

Road safety and public health advocacy: The way forward

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Abstract

While road safety has traditionally been viewed as the responsibility of the transport and police sectors, the public health sector has an important role to play in preventing road traffic injuries through: policy development, advocacy, research, injury surveillance, services, prevention and control, and evaluation. In helping to achieve a goal of strengthening the links between public health and road safety, a framework for advocacy is being developed with a focus on establishing partnerships with a range of organisations and individuals to develop and deliver support for road safety.

This presentation will outline a range of advocacy approaches including:

- Establishing a health advocacy advisory committee to guide and support road safety advocacy strategies
- Developing support materials (including website, factsheets) to assist advocacy strategies
- Developing an advocacy toolkit to support road safety
- Working with key opinion leaders and the media to promote road safety and public health agendas – e.g., official launch of the project in June 2010

Keywords

Road safety advocacy; public health

Introduction

Traditional road safety approaches that focus on behaviour change have contributed to significant improvements in road safety and road fatalities.¹ Many countries, including Australia, have recently seen a 'levelling off' in the reduction of fatalities and road injuries suggesting that a change in the approach to identifying key strategies for preventing road safety trauma is needed.¹

Based on programs in the Netherlands and Sweden, the Western Australian (WA) government and the Road Safety Council (RSC) developed a road safety strategy that was related to both the safe system and Vision Zero approach. Whilst advocating for a system that is tolerant of injuries, within a safe system approach there is a focus on responsible use of the system. In this way, the concept of shared responsibility and safe road use was developed.²

Road Safety in Western Australia using the Safe System Approach

The twelve year strategy, Towards Zero Getting There Together 2008 – 2020, was developed based on four key concepts: the limit of human performance; the limit of humans to tolerate force; shared responsibility; and a forgiving transport system.² This also involved a shift in thinking to prevent fatalities and injuries within the transport system.² Using this approach recognises that road users will continue to make mistakes and there is the need to reduce the consequences of these.¹ Central to this approach is an understanding and acknowledgement that the human body is limited to withstand a certain level of physical force. The aim is to develop improved crash management so that no individual road user is exposed to a crash force that is likely to result in fatal or serious injury.

In addition, the focus is on shared responsibility that provides a holistic approach to managing the interactions between the four cornerstones of the safe systems approach.^{3, 4} The interaction of the system components (ie., vehicle, infrastructure, road user, safe speed) is considered rather than each component separately.¹ It has been estimated that approximately 16,000 people would be prevented from a fatal or serious injury on WA roads if all four key areas of the strategy are implemented effectively over the 12 year period.²

Road safety as a public health issue

While road safety has traditionally been viewed as the responsibility of the transport and police sectors, the health sector has an important role to play in road traffic injury prevention through a range of strategies including policy development, advocacy, research, injury surveillance, services, prevention and control, and evaluation.⁵ Presently, road safety is not a 'top of mind issue' for many health organisations, nor is health a reason for acting on road safety.

Road safety continues to be a major public health issue for WA; it affects everyone, whether they drive, walk or cycle. The benefits to the health sector from improved road injury prevention include fewer and shorter hospital admissions and reducing the level of severity for injuries.⁵ This would lead to savings in terms of monetary, time and community costs. In addition, through making the roads safer for pedestrians and cyclists, more people may adopt a healthier lifestyle by walking and/or cycling.⁵ In helping to achieve a goal of strengthening the links between public health and road safety, the PHAIWA road safety advocacy program (Healthy Roads) focuses on establishing partnerships across a range of public health organisations to develop and deliver advocacy to support road safety.

What is Public Health Advocacy?

Advocacy is about promoting and supporting changes that will improve the health and wellbeing of a community and involves working together to influence others. Public health advocacy involves creating and maintaining effective coalitions, advancement of a public policy initiative through the strategic use of news media,⁶ and applying information and resources that will provide systematic change in the way people in a community live.⁷ It also often involves bringing together different

groups to work toward a common goal.⁸ Advocacy can be planned in a logical manner but in many cases it is a reaction to an event or issue. With this in mind, advocacy involves both reactive and proactive actions; can be used as part of a community initiative; and involves strong relationships and partnerships as well as creativity, innovation and a commitment for the long haul.

Advocacy also requires passionate individuals and organisations to be proactive and also reactive when presented with windows of opportunity to further a cause. Advocacy can take time- changing road safety culture is an ongoing process.

Advocacy has no prescribed or clearly determined method but is about finding combinations of strategies that may be unique to further each specific cause. Figure 1 provides examples of some strategies that can be used as part of a comprehensive approach to advocating for change.



Figure 1: The advocacy wheel

Source: Stafford, J, Mitchell, H, Stoneham, M, Daube, M. *Advocacy in Action: a toolkit for Public Health Professionals*; Second Edition. Perth: Public Health Advocacy Institute of Western Australia; 2009

Promoting Road Safety through Public Health Advocacy Project (Healthy Roads)

Viewing road safety as a critical public health issue is the overall philosophy for the Healthy Roads project, while ensuring that the focus is supportive of the Office of Road Safety's (ORS) systematic approach to road safety. The project, funded through the Road Trauma Trust Fund, aims to develop an advocacy framework to add value to and complement the work currently conducted by the ORS that will

ultimately lead to a reduction in the number of fatalities and serious injuries on the road.

