Pathways to Policy:

Lessons Learned from the Coalitions Linking Action and Science for Prevention (CLASP) Initiative

For Nutrition and Food Environment Policy

CANADIAN **PARTNERSHIP** AGAINST **CANCER** PARTENARIAT CANADIEN CONTRE LE **CANCER**

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Executive Summary

Coalitions Linking Action and Science for Prevention (CLASP) was an initiative of the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer (CPAC) that aimed to improve the health of communities and of Canadians. CLASP did this by bringing together organizations from two or more provinces and territories, with research, practice, and policy experts forming coalitions to integrate cancer prevention with strategies to prevent other chronic diseases. All twelve CLASP projects have completed their funding as of September 2016. Through CLASP, numerous policy changes have been documented as evidence of the far-reaching impact of the initiative. In the context of CLASP, policy refers to any of a system of laws, regulatory measures, courses of action, and funding priorities that guide decision-making at an organizational or government level. In addition to policy changes, over 700 knowledge products (e.g., peer-reviewed literature, grey literature, presentations, educational resources, tools, etc.) were developed. This knowledge base presents an opportunity to leverage learnings from the evidence-based interventions implemented through CLASP to the broader prevention community through knowledge mobilization efforts of the Partnership.

The objective of this project was to identify and analyze key lessons learned from the 220 CLASP products and cross-CLASP evaluation data related to the development, implementation, and evaluation of policy interventions and policy changes in the area of food environments. An additional objective was to gather the perspectives of key informants from CLASP projects with respect to lessons learned from their experiences and, through their input, to validate the lessons learned from CLASP project documents. This process was carried out for all twelve CLASP projects following the completion of the final five projects in September 2016.

Through the Pathways to Policy methodology, 260 policy change examples related to healthy food environments and that mapped to World Cancer Research Fund's NOURISHING framework were found from four CLASP projects. These policy changes primarily occurred within municipalities and communities, workplaces, and schools and child care settings.

A central interest in this investigation was the learning that could be gathered from understanding the processes that led to policy changes through the CLASP initiative. By looking across all examples and identifying the mechanisms, processes, enabling factors and approaches that led to policy outcomes, 10 'Pathways to Policy' were identified and grouped into three broad categories: People, Tools, and Approaches and Ways of Working. The Pathways to Policy represent critical success factors for policy development and implementation that are applicable beyond the CLASP initiative and can inform food environment policy work in jurisdictions across Canada.

Pathways to Policy: Lessons Learned from the Coalitions Linking Action and Science for Prevention (CLASP) Initiative

Background

Coalitions Linking Action and Science for Prevention (CLASP) was an initiative of the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer (CPAC) that aimed to improve the health of communities and of Canadians. CLASP did this by bringing together organizations from two or more provinces and territories, with research, practice, and policy experts forming coalitions to integrate cancer prevention with strategies to prevent other chronic diseases.

CLASP responded to the fact that many aspects of healthy living and a healthy environment can reduce the risk not only of cancers but also of chronic diseases such as diabetes, lung disease and heart disease. These common factors include maintaining a healthy body weight, quitting smoking, and reducing environmental and occupational exposure to toxic substances. Seven CLASP projects completed their funding by September 2014, while five projects completed two years later in September 2016. Through CLASP, numerous policy changes have been documented as evidence of the far-reaching impact of the initiative. In the context of CLASP, policy refers to any of a system of laws, regulatory measures, courses of action, and funding priorities that guide decision-making at an organizational or government level.

In addition to policy changes, over 700 knowledge products (e.g., peer-reviewed literature, grey literature, presentations, educational resources, tools, etc.) were developed by the CLASP projects. This knowledge base presents an opportunity to leverage learnings from the evidence-based interventions implemented through CLASP to the broader prevention community through knowledge mobilization efforts of the Partnership. The learnings from CLASP will also help to inform future cancer prevention initiatives of the Partnership.

Objective

The objective of this project was to identify and analyze key lessons learned from the 220 CLASP products and CLASP final reports related to the development, implementation, and evaluation of policy interventions and policy changes in food environments such as schools, recreation centres, workplaces, municipalities and other community settings. An additional objective was to gather the perspectives of key informants from CLASP projects with respect to lessons learned from their experiences and, through their input, to validate the lessons learned from CLASP project documents.

