

## **What is Advocacy?**

Everyone at some point in their lives will face an issue that they will feel strongly enough about to stand up and say that something needs to be done to change it. A good example is a person living with HIV/AIDS who stands up and asks why not enough is being done to prevent and treat this illness.

Advocacy as defined by the World Health Organization is, "... the pursuit of influencing outcomes".

## **Who is an Advocate?**

An advocate is someone who is *advocating* for an issue or a cause.

To be a successful advocate, you should be:

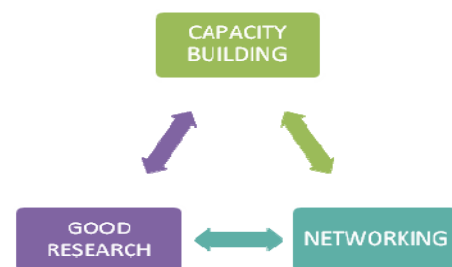
- Strongly committed to seeing a particular change happen
- Willing to learn and develop an understanding about the issue
- Able to translate your understanding into a plan of action
- Not hesitant about going public with that understanding

## **Advocacy involves...**

**Capacity Building** so that the community/group you represent will actively participate in making changes

**Networking** in order to put together resources that you need

**Good Research** so that the problem and possible solutions can be clearly identified



## **Why is Advocacy So Important?**

\* Because decision-makers react to the groups or people who most effectively bring their issues to the front line of the public agenda.

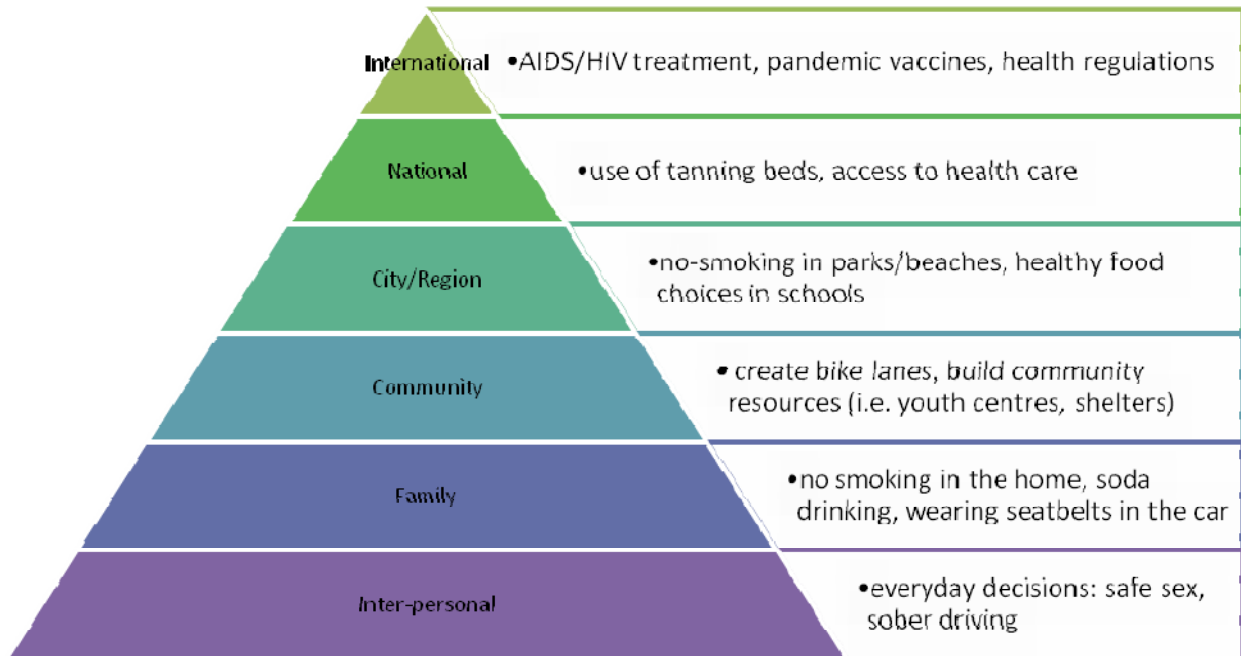
\* Because all governments have different interests and concerns, as well as their own policy priorities and financial challenges – those who can best engage in this process will have their voices heard.

\* Because if you choose not to get involved, you will have no say in decisions that could have a substantial impact your lives.

\* Because you as voters (or soon-to-be voters), taxpayers and citizens have the power to make changes around your issues.

### ***Where does Advocacy Happen?***

Advocacy takes place at different levels according to the problem and the types of groups involved. Examples of decisions made at different levels include:



(Adapted from TearFund Advocacy Toolkit)

Changes made at one level influence people at another level. So, advocacy is needed at all levels for lasting change. People in communities suffer the effects of decisions made at higher levels. But people in communities can influence these decisions by voting and lobbying decision-makers at higher levels.

### ***Different Ways to Advocate (make your voices heard)***

#### **1. Making a Telephone Call**

The telephone can be a useful tool for letting others know about your concerns and ideas, as well as for collecting information. You may want to call to express your opinion with an elected official, to gain support from other groups for a project, or to let community members know of an important meeting or event.

#### **2. Writing a Letter to an Elected Official**

Letters can be a basic tool in educating officials and other decision makers of their citizens' views.

### **3. Visiting an Elected Official**

Before you visit an official, be sure you have studied your issue and can talk clearly about the problem, the solution you favor, and why you believe it is the best course of action. You should be able to explain your main concerns in two to three sentences.

### **4. Creating and Circulating a Petition**

A petition is a paper with a collection of signatures that shows that many people agree with your position. It shows group strength and can be a powerful tool for gaining attention for a problem or project.

### **5. Writing a Letter-to-the-Editor**

A Letter-to-the-Editor provides a chance to comment on articles and advertisements appearing in local newspapers, as well as on current issues. Studies show that people read the Letters-to-the-Editor sections more than they read the editorials by journalists! More importantly, Letters-to-the-Editor is widely read by community leaders and law-makers to learn public opinion about current issues in the news.

### **6. Writing a Media Advisory**

A media advisory is a useful tool for summarizing your key arguments in a way that draws the media's attention.

### ***Examples of Health Advocacy by Youth***

**Flavour Gone** is a youth led, Ontario based group working to ban flavoured tobacco products in Canada. They use their website to raise awareness of the harms of flavoured tobacco products. They also have on-line petition where people can sign to ban flavoured tobacco products.

<http://www.flavourgone.ca>

**Global Youth Voices** uses photography, video, art, and stories to explore and express strengths and weaknesses of their community. Youths identify key issues and plan an action project to voice their concerns in order to improve their communities. Check out their website for different projects (youth action projects) young people initiated.

<http://www.globalyouthvoices.org/>

**Advocates for Youth** works with many health care providers, educators and other youth-serving professionals, to build capacities of young people to make informed and responsible decisions about their reproductive and sexual health. They also work in partnership with federal, state and local organizations to educate legislators and elected officials on a variety of issues that impact the sexual and reproductive health of young people.

<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/>

## References

Youth Advocacy Training Institute (n.d) Advocacy for health 101 [Facilitator's handbook]. The Lung Association, Ontario, Canada.