WORKSHOP 6
POLICY BASICS

Objectives
Following this workshop, the youth will be able to:

- Identify the various levels and roles of government in Canada.
- Define policy and describe how it shapes the conditions for everyday life.
- Explain the benefits of youth engagement in policymaking.
- Identify factors that challenge positive mental health and opportunities for policy change and advocacy.

Overview
One of the most impactful ways to improve living conditions for the greater good is to address inequities and work to change systems. When it comes to mental health, policy can either enable or hinder possibilities.

Total time
2 hours.

Facilitator Prep
- Review and summarize AWE evaluation results to share using a modality of your choice.

Welcome
Ask the group to share an event or situation that made them feel powerful or that changed what they believe about themselves for the better.

Connect & Open
Review AWE survey summary and anonymous compliments from last session.

Look Back

Review that during past workshops, the group has explored various concepts related to mental health, including resilience and the social determinants of health. They have also learned about mental health promotion as an approach to strengthening wellbeing for individuals and their communities, and have mapped their personal identities while exploring how to challenge inequities tied to various social categorizations.

Look Forward

Share that during this workshop, the group will explore how policy can impact mental health by shaping the social determinants that influence our lives. The group will delve into the basics of policy, including the different levels that it operates at and why it is important to support youth engagement in policymaking processes. They will also continue their work to identify and prioritize challenges that are impacting youth mental health in different settings, including in their families, schools and broader communities. This will support them in identifying where policy advocacy and change could offer promise for enhancing youth mental health.

Let the youth know that this week marks a transition to Phase 2 of the Agenda Gap program, which focuses on bridging knowledge with action planning. The group will now move from activities supporting knowledge and relationship building to those focused on using their skills to guide their advocacy plans and policy engagement. They can think of this phase as helping to solidify their project goals.

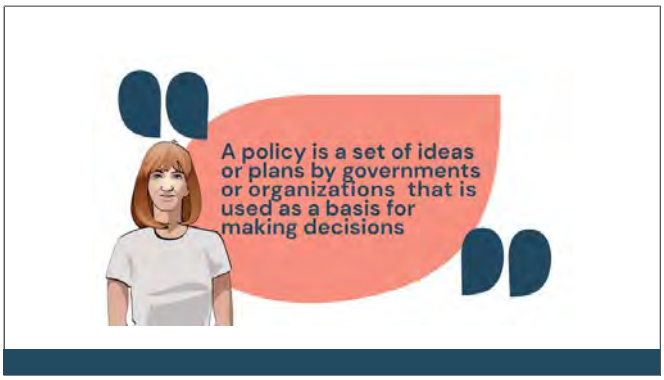
Gauging Knowledge

1. Prepare the youth to answer a question. Ask them to respond using a scale of 1–5, with 1 being "not at all" and 5 being "extremely." Once the question has been read, have them thank about their response and wait to answer. Everyone will be asked to say their answers at the same time.
2. Ask the question: *How familiar are you with the concept of policy?*

Frame

Play the workshop theme video, *Youth Uprising*. This video introduces the connections between power, policy, and youth-centered change. Following the video, ask the youth for their thoughts about the video.

Share the "policy definition" slide. To build further understanding, explain that policies reflect a set of ideas or plans that governments or other organizations use as a basis for making decisions.



Share "change the system" slide. Explain that by changing policy, we can change systems to address the social determinants that affect our mental health.

Share the "gap" slide. Explain that to change policy, we need to become informed and take constructive action. This can help us in realizing policies that protect and promote the public good. Let the youth know that policies tend to reflect the values shared by members of a society, but that often these values reflect those with the loudest voices. This means that some perspectives and the values they represent may not be heard. One way to change policy is to build a strong and informed collective voice that ensures policymakers listen.

Activity 1 : A Day in the Life *(20 minutes)*

Aim

The goal of this activity is for youth to appreciate the power of policy by exploring how it appears in everyday life.