Specifically, the following questions were explored:

- What local, provincial/territorial, and national level food environment policy interventions and policy changes were developed, implemented, or evaluated through CLASP?

  ○ What lessons can be learned from the CLASP experience in developing, implementing, or evaluation these policy interventions and changes (e.g., Who were the key stakeholders?, How were the key stakeholders engaged?, What was unique about the context where this occurred?, etc.)

  ○ Where a CLASP project engaged municipal or other decision-makers to develop, implement, or evaluate a policy intervention or policy change, what were the engagement strategies?

○ What evidence exists, if any, to support the effectiveness of these policy interventions or changes?

- Cross-cutting themes were identified across all the policy interventions and policy changes, and key informants were interviewed to draw from their insights about the important factors in their work.

Methodology

1. The following definition of 'policy change' was used to guide decisions about inclusion/exclusion:

   'Policy change: An organizational or governmental change that results in a shift in operations or decision-making. The change has impact at a population-level on those within the regulating jurisdiction, organization, or groups targeted by the change. A policy change can be legally binding, voluntary, or a signal a shift in prioritization of efforts'.

2. The CLASP product database and existing list of CLASP Practice and Policy Impacts was the basis for identifying CLASP products for review. Each included item was reviewed to screen for policy relevance. Items that referred to a CLASP policy outcome were further reviewed to capture the specific nature of the policy outcome and the processes that contributed to the policy outcome. The relevant information for each item was listed in an Excel spreadsheet.

3. The findings were categorized into broad groupings of policy outcome types, locales, and relevant processes.

4. Overall learnings and cross-cutting themes were identified by reviewing the findings.

5. Ten key informants from four CLASP projects (three from Collaborative Action on Childhood Obesity (CACO), three from Nourishing School Communities (NSC), two from Policy Opportunity Windows: Enhancing Research Uptake in Practice (POWER Up!) and two from Working on Wellness (WoW)) were interviewed about their experiences working on food environment policy-relevant initiatives. A draft report listing preliminary themes was shared with key informants in advance. Interview questions can be found in Appendix I.

6. Key findings from interviews were incorporated into the analysis to develop a final set of key lessons learned.

Findings

Through the examination of CLASP products, 260 policy changes in the areas of food environments were identified. The nature of the policy changes include: changes in policy at recreation centres and daycares to limit or eliminate sugar-sweetened beverages and/or energy drinks; changes in policy to support vegetables, fruit and local food in school lunches; sustainable staffing to support food-related initiatives; healthy choices being available at workplaces; ongoing availability and delivery of healthy eating modules and curriculum in workplaces and for early learning staff; community gardens and sustainable harvesting. These examples came from four CLASP projects:

Collaborative Action on Childhood Obesity (CACO and CACO2) (15). This project aimed to reverse the escalating trend in childhood obesity by increasing access to positive local and culturally relevant and healthy food, physical activity opportunities and mental health supports and by promoting health literacy and evidence-based policy.

Implementation participants included: health NGOs; provincial and territorial governments; First Nations; Indigenous organizations; academic institutions.

Nourishing School Communities (136). This project had the aim of "getting more healthy and local food into the minds and onto the plates of school children across Canada" by increasing capacity to provide healthy, sustainable food, increasing knowledge about healthy eating, and creating and sharing knowledge. The project supported healthy eating through work in schools, after school programs and school/community gardens.

Implementation participants included: health, community and food system NGOs; Indigenous organizations; private food providers and producers; academic institutions.

Policy Opportunity Windows: Enhancing Research Uptake in Practice (POWER Up!) (94). POWER UP! drew upon parallel evidence and experience from tobacco control to strengthen current efforts for cancer and chronic disease prevention in the realm of obesity. The overall goal of POWER UP! was to

provide leadership and support for the development, implementation, and evaluation of obesity-related policy activities (including healthy eating and physical activity) for cancer and chronic disease prevention. Model policy resolutions, based on evidence, were developed and shared with municipalities.

Implementation participants included: municipalities and municipal associations; NWT community governments; provincial/territorial government (health and social services department); public health associations; provincial/territorial NGOs (focused on chronic disease prevention and obesity prevention); and academic institutions.

