

Planning and Engaging Across Sectors and Settings for Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) Interventions

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The OPUS learning guides are designed to help professors, students, and early career researchers easily access key takeaways from the OPUS workshop series and incorporate the lessons into the classroom and applied research projects.

In this presentation, Dr. Erin Hennessy discusses the value of using a systems thinking approach to engage partners across sectors and settings. She highlights key areas of planning and working with communities to drive policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change to address obesity. For definitions of key terms used in this presentation, see below.

Engaging Communities in PSE Change

To drive PSE change, it is important to engage and train partners from various sectors in systems thinking, including those working on the ground to address obesity. In her presentation, Dr. Hennessy describes the Catalyzing Communities Initiative, an approach to engaging multisectoral community partners in systems thinking to align goals and values and create a shared agenda for whole-of-community systems change. This shift to a more comprehensive, cross-sector approach ensures that PSE efforts are both community- and expert-driven.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe how an integrated, complex systems thinking can drive PSE change and innovation in the field.
- Explore how to engage multisector partners in systems thinking.
- Identify how to address challenges around engaging community partners.

Key Terms



Authentic community engagement: A participatory approach in which people and organizations in communities are not merely involved but are truly empowered as experts and decision makers



Policy, systems, and environment approach (PSE): Aim to create lasting improvements in individual and community health by changing rules or laws (policy); structures or networks that influence how services are delivered or resources are allocated (systems); and physical, social, or economic environments to drive behavior and culture change at a macro level



Systems thinking: An approach to problem-solving and innovation that views problems as part of an interconnected system with various parts that dynamically interact with and influence each other

Strategies for Driving PSE Change

Dr. Hennessy highlights four key areas for planning and engaging with communities to drive PSE change:

1. **Expand your focus beyond obesity:** This shift in framing helps researchers and practitioners consider the community's assets, wants, and needs, not just its challenges or problems.
2. **Use approaches that reflect the many factors that contribute to obesity:** Considering the perspectives of all players helps researchers and practitioners shape the questions they want to answer and the levels where they intervene.
3. **Use various practices, tools, and techniques to drive innovation:** The resources available to practitioners and researchers are always evolving, helping them meet the needs of the ever-changing field. Tools to support systems thinking transformation include group model building, system dynamics modeling, and social network analysis.
4. **Address longstanding issues:** Removing structural barriers and preparing for potential turnover in community partners helps make efforts more resilient and sustainable.

In her presentation, Dr. Hennessy shares several models and resources to support systems thinking. She also shares strategies to address the challenge of engaging partners across sectors. View her OPUS presentation to learn more.

WATCH THE KEYNOTE

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Reflection Questions

Imagine you are convening a local coalition of multisector leaders to work together to address child obesity in their community:

1. Thinking about the many drivers of obesity, what perspectives would be important to consider? What players would be important to speak with?
2. Using an asset framing approach, how would you talk to the community about obesity and its impact?
3. What are some structural barriers you might need to address in the community to ensure your efforts are impactful and sustainable?

Dive Deeper: Additional Readings and Resources

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