels of time, skill, and interest in the issue. Consider inviting people with specific expertise, as well as peers, patients and stakeholders who will help to build your case.

Four questions to consider when building support (Kendall et al., 2012)

- At what level are you planning to advocate? (Individual, program, organizational, etc.)
- What types of capacity or skills do you need to assemble? (Strategic planning, leadership, operational)
- What stage of advocacy are you in? (Scanning the environment, engaging stakeholders, sharing key messages, developing action plans)
- What type of strategy is best aligned with your advocacy work? (Top down, bottom up, relationship building, changing a culture)

DEVELOPING THE STRATEGY

A clear, well formulated strategy will assist the decision makers to better understand the issue. This can increase the odds that your advocacy initiative will be taken seriously.

Determine your audience

Your target audience is the decision makers you are planning to approach about your issue. You may have a variety of secondary audiences such as the public, community groups or co-workers.

Develop your objectives

Objectives should be SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. It can be helpful to think of your objectives in stages or time periods as your objectives will adjust the further you get into your advocacy effort.

S	Specific	Having specific objectives ensures that the time and resources invested into a strategy are working towards achieving the overall solution.
M	Measurable	While it is difficult to quantify advocacy action, it is important to develop a way to track what you have accomplished to achieve your goal.
A	Achievable	Evaluate how much time, talent and resources are available to reach your objectives and set realistic goals.
R	Relevant	Focus on actions that work toward the overarching goal.
T	Time-bound	Advocacy requires a level of discipline. Establish clear deadlines to help maintain the issue as a priority and help facilitate time management.

Develop your key messages

Key messages are the main points you want your target audience to hear and remember. Key messages should always center around the facts and evidence in order to ensure credibility in your advocacy effort. You will use these key messages throughout your efforts.

Tips for developing key messages

- Use the KISS principle: keep it short and simple.
- Think of them as sound-bites: succinct, clear and easy to remember.
- Limit the use of jargon or technical terms as much as possible.
- Where possible use statistics and real-life examples so your issue is relatable.
- Determine the best person to deliver the messages based on the audience and method.

Prepare your tools

It is useful to have a variety of different tools and tactics prepared so that you can take advantage of any opportunity to connect with your decision makers and share your key messages. Additionally, it is good practice to have something that you can leave behind after meetings with decision makers or other stakeholder groups.

Tools and methods could include, but aren't limited to:

- Fact sheet
- Infographic
- Letter
- Written proposal
- Elevator speech
- Presentation
- Social media
- Media

Elevator speech

A short 30-60 second speech that summarizes your issue and your goal.

- Share your name and your expertise or why you are advocating for the issue.
- Describe the issue you are addressing.
- Make it relatable – put a human face to it, paint a picture or tell a story.
- Describe what action you are looking for.

Media

The use of media should have its own strategy. Media is best used when your advocacy initiative needs widespread public recognition and support. There can be both positive and negative effects to working with the media.

It is important to keep in mind that when working with the media there is the potential that you may not have final control of your message, which can result in it being misrepresented.

Media tools include media releases, letters to the editor and interviews.

Tips for interviews

1. Know your key messages and keep coming back to them.
2. Understand that media is looking for information that appeals to the interests of their audience. They often have a specific idea or angle that they are looking for you to fill.
3. A reporter is neither your friend or your enemy. There's no need to be apprehensive, but don't get caught up in conversations with them where you "say what you really think".
4. Be conversational, use plain language that the public will understand and don't talk for more than a minute without taking a break.
5. Don't be afraid to reframe the question in a way that works for you or segue into the topic you want to discuss. i.e. "it's really important that I also mention..."
6. Don't be afraid of silence. People often feel the need to fill the gap and this is when they say something they didn't mean to.

EVALUATING YOUR EFFORTS

Successful advocacy is a series of efforts. It may take a significant amount of time before you start to see your work result in change. Don't despair—effective evaluation will let you see the small successes you may have ignored and allow you to adjust your plan to reflect new evidence, support or understanding of the environment.

Using tools to collect, monitor and evaluate data, planning on how the data will be used, outlining specific responsibilities and expectations of team members, target audience and developing indicators of success will help bolster efforts, and identify future advocacy focus.

WORKSHEETS & SAMPLES

Framing Your Issue Worksheet

What is the issue?	
Why are you the one talking about it?	
What do you want to see happen?	
What is your proposed solution?	

Developing Your Strategy Worksheet

AUDIENCES	
OBJECTIVES	
KEY MESSAGES	

Sample Letter



Your name
Your address

Date

Name of recipient
Title
Address

Salutation (Dear _____)

1st paragraph: Let the reader know why you are writing them and what issue you hope to address.

2nd paragraph: Outline the importance of your concerns, the impact on stakeholders and important evidence or statistics to support your case. Make sure to include your key messages.

3rd paragraph: Re-state your concern and clearly identify what action you are looking for the reader to take. Thank the reader for taking the time to read your letter.

Sincerely,

(your signature)

Your name

The professional voice of nurses in Manitoba

105-865 Waverley Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3T 5P4

Toll Free 1-844-355-1520
Direct 204-992-1520
Fax 204-219-3418

armm.ca
@MBnurses
Facebook.com/AssociationofRNsMB