Working on Wellness (WoW) (15): The project supported the health and wellness of employees in primary industry worksites, as well as Council of Yukon First Nations employees, through the implementation of program modules designed to change workplace policies and employee behaviours in specific cancer and chronic disease risk factors areas (i.e., nutrition, physical activity, alcohol use, sleep, stress, etc.).

Implementation participants included: public health and health NGOs; provincial/territorial government; Indigenous organizations; workplaces and industry; academic institutions.

Policy Actors

The food environment policy work done as part of CLASP initiatives involved a wide range of partners and settings. The policies developed or changed were primarily under the authority and responsibility of municipal or community governments (in some cases First Nations communities); workplaces; and schools, childcare, and early learning environments. In a handful of cases, policies were advanced within the federal or provincial/territorial governments.

Within municipalities, communities, and First Nations communities, policy decision-makers such as politicians, senior bureaucrats, and Band councils were instrumental in advancing policy changes, with their staff working on the day-to-day development and implementation.

Provincial/territorial municipal associations, public health, and chronic disease prevention NGOs played a supportive role in bringing forward evidence, engaging with the public, or sharing best practice policy solutions. The policies developed may have been aimed the population of a community or municipality on the whole, or focused on public facilities or internal processes specifically.

Where workplace policy was changed, chronic disease prevention NGOs took the lead in partnering with workplaces and guiding the organizations towards policy solutions that fit with corporate goals and objectives. Meanwhile, health and safety representatives and senior organizational leadership were critical to bringing about healthier food environment policies by getting corporate buy-in and navigating approval processes.

School and childcare policies occurred within a wider range of partner organizations. Some school policies were changed at the individual school, school district, or provincial/territorial government level, while others occurred within private school food provider companies. Where childcare policies were developed and implemented it was either in a

centre-by-centre basis or an overarching policy change by the umbrella organization. Chronic disease prevention NGOs played a supportive and guiding role in these cases: identifying where policy solutions could impact healthy eating and food environments, bringing forward evidence-based policy interventions, and convening multi-sectoral partners.

Policy Outcomes

The World Cancer Research Foundation (WCRF) NOURISHING Framework[1] is a policy framework to promote healthy diets & reduce obesity. The framework was designed to highlight where governments can take action to promote healthy diets and reduce overweightness, obesity, and in turn reduce the risk of cancer. The framework brings together ten policy areas across three domains: food environment, food system and behavior change communication.

According to the WCRF, the NOURISHING framework comprises a comprehensive package of policies to promote healthy diets and reduce obesity and non-communicable diseases. Each letter in the word NOURISHING represents one of ten policy action areas:

N = Nutrition label standards and regulations on the use of claims and implied claims on food

O = Offer healthy food and set standards in public institutions and other specific settings

U = Use economic tools to address food affordability & purchase incentives

R = Restrict food advertising and other forms of commercial promotion

I = Improve nutritional quality of the whole food supply

S = Set incentives and rules to create a healthy retail and food service environment

H = Harness food supply chain & actions across sectors to ensure coherence with health

I = Inform people about food & nutrition through public awareness

N = Nutrition advice and counselling in health care settings

G = Give nutrition education and skills

(WCRF, accessed at http://www.wcrf.org/int/policy/nourishing-frame-work/about-nourising#what-is-nourishing, March 24, 2017)

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[1] http://www.wcrf.org/int/policy/nourishing-framework/offer-healthy-foods

While aimed at governments, the NOURISHING framework includes components that describe many of the approaches exemplified in the CLASP initiatives. For this report, the framework was extrapolated beyond a government focus to other settings where food environment policy changes were seen in CLASP: workplaces, schools, and childcare centres. It was used as a basis for connecting the policy project outcomes with an established, evidence-informed framework.

The number and specific nature of the policies that came out of CLASP initiatives, grouped according to elements of the NOURISHING framework, are shown in Table 1. The majority of policies arising from CLASPs were in the "O = Offer healthy food and set standards in public institutions and other specific settings" category, with a focus on schools, childcare centres, and municipalities as sites for policy implementation, and "I = Improve nutritional quality of the whole food supply" category, exclusively happening in schools and childcare through private food providers. As shown in Table 1, policy changes from most of the categories were in evidence, although given the nature of the projects, there were no policies in the "I = Inform people about food & nutrition through public awareness" or "N = Nutrition advice and counselling in health care settings" categories. CLASP initiatives had activities that fell under these and other NOURISHING categories, but those activities were not specifically in the arena of policy and, thus, are not presented in this report.

