

## Lesson 1: Overview of Policy Evaluation

### Lesson Overview

This lesson introduces you to evaluation as it applies to policy. It lays the foundation for the rest of the course.

First, you will learn what you can expect from the course and some useful information to help you get the most out of your training experience. Then, the lesson provides a quick review of policy, the policy process, and the CDC Evaluation Framework. Finally, you will learn some distinctions between policy evaluation and program evaluation.

This lesson will enable you to

- Define policy evaluation.
- Describe considerations that distinguish policy evaluation from program evaluation.

This lesson should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

### Course Introduction

#### *Overview of Lessons*

#### **Lesson 1: Overview of Policy Evaluation**

This lesson introduces you to evaluation as it applies to policy and provides helpful information about course features.

By the end of Lesson 1, you will be able to

- Define policy evaluation.
- Describe considerations that distinguish policy evaluation from program evaluation.

#### **Lesson 2: Advancing Public Health through Policy Evaluation**

This lesson will help you identify opportunities for advancing public health goals through policy evaluation throughout the policy process.

By the end of Lesson 2, you will be able to

- Explain how policy evaluation can be used to advance public health goals.
- Identify opportunities for policy evaluation throughout the domains of the policy process.

Note that, throughout the course, the phrases “within and across the domains of the policy process” and “throughout the policy process” will be used interchangeably.



### **Lesson 3: Evaluation at Each Domain of the Policy Process**

This lesson will show you how to apply the CDC Evaluation Framework throughout the policy process, including key questions to ask.

By the end of Lesson 3, you will be able to

- Describe how to apply the CDC Evaluation Framework throughout the policy process.
- Identify key evaluation questions to ask throughout the policy process.

### **Lesson 4: Overcoming Challenges to Policy Evaluation**

This lesson acknowledges some common challenges of conducting policy evaluation and explores some methods for overcoming them.

By the end of Lesson 4, you will be able to

- List challenges of conducting policy evaluation.
- Identify methods to overcome common challenges to policy evaluation.

### **Lesson 5: Course Summary**

This lesson reviews all previous learning objectives and presents PDF summaries of each lesson in the course that you can save and print for future reference. It also provides a consolidated list of resources used throughout the course.

## **Policy Process Overview**

### ***What Is Policy?***

Let's begin by reviewing some basic information, starting with the definition of policy. Policy is one potentially effective way to improve the health of populations. At CDC, we define policy as a law, regulation, procedure, administrative action, incentive, or voluntary practice of governments and other institutions.

Policy has been a useful tool in many public health achievements. You will learn more about those achievements in the next lesson.

### **Law**

Federal laws are enacted by Congress and signed into law by the president. An example of a law related to public health is the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, which increases access to healthy food for low-income children by authorizing funding to federal school meal and child nutrition programs.

For more information about the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, download the Fact Sheet from the Resources page.





### **Regulation**

A regulation (also referred to as a rule) is a general statement issued by an agency, board, or commission that has the force and effect of law. Congress often grants agencies the authority to issue regulations. Federal regulations specify the details and requirements necessary to implement and enforce legislation enacted by Congress.

As an example of a regulation, the tobacco industry is prohibited from manufacturing for sale or distribution any tobacco products for which the label, labeling, or advertising contains the descriptors "light," "low," or "mild" (or any similar descriptor). See the CDC Tobacco Controls website for more information about this example: <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/TobaccoControls/>

For more information about regulations at CDC, view the intranet site: <http://intranet.cdc.gov/od/ocs/cdcreg/index.html>.

### **Procedure**

A procedure is an established or official way of doing something. One example of a procedure is implementing universal precautions for preventing transmission of bloodborne infections.

### **Administrative Action**

As used in this course, an administrative action is any action or decision made or issued by an agency, such as an executive order, to implement a policy or program.

An example of an administrative action is a "boil water" notice, such as the one described here:

<http://yosemite.epa.gov/opa/admpress.nsf/0/ECA50B78117D0B4385257537006E4636>.

