

Effective Advocacy within Primary Health Care Systems

Definitions

Advocacy: the process of influencing people to create change – educating people about a need and mobilizing them to meet it

Psychology advocacy is a process of “informing and assisting decision-makers...who promote the interests of clients, health care systems, public and welfare issues, and professional psychology” (Cohen et al., 2012, p. 152)

Assess: Define the Situation

- One in five Canadians will experience a mental illness
- In Alberta, the ratio of psychologists to people is 1:1500 (or 6.7 per 10 000)
- 77% of psychologists in Alberta work in the Health Care and Social Assistance industry
- Per the Alberta Mental Health Review:
 - Almost half of Albertans have indicated at least one of their needs was not met when accessing assistance for addiction or mental health issues

Plan: Goals & Objectives, Target Audiences, & Key Messages

The Canadian Psychological Associations (CPA) purposes of advocacy include:

- Influencing health, science, and social policy funding and decision making concerning the science and the practice of psychology
- Informing politicians, their staff and the bureaucracy about psychological research and practice and their relevance to government policy and Canadian society
- Establishing liaison with other organizations of researchers and practitioners within psychology and other disciplines and professions

Becoming the Best: Alberta's 5-Year Health Action Plan outlines provincial objectives, including expanding access to primary health care teams, further fine-tuning PCNs, and introducing other ways of delivering primary care.

Act: Develop & Implement Advocacy Plan

- Create actions around the goals & objectives with timely, significant benchmarks to measure success
- One approach is to focus opportunistically on issues that are already priority of government and for which psychology has pertinent knowledge
- Another approach is to choose issues that foster alliances with other programs and organizations – joint proposals often get more attention from decision-makers

For example, if each psychologist in Canada contacted their Member of Parliament and provincial legislator twice a year by letter, telephone, fax, e-mail, or in person - it would result in over 40 000 contacts per year!

Engage the Media

The media has tremendous influence on the public. In a media advocacy guide, the World Health Organization credits the media with setting the public agenda which, in turn, sets the policy agenda.

PAA uses its website and Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn accounts to advocate for psychology; and

- Presents a John G Paterson Media Award for exceptional contributions of portraying psychological knowledge to the public through the media
- Hosts continuing professional development activities centered on media engagement and networking,
- Has a media guide/directory to assist members of the media in locating psychologists with expertise in a variety of topics of psychology

What You Can Do

- Contact your MLA, or Alberta Minister of Health (contact information can be found on the Legislative Assembly of Alberta website)
- Contact your provincial psychological association – Psychologists Association of Alberta
- Contact a national association – CPA, CCPPP, CMHA, MHCC
- Utilize your natural sphere of influence to advocate key messages to colleagues and professionals

More Information

CPA: An Advocacy Guide for Psychologists

Psychologists' Association of Alberta: The Value of Choosing a Psychologist

Alberta Health: Alberta's Primary Health Care Strategy

Valuing Mental Health: Report of the Alberta Mental Health Review Committee 2015

Sources

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