Table 1: CLASP-impacted food environment policies categorized according to elements of the NOURISHING framework[1]

NOURISHING Category	Type of Policy Change	Number of CLASP-impacted policies		
		Community/ Municipal	Workplace	School/ Childcare
N = Nutrition label standards and regulations on the use of claims and implied claims on food	Nutrition labeling on food and beverages		3	
O = Offer healthy food and set standards in public institutions and other specific settings	Implement standards/policies for offering healthy foods and beverages		4	54
	Remove unhealthy foods and sugar-sweetened beverages			2
	Ban sale of energy drinks in community or public facilities resolution or by-law	83		
	Ban sale of sugar-sweetened beverages in public facilities	1		
	Create breastfeeding-friendly spaces resolution	1		
	Access to free drinking water resolution	7		
	Introduce standards/policies for healthy vending machine options		2	1
	Local, healthy food programming integrated into strategic plan and/or operations	2		9
	Revise healthy school food policy			1*
U = Use economic tools to address food affordability & purchase incentives	Taxation of sugar-sweetened beverages included in obesity strategy	1*		
	Decreased price of salad bar to increase accessibility			1
R = Restrict food advertising and other forms of commercial promotion	Introduced Senate bill to restrict marketing of unhealthy food and beverages to children	1†		
I = Improve nutritional quality of the whole food supply	School food provider developed healthier menu options			35
	Food supplier developed new products to meet requirements of healthier school food provider menus			1
	Sugar-sweetened beverages removed from section of school food provider menu			1

[1] http://www.wcrf.org/int/policy/nourishing-framework/offer-healthy-foods

S = Set incentives and rules to create a healthy retail and food service environment	Ban fast food outlets near schools by-law	2		
H = Harness food supply chain & actions across sectors to ensure coherence with health	Nutrition rating system for public facility food and beverage purchasing	4		
	Policy enabling serving of traditional game meats in school			1
	Prioritizing purchasing local, healthy food in local food strategy	2* 1†		1*
	New local food to public institution initiatives in provincial budget	1*		
	Develop new contracts with school food provider for salad bars			5
	Developed new contracts with farmers to procure produce			8
	Revised policy for food service requirements for cafeteria operations			1
	Health and safety committee made responsible for healthy eating and nutrition		5	
I = Inform people about food & nutrition through public awareness				
N = Nutrition advice and counselling in health care settings				
G = Give nutrition education and skills	Healthy eating toolkit accredited/integrated into curriculum for licensed Early Learning Practitioners	2*		
	Full-time/part-time coordinator hired to continue implementation of healthy eating programming	2*	1	5
	Land-sea based food program integrated into school curriculum			3‡
	On-site dietitian hired		1	
	Healthy eating and gardening integrated in school curriculum			4
	Resources allocated for yearly tilling and maintenance of community garden	1‡		
	Sub-Total (by setting)	**111**	**16**	**133**
	Total	**260**		

* Provincial/Territorial
† Federal
‡ First Nations

Pathways to Policy

A central interest in the current investigation was the learning that could be gathered from understanding the processes that led to policy change. By looking across all examples and identifying the mechanisms, processes, enabling factors and approaches that led to policy outcomes, the following pathways to policy were identified. For many of the policy examples in CLASP projects, multiple themes were evident.

Key informants generally agreed with the preliminary themes that had been identified from the documents. Based on their input, some of the preliminary themes were condensed and other themes were brought forward, to create a total of 10 themes.

I. People

Partnerships, relationships and networks

When asked about the important aspects of food environment policy work, key informants uniformly identified partnerships as critical. Part of the reason that partnerships are so important is that the food environment is multi-faceted and complex, and no single or small group of actors can have all the necessary knowledge, relationships or leverage. The value of partnerships is that

the reach and potential of any initiative is increased because with well-placed partners, the project obtains credibility, local knowledge, access to networks, and capacity.