### **Incentive**

An incentive is meant to motivate or encourage a desired outcome. For example, the Medicare and Medicaid Electronic Health Records (EHR) Incentive Programs provide incentive payments to eligible professionals, hospitals, and critical access hospitals as they adopt, implement, upgrade, or demonstrate meaningful use of certified EHR technology.

### **Voluntary Practice**

An example of a voluntary practice is the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Healthy Hospital Food Initiative:

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/living/cardio-hospital-food-initiative.shtml>



### ***The Policy Process***

Policy development is rarely a linear process; often the domains of the policy process overlap or occur out of order. However, in the ideal scenario,

- A problem is defined.
- Potential policy solutions are identified, analyzed, and prioritized.
- The best solution is adopted and implemented.

Key stakeholders are involved during the entire process. Evaluation also plays a critical role throughout the domains of the policy process.

The CDC policy process model, as shown in the graphic, was developed to foster a common language and understanding of what policy is and the process by which it is conceptualized, developed, adopted, implemented, and evaluated.



### ***Policy Process Domains***

Below are descriptions of each policy process domain. You can read the Overview of the Policy Process document, linked on the Resources page, to learn more.

#### **I. Problem Identification**

Clarify and frame the problem or issue in terms of the effect on population health.

- Collect, summarize, and interpret information relevant to a problem or issue (e.g., nature of the problem, causes of the problem).
- Define the characteristics (e.g., frequency, severity, scope) of the problem or issue.
- Identify gaps in the data.
- Frame the problem or issue in a way that lends itself to potential policy solutions.



## II. Policy Analysis

Identify different policy options to address the problem/issue and use quantitative and qualitative methods to evaluate the policy options to determine the most effective, efficient, and feasible option.

- Research and identify policy options.
- Describe
  - How the policy is anticipated to impact morbidity and mortality (health impact).
  - The political and operational factors associated with adoption and implementation (feasibility).
  - The costs to implement the policy and how the costs compare with the benefits (fiscal and economic impact).
- Assess and prioritize policy options.

## III. Strategy and Policy Development

Identify the strategy for getting the policy adopted and how the policy will operate.

- Identify how the policy will operate and what is needed for policy enactment and implementation (e.g., understand jurisdictional context and identify relevant information and capacity needs).
- Define the strategy for engaging stakeholders and policy actors.
- Possibly draft the policy (law, regulation, procedures, actions, etc.).

## IV. Policy Enactment

Follow internal or external procedures for getting the policy enacted or passed.

Enact one or more of the following:

- Law
- Regulation
- Procedure
- Administrative action
- Incentive
- Voluntary practice

## V. Policy Implementation

Translate the enacted policy into action, monitor uptake, and ensure full implementation.

- Operationalize the policy and define implementation standards.
- Identify indicators and metrics to evaluate implementation and impact of the policy.



- Coordinate resources and build capacity of personnel to implement the policy.
- Monitor and assess implementation and ensure compliance with the policy.
- Support post-implementation sustainability of the policy.

### **Overarching Domain: Stakeholder Engagement and Education**

Identify and connect with decision-makers, partners, those affected by the policy, and the general public.

- Identify key stakeholders, including supporters and opponents (e.g., community members, decision-makers, nonprofit, and for-profit agencies).
- Assess relevant characteristics of the key stakeholders (e.g., knowledge, attitudes, and needs).
- Implement communication strategies and deliver relevant messages and materials.
- Solicit input and gather feedback.

### **Overarching Domain: Evaluation**

Formally assess and evaluate the steps of the policy process, including the impact and outcomes of the policy.

- Define evaluation needs, purpose, and intended uses and users.
- Conduct evaluation of prioritized evaluation questions, for example:
  - Was the problem defined in a way that prioritized policy solutions?
  - How were stakeholders engaged?
  - Is the policy being implemented as intended?
  - What is the impact of the policy on health?
- Disseminate evaluation results and facilitate use of those results.

### ***CDC's Role in Policy***

CDC plays an important role in identifying and describing policy options to address health problems, analyzing policies to understand their potential health and economic impact, and identifying evidence-based policy solutions and gaps in the evidence base.

