

# Public Involvement at the Public Health Agency of Canada

Engaging citizens, experts, stakeholders and partners in decision making

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# Public Health Agency of Canada

- Created in September, 2004
- Canada's First Chief Public Health Officer
  - Dr. David Butler-Jones
- Mandate
  - *In collaboration with our partners, lead federal efforts and mobilize Pan-Canadian action in **preventing** disease and injury, and **promoting** and **protecting** national and international public health*

# Public Health Agency of Canada

- 4 Branches
  - Strategic Policy, Communications and Corporate Services
- Risk Communications Unit
  - Risk Communications
  - Public Involvement
  - Research
- Public involvement should “be embedded in the DNA of the Agency”

# Why engage the public?

- Reflect societal values
- Reconcile competing values
- Provide a values “lens” for decision-making
- Draw on collective knowledge
- Validate policies and assumptions
- Legitimacy and Empowerment

# Reality checks

- Political agendas & priorities
- Jurisdictional roles & responsibilities
- Language considerations
- First Nations & Aboriginal populations
- Stakeholder interests

How do we regularly involve citizens in policy decisions in a way that decision makers see value and not threat?

# Building from experience

- History of public involvement activities at Health Canada
- Groundbreaking Policy Toolkit for Public Involvement in Decision Making
  - principles, guidelines and information for the effective involvement of citizens in government decision making on health issues
- [http://www.hcsc.gc.ca/ahcasc/pubs/publicconsult/2000decision/inde\\_e.html](http://www.hcsc.gc.ca/ahcasc/pubs/publicconsult/2000decision/inde_e.html)
- 2004: PHAC to deliver public health goals

# Leveraging experience: Health Goals for Canada

- Consultations were broad and inclusive -provinces and territories, public health experts, stakeholders and citizens all engaged
  - 12 roundtables with stakeholders across Canada
  - 5 expert roundtables on themes e.g. Aboriginal Health, Environmental Health and Social Determinants of Health
  - 5 Deliberative Dialogues with citizens
  - Web surveys
  - Cascading consultations
- 10 Health Goals for Canada that reflect:
  - Canadian voice
  - Aboriginal input
  - intergovernmental input and feedback

[www.healthycanadians.ca](http://www.healthycanadians.ca)

# Learning experience: Health Goals for Canada

- Benchmark example of cross-jurisdictional, multi-layered consultation process
- Reality check: the government fell and no movement to Phase 2 under new leadership

# A pilot application

- The opportunity:
  - Leverage pandemic influenza issues to showcase value of public involvement in policy decisions
  - Deliver a meaningful strategy that leaves a footprint from which to build
- The bigger picture:
  - define long-term vision/guiding principles for public involvement in pandemic planning
  - propose, test and validate activities and approaches that can become core elements of a PHAC public involvement strategy

# Antivirals for prophylaxis

- Task Group mandated to develop policy options and recommendations on the provision of antivirals for prophylaxis
- Policy options and recommendations to be informed by citizen and stakeholder input as 1 of 7 considerations

# Antivirals for prophylaxis

November 2006-January 2007

- 5 citizen dialogues
- 2 target group dialogues
- 2 broad national stakeholder dialogues
- 1 First Nations dialogue
- 1 Roll-up event

# Current environment

- Approvals and buy-in required at various Federal/Provincial/Territorial levels, and across sectors
- Value-laden issue with complex scientific and technical elements
- Strong government and stakeholder positions >> external pressure to make a decision

## Implications:

- Time delays
- Shifting project scope
- Possible cancellations

# Why continue?

- It's the right thing to do, and it's part of our mandate
- Not just to showcase value of public involvement, but to benchmark ways of working across governments and sectors in partnership
- Supports communications and other programs
- Build credibility and capacity by gaining experience

# What we'd like to be able to say to Canadians...

- *“The decision we have made today is not an easy one, nor is it one that has been taken lightly. That is why earlier this year, we engaged Canadians, experts and stakeholders in defining a set of guiding principles for making these tough ethical choices—choices we as policy-makers might have to confront- so we wouldn't have to make them blind, in the heat of the moment. When we asked Canadians what to do regarding \_\_\_\_\_, they said \_\_\_\_\_. That is what we are announcing today.”*



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Public Health  
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# Health Canada's Public Involvement Continuum

