

POLICY BRIEFS WITH PERSONALITY: HOW TO INNOVATIVELY DISSEMINATE EVIDENCE FOR ADVOCACY

Yohualli Anaya, MD, MPH¹; Alison Huffstetler, MD²; Yalda Jabbarpour, MD²; Andrew Bazemore, MD, MPH^{3,4}

¹ University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health

² Robert Graham Center for Policy Studies in Family Medicine and Primary Care, Washington, DC

³ American Board of Family Medicine, Lexington, KY

⁴ Center for Professionalism & Value in Health Care, Washington, DC

While family medicine physicians, educators, researchers, and trainees offer unique insights capable of informing policy and shaping upstream factors that influence our patients' health, they receive limited training in how to shape those insights into effective communications for advocacy.

One way to influence action around issues that impact clinicians and their patients is through policy briefs. Policy briefs have long been used to disseminate evidence, patient narratives, and policy implications and recommendations, aiming to provide impartial insights to the policy makers.

What Is a Policy Brief?

- A concise document to present a policy issue, the available evidence, and recommendations on best options to help the audience make informed policy decisions
- Typically targets federal, state, or local decision makers (eg, staffers, organizational leadership, community leadership/organizations, health professionals, the media)

Types of Policy Briefs

- Briefs for an academic audience published in academic journals. While still containing a clear message, they may not have specific policy targets but rather aim to raise awareness (see jabfm.org/content/subject-collection-policy-briefs).
- Briefs for a legislative audience distributed to members of congress and their staff, as part of advocacy efforts, and distributed to a wider audience depending. Your institution's or specialty association's government relations office can assist with arranging legislative visits.

What to Include

- A clear, concise, informative, and engaging title
- An easy-to-understand background summary of the issue. Framing should be relevant to your audience and the type of policy intervention you seek. Limit your background to 200 words. Include a problem statement that crystalizes the discrepancy between the current and desired states.
- Objective facts to support your recommendations
- Visual media (eg, figures or infographics) to illustrate your data

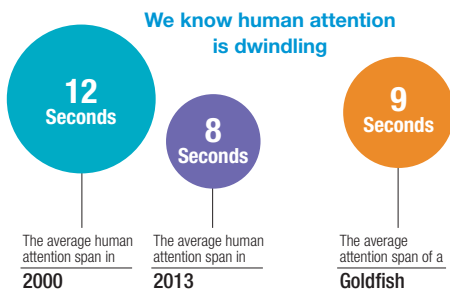
- Evidence-informed policy alternatives and recommendations with a discussion of how they contrast with the current policy approach
- A brief list of sources

Constructing an Effective Policy Brief

- Define the problem³
- Convince your reader of the importance of the problem and the necessity for policy action
- Stay narrow in scope to stay concise
- Use headings, short sections, and visual aids to make your information easy to follow
- Complement evidence with anecdote and include a compelling story
- Avoid jargon
- Provide feasible, concrete policy solutions grounded in evidence and within the scope of your audience
- Thoroughly consider all relevant stakeholders, avoid inadvertently excluding any group, and consider unintended consequences.

Final Tips

- Know your audience and tailor your message to their interests, knowledge level, and needs.
- Consult a resource on applying an equity lens to consider individual, institutional, and systemic levels, and ultimately promote equitable policy.⁴
- Construct briefs on actionable issues, relevant to policy makers (eg, executive, legislative, academic) with clear recommendations for practical solutions. If there is no action item, the topic may not be appropriate for a brief.



Acknowledgments: The authors are grateful to Rachel Lundwall, Research Writing Specialist at the UW-Madison Department of Family Medicine and Community Health for her editorial support.

References:

1. Society of Teachers of Family Medicine. Advocacy Resources and Key Issues. Accessed September 11, 2023. <https://www.stfm.org/Advocacy>
2. The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Policy Briefs. Accessed December 7, 2023. <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/policy-briefs/>
3. Wong SL, Green LA, Bazemore AW, Miller BF. How to write a health policy brief. *Fam Syst Health*. 2017;35(1):21-24. doi: 10.1037/fsh0000238
4. Multnomah County Office of Diversity and Equity. Equity and Empowerment Lens. Accessed December 12, 2023. <https://multco.us/diversity-equity/equity-and-empowerment-lens>