Keep in mind that you must comply with the anti-lobbying guidance for all federal agencies. CDC does not lobby for or against any legislation, regulation, administrative action, or order proposed or pending before the U.S. Congress or any state or local government or legislative body.

It is inappropriate to conduct activities supported by federal funds that advocate for the passage or defeat of legislation at the federal, state, and local levels. For more information, see the anti-lobbying guidance and websites listed on this lesson's Resources page, accessible from the button at the bottom of the screen.





## What Is Policy Evaluation?

### **Definition**

Policy evaluation is the systematic collection and analysis of information to make judgments about contexts, activities, characteristics, or outcomes of one or more domain(s) of the policy process.

Evaluation may inform and improve policy development, adoption, implementation, and effectiveness, and builds the evidence base for policy interventions.

### ***Overview of Evaluation Within and Across the Policy Process***

#### **Evaluation Within the Problem Identification Domain**

The purpose of evaluation within this domain is to identify the context and cause(s) of the issue and the extent that it lends itself to potential policy solution(s) and prioritized action. This domain asks the question, "What are the causative and protective factors that could potentially be targeted by a policy intervention?"

#### **Evaluation Within the Policy Analysis Domain**

The purpose of evaluation within this domain is to understand the process of policy development, including analysis and prioritization of policy options, contextual support/opposition, and potential public health and economic/fiscal impact(s).

#### **Evaluation Within the Strategy and Policy Development Domain**

The purpose of evaluation within this domain is to assess the prioritized policy (or set of policies) and the adoption and implementation strategies in the specific settings and jurisdictions.

#### **Evaluation Within the Policy Enactment Domain**

The purpose of evaluation within this domain is to assess the process of policy adoption/enactment (including laws, regulations, procedures, administrative actions, incentives, or voluntary practices).

#### **Evaluation Within the Policy Implementation Domain**

The purposes of evaluation within this domain are to

- Understand how the policy was integrated into relevant settings and systems.
- Assess compliance with the policy.
- Identify the occurrence of and variation in intended and unintended outcomes.

#### **Evaluation Within the Stakeholder Engagement and Education Overarching Domain**

The purpose of evaluation within this domain is to evaluate whether relevant stakeholders were engaged, and how they were engaged, in each of the policy domains.



## Why Evaluate Policy?

### Uses of Policy Evaluation

Policy evaluation can have many uses.

- Document and inform the policy development, adoption, and implementation process.
- Assess policy effectiveness at improving targeted health outcomes.
- Assess support for proposed policies.
- Assess compliance within existing policies.
- Inform the evidence base.
- Inform future policies and policy efforts.
- Help identify results of policy efforts, including health outcomes.

One way to make explicit links between policies and health outcomes involves the use of logic models, which you will learn about later in this course.

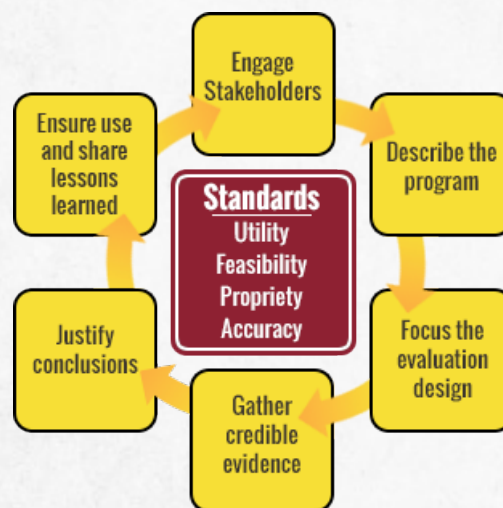
## Distinct Aspects of Policy Evaluation

### The CDC Evaluation Framework

You are probably already familiar with program evaluation and the CDC Framework for Evaluation in Public Health, which provides six practical steps and four sets of standards for designing and implementing any evaluation. The framework is a non-prescriptive tool for organizing the ongoing and iterative process of evaluation.

As with the policy process, evaluation may or may not be a linear process. In particular, the processes of engaging stakeholders, describing the policy, and selecting the focus are interconnected and may occur simultaneously.