It was important to be intentional about building and maintaining the partnerships. Key informants commented that the key factor was not having many partners, but having the right ones. Diversity among the partners was important. Many informants talked about the need for different layers or levels of partners. For example, diversity could mean having partners who came from policy, practice and research fields, or partners who brought provincial/territorial perspectives along with those who had local/regional knowledge and relationships, or partners who came from grass-roots community action, health-promoting organizations, and business or food production. As one CLASP project evaluation report noted, the challenge of promoting healthy living is multi-dimensional and therefore requires a multi-faceted solution from the collaboration between research, practice, and policy specialists (Collaborative Action on Childhood Obesity (CACO2): Evaluation report, 2014). Understanding the mandates of each partner was also important, with clear expectations of what each partner could bring to the table, where they could have influence, and what areas were not going to be possible

for them to influence. The resource needs of each partner were also important – when time had to be taken away from other responsibilities, providing financial resources to support staffing or backfilling was effective.

Along with the diversity among partners came the need for skilled facilitation of the relationships among partners, as a way of developing common ground and a shared vision, and as a way of surfacing and managing different perspectives and views so that they strengthened, rather than weakened, the partnership.

Key informants also spoke about the challenges created when there was turnover or change in work assignments, emphasizing that relationships are personal and depend on trust being built over time. When roles transition to different individuals, it is important to give time for the people involved to get to know each other and establish shared understanding.

Champions

Most CLASPS intentionally drew on champions who were able to move their work forward in a certain setting or context. Champions were people who saw the connections between healthy food environments and their organization's objectives or their own

roles. In some case, they were individuals who had authority over decision-making and policy adoption within their organization or community. In others, they were individuals within an organization who may not have had direct influence over policy processes, but who were able to gather support and buy-in from their colleagues, senior decision-makers, and community leaders. Champions had roles such as workplace team leads, municipal staff and councillors, elders and community leaders from Indigenous communities, school staff, and medical officers of health. Another specific type of champion identified was the "gatekeeper" – discussed in the next pathway.

Gatekeepers

Through partners, networks and local champions, influential stakeholders that had a gatekeeper role in their specific setting were reached, thus enabling the implementation of food environment changes. Often these gatekeepers on the ground were very close to food options and food provision, such as kitchen staff, vending machine and concession staff, or recreation centre staff. When these gatekeepers were involved in the projects, potential barriers to implementation could be more effectively addressed because food preparation and delivery was (at least somewhat) within their control. On the other side, if these stakeholders had not been involved, the changes might have met with resistance or have been impossible within the setting.

II. Tools

Sharing tools and resources

Creating and sharing tools or resources can be one facet of an approach to food environment policy influence. Tools and resources that were used in these CLASP contexts included policy examples or templates, posters, information sheets, curriculum materials, and evidence and policy briefs. The tools and resources were important contributors to sustainability (discussed below) because the materials meant that the initiative could be somewhat self-sustaining even in the absence of staff or project partners. The resources were not the key to policy change in and of themselves, but in the context of relationships with credible project team members, the tools were a tangible and easy to follow way of describing the "how-to" for a particular change. Tools, used in combination with the right people and the right timing, were valuable, particularly if they had, or could be adapted to have, local relevance. There were numerous examples of tools, such as sample policies, that were felt to have been well received by end users because they were locally relevant and clearly oriented to the context in which they were being shared. This included the design and artwork that reflected local culture, and photos that were recognizable as local or similar to local settings.

Drawing on evidence

CLASPs drew on evidence in various ways to support their food environment policy work. In most cases, the evidence was in the background to the more applied and setting-specific resources that formed the core of the work. For example, although there was evidence to support certain policy approaches, the sample policy templates did not necessarily refer to that evidence in detail. One CLASP described this as: evidence alone is not enough for policy change to occur (Policy Opportunity Windows: Enhancing Research Uptake in Practice: Evaluation Report, 2016). Some key informants mentioned that most people do not need evidence to convince them that problems related to food exist, such as obesity or inadequate intake of vegetables and fruit among children. What was needed in many cases was information about what changes can be made that are practical in a given setting. For people in implementation roles who are not health professionals or researchers, the interest is in jargon-free, relevant material that describes what can be done in clear steps.

