

# Making the case for Public Health

A framing and communication webinar presented by Act for Public Health, an initiative of the Public Health Law Partnership

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**real**  
**Language**  
LLC

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# Goals for today's presentation

- Align your communication efforts with your strategy
- Apply framing and language research to your messages about public health and its authority—its power to keep us all safe

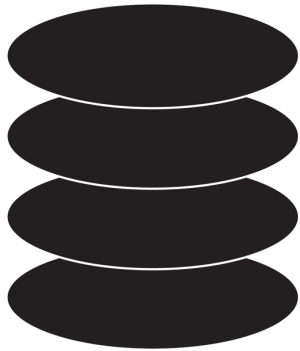
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**Tip #1**

**Let strategy dictate  
your message**

# Message is never first

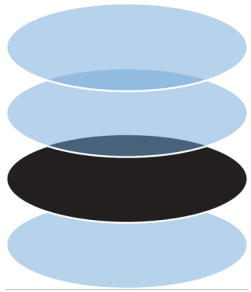
The layers of strategy



## Overall strategy:

- What is the specific bill?
- Who has the power to reject it?
- Who else do you want to reach and what do you want them to do?
- What actions are you taking?

# Message strategy



**Framing:** what the issue is about

**Message:** what we say

**Messenger:** who says it

**Target:** who needs to hear it

**Setting:** where it is said

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## **Tip #2**

**Frame public health as  
indispensable**

# Framing

The way we talk about any issue affects how audiences understand the **problem**, who's **responsible**, and what to **do** about it

# Just a few clues...

**PREVENTION WORKS**







**Frames are mental pathways that  
help people understand the world.**

# What's our default frame?

## Portrait

Personal responsibility

You're on your own

Duty to your family

**Market Justice**

Government *interferes*

## Landscape

Shared responsibility

We're in this together

Duty to the collective good

**Social Justice**

Government *protects*\*

\*or should protect

*A mashup of Daniel Beauchamp 1976 & Jared Bernstein 2006*





# Frame public health as indispensable

Consider the way  
fire departments  
are framed



# Public health as firefighting

“To stand a chance against a threat like COVID-19, the nation needs to sustain higher funding year to year and invest resources in planning, workforce, and infrastructure beforehand. **Not doing so is akin to hiring firefighters and purchasing hoses and protective equipment amid a five-alarm fire**”

# Highlight public health's strengths

Too strong a focus on deficiencies can suggest public health is now at the point of being unable to provide the services people need (and so, unworthy of resources)

- “It is a further **erosion** of the nation’s already **fragile** public health infrastructure.”
- “The departures accelerate problems that had already **weakened** the nation’s public health system.”

# Highlight public health' strengths

Showcase what public health does and can do for the greater good

Using vaccine research conducted over the last 20 years and carefully constructed clinical studies, **public health researchers found vaccines against SARS-CoV-2 to be safe and effective.** To date, more than **210 million people have been fully vaccinated** and are now much less likely to get severe disease or die from COVID-19. **Millions of lives have been saved** through these efforts (...)

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## **Tip #3**

**Portray public health  
as competent,  
confident and active**

# Evoke confidence

Minimize language that feels soft, vague, or opaque such as

- Guidance
- Evolution
- Might

Use affirmative, clear, concise, direct language such as

- Requirements
- Directives
- Orders



# Use active language

- Describe public health people in action
  - They *deliver* vaccines, medicine, etc.
  - We *prevent* spread of diseases
- Don't hedge, use direct verbs

Our decision making  
We seek to protect  
It seems like

We decide  
We protect  
We know that

# What does public health *do*?



# Sample message

## *Before*

Early in the pandemic, our public health workforce took quick, decisive action to protect our essential healthcare workers, who in turn protect all of us, by triaging masks to our hospitals. They also worked night and day to analyze the situation and make decisions based on new data and new supply chain developments, such as more cloth masks being available.

## *After*

Early in the pandemic, our public health workforce **jumped in** right away to **protect** our essential healthcare workers—who protect all of us—by **getting** desperately needed medical masks to hospitals. They **stayed** on the trail of the virus 24/7, **strengthening** guidelines to **urge** mask use for everyone as soon as enhanced data on transmission and supplies were released.

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## **Tip #4**

**Use plain and  
descriptive language**

# Jargon and technical language

If the 11th US Circuit Court of Appeals -- which oversees appellate challenges from Florida, where the federal judge who struck down the mandate sits -- upholds the ruling striking down the mandate, it would be precedent for all the other federal courts in that circuit, which covers the Southeast.

# Use plain language instead of

shift in authority  
injunction  
evidence-based  
communicable diseases  
issuance  
morbidity  
veto  
preemption  
override  
broad ramifications  
health equity  
equitable health outcomes  
exercise authority

# Sample plain language

**Preemption** is when the state stops local communities from deciding what's best for themselves.

**Shift in authority** means the state legislature –a group without public health training and expertise – takes away the power to make decisions about community health from local public health leaders who do have the training and expertise.

# Use plain language to describe

Describe or expand, don't use alone

- Power
- Authority

Public health has the power **to** keep our loved ones healthy and safe

We must protect the public health authority **to** make the decisions that keep us safer and healthier



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## **Tip #5**

**Describe how bills and  
lawsuits block public  
health**

# Describe how bills/lawsuits block public health

- Blocking public health from doing its job
- Demanding results while taking away resources and tools
- Not taking advantage of resources, efforts, expertise
- When possible, name specific decision-makers

# Lawsuit example

In a lawsuit filed Saturday, the plaintiffs argued Philadelphia does not have authority to enforce the indoor mask mandate. They also say the order breaches the state constitution and defies recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

<https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/3271690-philadelphia-sued-over-new-mask-mandate/>

# Sample response message

Our duty in public health is to keep Philadelphians healthy and thriving. This means we must respond quickly to new developments, such as an increase of new cases in our city, with strategies that work such as mask orders. We do this all the time, but especially in times of crisis. **This lawsuit would tie our hands and leave us unable to** respond, adapt, and inform the public on how to stay healthy in real time. That's why we ask the judge to dismiss the case so we can focus on what matters the most, the well being of Philadelphians.

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Values

Solution

Problem

# Framing considerations

- The first frame has the advantage
- Attacks make it hard to frame first
- How can we reframe the conversation?
- We need to know what our frame is and lead with that
  - What is public health? Why is it worth defending?

# Using the public health frame

Public health workers are dedicated public servants working for the greater good to protect us from illness, disease and unhealthy conditions. They educate us about good health practices, they monitor patterns of disease and illness, they connect us to programs and services, and they share practices and policies that keep us all safe.

– Sarah de Guia, ChangeLab Solutions

# Summary

1. Let strategy dictate your message
2. Frame public health as indispensable
3. Portray public health as competent, confident, and active
4. Use plain language and describe technical or vague language or jargon
5. Describe how bills and lawsuits block public health



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## **THANK YOU!**

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