The evaluation framework pictured here is a tool that can be applied to address the distinct aspects of policy evaluation. You will learn more about using this framework when evaluating policy later in this course.



### Program

The term “program” is used to describe any organized public health action. Programs can include, among others

- Direct service interventions
- Community mobilization efforts
- Research initiatives
- Surveillance systems





- Outbreak investigations
- Laboratory diagnostics
- Communication campaigns
- Infrastructure building projects
- Training and education services
- Administrative systems

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Framework for program evaluation in public health. MMWR 1999;48(No. RR-11):3.

A description of each step and the categories of standards outlined in the Framework appear below. For more information, visit the CDC evaluation site, linked on the Resources page.

### **Engaging Stakeholders**

This part of the framework entails involving those people and organizations with a direct interest in the evaluation and the evaluation process.

Additional details are included in the document, *Engaging Stakeholders*.

### **Describing the Program**

In this step, you develop a clear description of the intervention including purpose, activities, and intended outcomes/impact. Additional details are included in the document, *Describing the Program*.

### **Focusing Evaluation Design**

Focusing the evaluation design involves deciding what questions the evaluation will answer and what design and methodology will be needed to answer the questions. Additional details are included in the document, *Focusing the Evaluation Design*.

### **Gathering Credible Evidence**

In this step, you will identify how to measure selected outcomes and indicators, and collect the required data. Additional details are included in the document, *Gathering Credible Evidence*.

### **Justifying Conclusions**

This step involves examining evidence collected and testing conclusions against criteria agreed upon by stakeholders. Additional details are included in the document, *Justifying Conclusions*.

### **Ensuring Use of Findings and Sharing Lessons Learned**

You will need to ensure the application of evaluation results by designing the evaluation to achieve intended use of stakeholders, providing feedback to



stakeholders, disseminating results of the evaluation to target audiences, and following-up on the use of the results. Additional details are included in the document, *Ensuring Use and Sharing Lessons Learned*.

### Categories of Standards

The framework also includes a list of standards that are important to keep in mind when conducting any type of evaluation. These standards are categorized into four groups, and the framework asks you to apply each of these four groups as a “lens” to help isolate the best approaches at each step.

<b>UTILITY</b>	Who wants the evaluation results and for what purpose?
<b>FEASIBILITY</b>	Are the evaluation procedures practical, given the time, resources, and expertise available?
<b>PROPRIETY</b>	Is the evaluation being conducted in a fair and ethical way?
<b>ACCURACY</b>	Are the approaches at each step accurate, given the needs of the stakeholders and the purpose of the evaluation?

These standards don’t dictate how to conduct an evaluation; rather, they help assess the many options at each of the six steps and choose the options that are best suited to the particular evaluation.

## Considerations for Policy Evaluation

### *Nuances to Consider*

Though policy may be a type of public health program, policy evaluation can be distinct from other forms of program evaluation in several ways. Some of the nuances of policy evaluation you must consider are shown below.

### Identifying Impacts

Policy evaluation may be one of multiple strategies in a comprehensive multilevel approach to reach a health outcome. Policy making also may involve multiple years between planning, enactment, and outcomes. Thus, documenting a link between the policy and observed outcomes may be difficult. Policy efforts may often develop without an underlying theory, or sometimes without the intention of addressing health, making it harder to recognize or show how a policy may lead to public health impacts.

### Collecting Data

The scale and scope of data collection may differ from program evaluation, with more emphasis on collection of data at system and community levels. Hence, the use





of surveillance and administrative data is more commonly used in policy evaluation depending on the domain of the policy process.

When using existing data to evaluate policy efforts, boundaries may be defined differently (e.g., population or demographic vs. geographic), and defining the audience for a policy effort may be more complicated than for a programmatic effort. Likewise, it may be more difficult to identify a comparison group or community for a policy effort.

People often choose to participate in a program or receive services, whereas with policy efforts, people can be impacted without their consent.