For some audiences, such as government policy analysts or multi-national corporations, being able to describe the evidence base that supported a particular action was felt to be influential. Case studies that presented evidence in context were another valuable approach for these and other audiences. In some cases, particular objections to a change, such as the possible impact on revenues of a change to concession menus, could be addressed with evidence from other jurisdictions.

Another role for evidence was found in evaluation evidence throughout the course of the projects. Process and developmental evaluation approaches provided evidence that was used to shift and adjust the project as it progressed.

Knowledge exchange
Key informants spoke frequently about the valuable investment that the CLASPs had made in sharing knowledge. In the context of very diverse partnerships, it was valuable to share knowledge among project team members as well as with broader audiences. Because the success of these initiatives relied on diverse partners coming to a shared understanding and working together, knowledge exchange was an enabler because it allowed different perspectives and interests to be surfaced

and discussed. Once that shared understanding was established, momentum and coordinated action could result. Knowledge exchange also allowed learning from other jurisdictions and provided opportunities to gain inspiration and ideas from others. The function of knowledge exchange as a capacity building strategy was also noted as important for sparking new partnerships, new approaches and building a stronger foundation of support with stakeholders (Nourishing School Communities: Evaluation report, 2016).

III. Approaches and Ways of Working

Understand that food is part of a system
Several CLASPs started from, or came to, a framework that placed food choices in the much larger context of a political, economic, social and cultural system of food and other resources. The "food system", which was a term used by some CLASPs to describe the field in which their projects were situated, allowed them to appreciate and work with the many aspects of food that were important for their desired outcomes. It was also a way of finding a place for diverse partners who all had some piece of the food system, and of valuing the different contributions of partners, knowing that no one partner had access to the entire system.

Key informants described the use of guiding frameworks or principles that they returned to as a way of grounding their work and staying oriented. In such a complex field as food environments, it was important to develop a shared vision and to keep going back to that vision as the project progressed.

For some projects and partners, a "food systems" perspective led them to emphasize local food, or to incorporate local and traditional food into policies when possible. For other projects and partners, local food was not a critical part of their approach in the setting. For example, for remote workplaces with challenges related to food transportation, or in schools where costs are a significant driving factor, it was meaningful to be moving toward healthier food choices – to also incorporate local food might have been impractical and would have taken away from the implementation of other important changes.

Appreciating the meaning of food and food choices was important for projects in responding to the particular nature of food that makes it different from other aspects of healthy choice. Food, within a system, represents comfort and culture, and changes to food availability are often met with strong resistance because food is embedded in very personal experiences and contexts. Some key informants also

remarked on a key learning that food is a business, and to remove or alter food choices has a direct effect on someone's livelihood. It was important to recognize the very direct implications of food and beverage sales for providers, vendors, and settings such as recreation centres that derive proceeds from sales. Even schools, with pizza and hot dog sales or fundraising with chocolate bars, have revenue aspects to their food system. For many projects, the emphasis was on offering healthy choices and encouraging experimentation, rather than restricting or eliminating certain types of foods or beverages. In some contexts, however, there was a staged approach that coupled increased availability of water, for example, with a ban on energy drinks.

Flexibility and adaptation to context

It was necessary to understand and adapt to the setting and to recognize the ways of operating. For example, workplaces have business cycles, labour-management structures, head office reporting requirements and strategic directions; schools and recreation centres have the needs and preferences of parents and children to take into account. First Nation communities and rural communities have local customs and culture that influence who needs to be involved in a decision and what their preferences may be. By

taking steps to understand the drivers or key features of a setting, it was possible to adapt and align, making it easier for the setting to implement proposed changes that they had been a part of developing.

Although collaboration and flexibility were certainly hallmarks of CLASP work on food policy, the key informants were also clear that getting things done required some directiveness and strategy. Projects worked with those who were ready and moved forward according to the project vision. They were flexible, but also saw the need to challenge and push in order to propel changes forward.

Attend to implementation and sustainability

In their policy work, CLASPs recognized that a formal policy, in and of itself, would not be enough to bring about change in food environments. Formal policies were a possibility in some cases, but much of the work had to do with supporting implementation of policy and environmental change approaches. Building interest, listening to concerns, adapting, offering options – all of these were valuable approaches that might have had little direct effect on a written policy, but had everything to do with the willingness of these settings to consider change, to contribute to planning for and implementation of change, and to sustain

the changes over the longer term. As noted in one project evaluation report, where workplaces were engaged, external support was also viewed by employers as external accountability for carrying through with the project activities and delivering the expected results (Working on Wellness: Evaluation report, 2016).

