



What are Policy, System and Environmental Change Strategies?

Policy, system, and environmental (PSE) change strategies are approaches to behavior and culture change that aim to create lasting improvements in individual and community health and well-being. PSE change seeks to make healthier choices more accessible to all. We know that our health and well-being are supported by the places we live, work, worship, learn, and play. Our ability to make healthy choices is affected by the availability, affordability, and accessibility of the vital conditions (for example, humane housing, meaningful work and wealth, transportation) we all need every day to thrive.

Creating policies, systems, and environments by adopting new laws, changing organizational policies, or shaping physical landscapes can positively influence community health and well-being. Actions focused on changing conditions through PSE are more effective than traditional programs alone because they create more supportive environments, reach more people, and lead to more impactful change.

The table below illustrates the distinct characteristics of programs versus policy, system, and environmental (PSE) approaches.

Characteristics of Programs vs PSE Changes	
<p>Programs and Events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occurs one time • Additive: can result in short term, individual behavior change • Focuses on individual behavior • Not part of an ongoing plan • Short term • Non-sustaining 	<p>Policy, System, and Environmental Changes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing • Foundational: can shift population behavior and culture over time • Focuses on population change • Part of an ongoing plan • Long term • Sustaining

- **Change:** The process of modifying policies, systems, and/or environments in a sustainable way that promotes equitable health outcomes for everyone.
- **Community:** A diverse group of people whose connections and relations are shaped by geography, shared resources, needs, experiences, culture, and/or shared environments in settings such as worksites, schools, and organizations.

Policy Change

Policies are laws, ordinances, resolutions, mandates, regulations, organizational guidelines, rules, or practices. Policies:

- Are in writing
- Set expectations that people and organizations will follow them
- Are enforceable beyond relying on social and cultural norms.

Policy examples include:

- **MN EATS:** lactation support policies for communities, employees, parents, students, and visitors
- **MN MOVES:** school does not allow withholding of recess as punishment
- **MN Well-being:** require training for management on how to support staff
- **MN Breathes:** update K-12 school policy to comprehensively address e-cigarettes and prohibit schools from accepting industry support

Systems Change

Systems change involves processes, procedures, relationships, and power structures in a community or organization. It is the way organizations and communities operate or do their work.

Systems change examples include:

- **MN Eats:** childcare directors and staff are trained to offer educational supports to expecting parents/new parents about chest feeding
- **MN MOVES:** a community prioritizes safe and active routes to parks or food outlets (or other important community places) in community planning
- **MN Well-being:** employees are routinely included in decision-making processes, such as workplace wellness committee
- **MN Breathes:** point-of-sale enforcement policies and measures focus on retailers instead of youth purchase, use, or possession

Environmental Change

Settings and spaces within which organizations operate, and within which people live, work, study, play, and pray. The environment change:

- Can be tangible (physical structures, “the built environment”) or
- Intangible (for example, having cultural, social, or economic dynamics)

Environmental change examples include:

- **MN EATS:** create a lactation space/facilities to support chest feeding employees, students, community members
- **MN MOVES:** ensure sites offer facilities to support active transportation (like bike racks)
- **MN Well-being:** create a quiet room or wellness spaces for employees to support well-being and resiliency
- **MN Breathes:** reduce youth exposure to commercial tobacco in retail environments and places like schools, parks, and workplaces

How to Make PSE Change

- **For policy change,** one may collaborate with the organization’s leadership team to propose and champion healthy policy changes aligned with the project goals.
- **For systems change,** one may initiate partnerships with organizations and institutions to transform organizational culture and processes contributing to the issue.
- **For environmental change,** one may identify and advocate for healthy physical changes in the environment that can support the project objectives.

For more information: www.olmstedcounty.gov (Search: SHIP)

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