

GOVERNMENT MECHANISMS AS OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE

Government agencies continuously engage in processes that offer opportunities to incorporate a health lens, foster new intersectional relationships, make recommendations for intersectoral action, or embark on a more structured Health in All Policies approach. For example, agencies develop reports, sponsor conferences and educational events, develop grant programs, write proposals to obtain new funding, engage in strategic planning and accreditation processes, respond to natural disasters, and in some cases develop and propose regulations and legislation. The table below describes government functions^{88,89} and provides examples of how each of these may offer “windows of opportunity” for embarking on new partnerships to support specific healthy policies or programs, or for launching a Health in All Policies initiative.

GOVERNMENT MECHANISM	OPPORTUNITY	POSSIBLE ACTION
DATA	Government agencies collect, standardize, and disseminate information and data. Sharing data or standardizing data elements across agencies can ensure more effective collaboration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve data sharing and collaborate on data collection between schools and social service agencies to improve access to nutrition assistance programs. • Include indicators related to the social determinants of health (e.g., income and employment, housing, and transportation) in health department reports.
DIRECT SERVICE PROVISION	States, counties, and cities provide direct services to communities and individuals. Departments can expand or create new services, better customize services, link services, and reduce barriers to access.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include healthy homes assessments in weatherization programs. • Incorporate health screening into intake processes at youth detention facilities.
EDUCATION AND INFORMATION	Agencies educate and inform the population on topics relevant to individuals, organizations, communities, and businesses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate messages around the importance of physical activity in promotional materials for a park. • Require that nutrition information be either posted or appear on the food labels of all food sold on school grounds or at school-sponsored events.
EMPLOYER	Governments employ staff in offices, parks, schools, and throughout cities, counties, and states. Employee policies can encourage healthy behaviors and also set a positive example for private businesses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide transit subsidies to encourage employees to use public transportation. • Provide lactation accommodations, including specially designated rooms and refrigerators, to support breastfeeding.
FUNDING	Grants provide funds to support specific projects or activities. Subsidies are assistance (monetary or otherwise) that reduces the need for monetary expenditures. Grants and subsidies can be used to encourage health-promoting actions. This includes payment for health-promoting services (e.g., Medicaid or Medicare).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer childcare subsidies to support workers with children. • Incorporate health and health equity criteria into requests for proposals from agencies outside the public health field.

GUIDANCE AND BEST PRACTICES	Guidelines can be used to encourage communities to implement best practices or proven methodologies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate strategies that promote community health into comprehensive land use and transportation plans or community climate action plans. • Share evidence to inform the adoption of evidence-based and evidence-informed strategies to address crime prevention.
PERMITTING AND LICENSING	Permits and licenses provided by government bodies authorize particular types of activities or development. ⁹⁰ Zoning, for example, is used to divide land into areas for allowable uses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamline permitting processes for farmers' markets to provide healthy food in underserved residential neighborhoods. • In the housing element of a comprehensive plan, outline a method for encouraging housing development near public transit hubs.
PURCHASING: PROCUREMENT AND CONTRACTS	Agencies spend significant money purchasing goods like food, supplies, and equipment, and contracting for services like construction and janitorial services. Procurement and contracting policies can promote other desired outcomes such as economic resiliency, and are a way to model behavior for other agencies or private businesses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish procurement policies that require vending machines on agency property to provide a minimum number of healthy options. • Establish policies supporting contracting with veteran-, minority-, or women-owned businesses.
REGULATION	Agencies can add, abolish, or change regulations, close or open loopholes, improve enforcement, or change complaint mechanisms for the public. Regulation is often useful in situations where consumers lack essential information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve enforcement of smoking bans in multi-unit housing structures. • Develop a regulation to apply a health analysis to budgetary and legislative decisions.
RESEARCH AND EVALUATION	Agencies may initiate research, or partner on projects with universities, research institutions, and communities. Evaluation can promote best practices and support model programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct economic research on the expected return on investment in terms of health outcomes from specific policies or types of policies. • Research new fuel technologies to identify strategies to improve air quality.
LEGISLATION AND ORDINANCES	State legislation and local ordinances provide funding or authorize new programs, regulations, or restrictions. Government agencies vary in their legal ability to support the passage of legislation and ordinances.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amend a local ordinance to allow mobile produce vending in a residential area. • Pass legislation to support access to safe, clean, and affordable water.
TAXES AND FEES	Governments can add new taxes, change or abolish existing taxes, or change the tax base to finance needed services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase vehicle licensing fees to raise revenue for supporting transit projects. • Raise cigarette taxes and use the revenue to pay for health care services and discourage tobacco use.
TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE	Agencies provide training and technical assistance to support local programs in working toward ongoing goals, and as programs and policies change. Both interagency and intra-agency training are essential to support collaboration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate non-health staff on how their work relates to health outcomes. • Provide technical assistance to regional transportation agencies on how to incorporate health considerations and outcomes into transportation modeling.