Policy examples and supports were important, but for some projects, this was not the place they started. As one key informant described, "we really just wanted to do things together. We had some policy people at the table and that's what they knew about. It made sense to do policy work for sustainability, so people supported it".

An interest in sustainability seems to have been a driving force behind a policy approach for most projects. Key informants remarked on the effective emphasis, from the beginning, on sustainability planning within the CLASP initiative. One example from a key informant was that, because they were constantly considering sustainability, they worked with certain settings and stakeholders that may have taken more time and effort, but were also more likely to lead to sustainability. This project did not pursue the highest possible volume of partners or settings: guided by sustainability concerns, they focused on a smaller number of partners and settings

that required significant time and investment, knowing that these contexts had more potential for long-term sustainability and leverage. Thus, an interest in sustainability actually influenced the choice of partners and settings from the early stages.

Prepare for opportunities

In order to work on policy initiatives, an understanding of the political decision-making context, political cycle, drivers, and influences is critical. Key informants from two of the CLASPs used the phrase that "policy is political" to describe this pathway, recognizing that that policy takes time and there will be aspects of change that are beyond anyone's control; nonetheless, it was possible to prepare, be ready, and then wait for the right opportunity to bring initiatives forward. Recognition of the time investment required for policy change was important for projects as they tried to maintain momentum, respond quickly to policy windows, and manage expectations about the rate and amount of policy change that would be possible within their timeframes. This pathway to food environment change connects to flexibility and adaptation: it was important that the projects were willing to assess the current state in a given setting, and be willing to move forward with those stakeholders from wherever they were starting.

Limitations

The objective of the resources, publications and final reports from CLASP projects was not specifically to document their policy strategies. As a result, there are several CLASP policy outcomes for which there are few details on contributing factors or processes. As well, we do not have formal evaluations of most of the policy interventions to consult. Thus, this investigation, although able to identify many intriguing examples of policy development and implementation, may not have been able to identify all the relevant factors that contributed to the policy outcomes.

Although key informant interviews were conducted to delve more deeply into some experiences with policy initiatives, it was not possible to interview all possible representatives from the relevant CLASP projects. As well, key informants often pointed out that the work they were able to report on was not always specific to CLASP, but was linked to other projects and initiatives in addition to CLASP.

References

Collaborative Action on Childhood Obesity (CACO2): Evaluation Report (2014)

Policy Opportunity Windows: Enhancing Research Uptake in Practice: Evaluation Report (2016)

Nourishing School Communities: Evaluation Report (2016)

World Cancer Research Fund. NOURISHING framework. [Last updated: February 28th, 2017.] Available at: http://www.wcrf.org/int/policy/nourishing-framework.

Working on Wellness: Evaluation report (2016)

Appendix: Key Informant Interview Questions

1. Please describe your role in the CLASP project.

2. Most CLASP food environment policy changes involved partnerships. In your case, what were key factors in making the partnerships successful? How could the partnership work have been improved?

3. Most CLASP food environment changes involved adapting to or aligning with the setting or local context. What kinds of adaptation or alignment were important in your case? How could adaptation and alignment have been improved?

4. What strategies were used to engage or influence stakeholders? Were there some strategies that did not work well?

5. Most CLASP food environment changes involved sharing or using products, such as sample policies, evidence briefs, toolkits, etc. In your case, what factors facilitated the uptake of products and tools? What factors prevented uptake?

6. What factors contributed to sustainability for these initiatives? What were the challenges?

7. Through CLASP document review, we identified some themes that may have supported or contributed to change in food environment policies in CLASP projects. Not all of these themes would be expected to be evident in every project. Which of the themes do you think were key for the CLASP policy interventions in your site? Were there other key factors?

8. Are there particular aspects of working on food environment change that make it different from other healthy environment initiatives?

9. What advice would you give to some one aiming to undertake a food enviroment policy initiative, based on your experience with CLASP?

10. Do you have any other lessons learned about ways that public health and partners can work effectively toward creating and sustaining healthy food environments?

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