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LEADING POLICY CHANGE IN PUBLIC HEALTH

A Collection of Policy Briefs



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Editorial

Teaching Public Health Change Leadership

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“The time for leaders is too great to leave their emergence to chance” (1). There is a documented need to develop leaders in public health educational programmes at every level (2). We need leaders with vision who can see a future different than the status quo, who can influence and drive change, who are able to communicate their vision and win others to embrace and implement it. Current and future complex public health challenges require public health leaders to use scientific, evidence-based approaches and leadership skills, especially in the area of transformation and leading change. Public health professionals work at the intersection of practice, research, and policy; therefore, they need to identify and understand public health problems, use research and scientific evidence to prepare policy options, and make recommendations for policy change to improve health and wellbeing or effectively advocate for it.

We present the collection of nine policy briefs developed by the students of the Governance and Leadership in European Public Health Master at Maastricht University in the Netherlands in the academic year 2020-2021. The development of policy briefs was a part of the course on leading change in public health, which is one of the topic areas in leadership education and training in this programme. The change leadership approach in this instance was adapted from a doctoral health leadership programme

model first implemented in 2005 by Babich and Brooks and colleagues at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, (4) with further adaptation more recently at Indiana University in the United States.

The main objective of this course was twofold: 1) to facilitate the development of change leadership competencies by the students based on the eight-step Kotter Model of Leading Change (5) including establishing a sense of urgency, creating a guiding coalition, developing a change vision, communicating the vision for buy-in, empowering broad-based action, generating short-term wins, never letting up, and incorporating changes into the culture, and 2) to help the students develop the skills of writing a policy brief as both an advocacy communication and policy change tool that can support public health leaders who want to introduce change.

The students worked in nine five-person leadership tutorial groups. Each group had a case study or problem devoted to a current public health problem, including *Achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Autism and Inclusive Education, Diversity and Inclusion in Public Health Organizations, Vaccination, Public Health Workforce, Artificial Intelligence, Green Deal, Nutrition and Food Policy in the EU and Health Inequalities and Vulnerabilities.*

Experienced academic facilitators were guiding the students in achieving the objectives of the course. Not only had the

participants define and contextualise the problem, which requires policy change, research possible policy options, and develop recommendations for policymakers but also had to propose a plan for implementation of a selected policy option addressing the stakeholders, barriers, and facilitators of change using the Kotter Model. A result of this educational innovation was a policy brief, structured according to the common policy brief logic (6), including:

- Title
- Executive Summary
- Context/Rationale for action on the problem
- Aims
- Proposed Policy Option(s)
- Policy Recommendations
- Sources consulted or recommended
- Information on original research/analysis

We hope that this course helped the students see leadership in a different way, not as a top-down, manage and control process but instead envision a change or transformational leadership, where it is possible to empower teams, collectively solve problems and spark lasting change. We hope that the course helped the students acquire and reflect on some of the leading change competencies such as: *serve as a driving force for change (including strategies of change), being able to identify and communicate the need to innovate when the opportunity arises, understand how change occurs and what stages it involves, lead a team and yourself, influence and communicate, work in interdisciplinary teams, solve problems and understand the impact of change on health.*

In order to educate a new generation of leaders in public health, the educational approaches need to change and provide opportunities for students to act as experts, co-designing real projects that can bring positive systemic changes.

We have the pleasure of inviting colleagues and the SEEJPH readership to find out how the students of the Maastricht University public health leadership programme propose policy change by reading the following collection of policy briefs.

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