### **Working with Stakeholders**

The type of stakeholders involved may be different, and the appropriate stakeholders for policy evaluation may vary by the particular domain of the policy process. Furthermore, a policy effort may be more heavily dependent on stakeholders to adopt/implement compared to programmatic efforts, and may be more influenced by context. Therefore, many more stakeholders may be involved in policy evaluation than in program evaluation depending on the scope of the evaluation questions.

### **Complying with Laws and Regulations**

When evaluating a policy effort or activities, be aware that the outcomes and measures in the evaluation must reflect activities permitted by federal anti-lobbying guidance.

For more information about legally allowable and restricted activities, read the document, *CDC Implementation of Anti-Lobbying Provisions*, linked on the Resources page.

### **Dealing with Uncertainty**

Policy efforts may be more uncertain and dynamic than programmatic efforts, and you generally do not have control over implementation, participants, and affected parties. There may be more variation in the timeline around policy efforts, whereas a programmatic effort is likely to have a known and defined timeframe, such as a specific funding period.

### ***Example of Program vs. Policy Evaluation***

To further examine how policy evaluation may differ from program evaluation, let's compare two approaches that local public health practitioners might use as they partner with schools to increase students' physical activity.

#### **Programmatic Approach**

Practitioners might implement an after-school physical activity program. To implement this option, they might select an evidence-based physical activity program and partner with a small team of after-school providers to adapt and then implement it for a specified period of time (e.g., 3 months).



In order to evaluate the program, the evaluator may choose to collect data from the teachers and children about the amount of time they are physically active before the program, during the program, and after the program has ended. In addition, the program may include a fidelity measure which documents whether or not it was implemented as intended.

### **Policy Approach**

Practitioners might partner with local schools to implement a district-level policy that requires students to engage in 30 minutes of physical activity each day. The policy allows for flexibility in how schools will meet the policy's requirements.

Practitioners may create a planning team to assess existing practices and resources and collaboratively select from available options, such as adding physical education (PE) classes to the school day, extending the duration of PE class time, or increasing the amount of time students are active during PE class. They would then create implementation plans that address requirements of the district-level policy while integrating the selected approach within the unique circumstances at the school.

To evaluate the school's new policy, the evaluators will determine when the "policy intervention" began (e.g., when the planning team convened to analyze options and develop a policy, or when they began implementing the selected policy).

Because the policy is ongoing, they also will decide when to assess outcomes. The policy is designed to involve multiple stakeholders and affect the entire student population; therefore, identifying sources of evaluation data may not be clear. For example, if the policy required that physical activity be incorporated into academic class time, the evaluator may use observational or survey techniques to assess whether or not these changes occurred. In addition, the evaluator may work with the schools to identify the key changes that they expect to occur as a result of the increased activity.

### **Policy Evaluation Expert (transcript)**

In this scenario, policy evaluation can differ from program evaluation in several ways. The start and end points of the intervention may not be easy to define. The evaluation may begin by assessing the planning process and then later evolve to assess implementation and outcomes. In addition, policy change often requires system change and stakeholder buy-in. Because both of these elements rarely occur immediately, it is important to be realistic when developing a policy evaluation timeline, especially if a policy intervention has not been enacted and implemented.

Collecting data on outcomes for the policy intervention will involve judgments about who may have been affected—for example, all students, a subset of students, or staff—and collecting data from those affected will be more challenging.

In addition to the PE policy intervention described in the example, other similar initiatives may be occurring in the school during the extended period in which the policy is implemented. Depending on your evaluation question, evaluators may need to understand the number and scope of all PE initiatives and account for them in the evaluation.

You can read more about school-based strategies for promoting physical activity in the Action Guide, *School-Based Physical Education: Working with Schools to Increase Physical Activity Among Children and Adolescents in Physical Education Classes*, linked on the Resources page.





### Lesson Summary

In this lesson, you learned what policy evaluation is and how it is distinct from program evaluation. You should now be able to

- Define policy evaluation.
- Describe considerations that distinguish policy evaluation from program evaluation.

The next lesson will build on this knowledge to help you identify opportunities for advancing public health goals through policy evaluation.