The Healthy Roads project provides support for the WA ORS Towards Zero Getting There Together road safety strategy. The three key focus areas for the project are:

1. developing an understanding and support for road safety advocacy among public health leaders, organisations and individuals;
2. fostering capacity building and knowledge sharing related to road safety advocacy among public health leaders, organisations and individuals, as well as across all levels of government and the community; and
3. establishing partnerships across a broad range of public health organisations to develop and deliver a road safety advocacy framework.

The advocacy framework

The advocacy framework for the project, informed by best practice and evidence-based policy and research, will investigate existing links between road safety and public health and will identify a range of strategies to strengthen these links. In addition, the framework will be aligned with the current ORS Road Safety Strategy.

To achieve this, the framework will build upon available evidence and develop strategies to:

- integrate public health advocacy opportunities to complement work carried out by the ORS;
- generate support for road safety from the public health community; and
- ensure that there is increased and sustainable support for the implementation of the framework.

In addition, the framework will involve a range of strategies that will include media advocacy, political advocacy, organisational advocacy and community based advocacy to assess the potential influence these have on converting “concern” for road safety into “concerted efforts” to reduce fatalities and serious injuries on roads. A review of previous public health advocacy interventions and strategies that have been successful in road safety or other specific settings or issues will determine whether similar methods may be suitable to be adapted for the project.

Advocacy strategies will be utilised to develop commitment for road safety from public health professionals. In addition, it will support collaborative efforts of all stakeholders enabling them to jointly address the problem as well as raising the community concern and awareness that road safety is a public health issue of significant and unacceptable proportion.

Call for Action

The focus for the project is on both short and long term consequences of road injury for individuals, families and the community. In addition, it will provide a resource that is kept up-to-date to inform and stimulate the continued involvement of health organisations in advocating for road safety. The project aims to develop innovative public health advocacy strategies that contribute to reducing fatalities and serious injury on WA roads.

Healthy Roads will have a number of advocacy strategies.

Healthy Roads Committee

The project has established a broad-based health advocacy advisory committee who provide guidance and support for the road safety advocacy strategies thereby ensuring the involvement of a range of health agencies. The committee comprises of health and medical organisations including; Paraplegic Benefit Fund; Royal Australian College of Surgeons (WA); St John Ambulance WA; Headwest (Brain Injury Association WA); Australasian College of Emergency Medicine; Office of Road Safety; Public Health Association Australia and RAC WA.

The committee acts as a resource for road safety advocacy and aims to develop cohesive working between health organisations to complement and build upon work already being done on road safety, with the main focus on road safety as a public health issue.

Media initiatives

The project has a strong focus on developing media strategies and media opportunities for road safety. The committee hopes Healthy Roads become a major point of contact for media enquiries about public health and road safety.

The launch of the Healthy Roads project attracted media coverage from both TV and written press. It communicated the consequences of road injury for individuals, families and the community by using both members of the Healthy Roads committee and a young male who had recently been involved in a car crash. Discussion took place on the experience and long term impact of being involved in a car crash. It also highlighted that the health sector and health organisations have a strong record in prevention and the importance of seeing road safety as an issue for them.

The project monitors road safety media coverage across print media, identifying positive and negative coverage, new strategies and initiatives. Monitoring a range of media helps identify public health and road safety issues aiding in identifying future direction for advocacy opportunities.

The 2010 Federal election provided an ideal opportunity for working with the media and key opinion leaders in promoting the importance of road safety. The project team identified road safety issues that can be advocated for on a federal level. This included advocating for a consistent approach across all jurisdictions in areas such as speed and alcohol and driving. We identified issues that may get some traction as a pre election ask and onto the various parties and public agenda.

There are simple things that can be done when working with the media- for example advocating for changing the language they use when reporting on road safety; the use of crash instead of accident. Simple strategies can have positive, long term effects.

Information sessions

Planning of information sessions is currently underway. The information sessions will be an opportunity to work with local health organisations and health professionals to promote support for road safety activities and increase the level of support for road safety issues among the public health community. The information sessions are an ideal way to show:

- road safety as a public health issue;
- how road safety affects health organisations and what the organisation can contribute to road safety; and
- how health organisations can incorporate road safety into their strategies and policies
- how to start the process of getting organisations involved in road safety advocacy

Road safety advocacy toolkit

The existing toolkit at PHAIWA; *Advocacy in Action: a toolkit for Public Health Professionals* is a resource that focuses on public health advocacy across a range of health areas. The adaptation of this toolkit will specifically look at integrating road safety and public health. It will be tailored to look at what specific advocacy strategies best suit road safety issues and how health organisations can advocate for these issues.

It will also be a resource that health and non health organisations can utilise to incorporate road safety into their policies and strategies.

Workshops/forums

The workshops/forums will focus on key road safety issues and aim to generate collaboration with and commitment from a range of stakeholders, including the private sector to engage in public health advocacy strategies to reduce fatalities and serious injury on WA roads. We will also be linking in with other existing forums that can support road safety and use Healthy Roads partnerships to generate support for these forums.

Supporting material

The Healthy Roads project has a number of supporting materials that it uses to promote road safety advocacy strategies from a health perspective. The project aims to be a continuing resource to inform and stimulate involvement of health organisations and health professionals in road safety. Resources include:

- website; provides supporting documentation on road safety and public health as well as example advocacy strategies that can be used;
- factsheets; cover aspects on the safe system cornerstones. They provide case studies of advocacy strategies used in road safety and what the individual or organisation can do.

Conclusion

Road safety is everyone's business. This program of work is not carried out by any other agencies in WA and there is a unique opportunity to emphasise the importance of public health advocacy in road safety. This project provides an avenue for road safety to be placed firmly on the public health agenda.

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