Steps

1. Play the video, *What Does Each Level of Government Do?* Explain that this video illustrates how policies impact various aspects of our daily lives.

2. Depending on the preferences, send the youth to smaller groups or complete this activity as a larger group.

2. Ask the youth to identify various policies that impact their lives with the following questions:.

    a. What does your average day look like? Prompt the youth to consider the places where they spend time throughout their day or week, including at their home, in transit, at school or work, volunteering or spending time in community spaces.

    b. How do you think policies impact or shape your daily activities?

    c. Who creates or enforces these policies?

    d. Why is it important to have youth at the policymaking table? Prompt for them to consider the expertise they bring to make policy more relevant, appropriate and equitable.

3. Return to Circle, if applicable. Ask the youth to draw a stick person. This activity is meant to foster a fun and collaborative space, so encourage the youth to draw the scenes while discussing the character's day.

4. Ask the group to:
    a. Name the character.

    b. Identify whether the character attends school or work each day. Have someone draw a symbol or image to reflect this choice.

    c. Describe how the character gets around each day (e.g., public transit, bike, car, walking, etc.). Encourage the youth to illustrate their selection.

    d. Name policies that may impact the character's commute (e.g., bike lanes, road rules, etc.).

    e. Identify policies the character must follow at school or work. Who might be the people organizations creating these policies?

    f. Depict another activity that the character participates in (e.g., playing a sport, grocery shopping, volunteering, etc.). Ask the youth to illustrate their selection and discuss any related policies.

5. Annotate with all the policies the group identified. Clarify that policies do not strictly come from the government. Organizations, associations, schools and even families can adopt policies, which they use to guide them in achieving particular goals. Note that laws are like policies but are developed with the aim of bringing justice to society and are enforced with legal consequences.

Facilitator Tips

- If the group is having a hard time brainstorming daily activities related to policies, consider providing some suggestions they may not have considered to illustrate how policy broadly applies to everyday things. Some examples could be using sidewalks, attending school, drinking tap water, turning down loud music late at night or riding in a bike lane.

Activity 2: Mapping the Challenge Tree *(30 minutes)*

Aim

This activity supports the group's process of identifying priority challenges impacting youth mental health in their community, and a related policy or practice change goal. It also informs strategies that may be helpful in creating needed change.

Steps

1. Share the "Challenge Tree" image (page 54) .

2. Explain that on the Challenge Tree:
    a. The leaves symbolize challenges affecting youth and their communities (e.g., racism).
    b. The trunk symbolizes how these challenges get institutionalized or maintained though harmful policies or practices (e.g., through inadequate anti-racism policies or a failure to enforce policies).
    c. The roots symbolize the underlying conditions, such as the values and beliefs that influence the challenges identified (e.g., racist beliefs within society).
3. Encourage the youth to recall the challenges they have identified in previous workshops. Remind the youth about the social determinants of health and how these determinants are often overlooked in discussions about youth mental health. As an example, in some communities, youth mental health is impacted by a lack of transportation options, making it challenging to participate in activities, and therefore contributing to loneliness and isolation. Yet these upstream causes are often not part of discussions about youth mental health.

4. As a group, have the youth annotate the tree leaves with the challenges they experience or observe in their own lives. Remind them of the challenges identified during previous workshops, if not included. Ask if they would like those to be included on the Challenge Tree.
5. Prompt further discussion by asking if there are any challenges that overlap or that are similar. Group these together.
6. Invite the group to recall the social identity activity, during which they considered how various identities and power structures interact to influence how people experience the world. As a group, consider how these challenges to mental health might be experienced by other youth, based on different social identities. You can prompt by asking: *What do these challenges look like for others? Is this challenge a common or shared experience?*
7. On a second space, review the trunk and roots for the challenges identified.
    a. Ask the youth to identify policies, practices or rules that might contribute to upholding the challenges identified and annotate on the trunk of the tree.
    b. Ask the youth to identify the roots or underlying beliefs, attitudes or historical events underlying these harmful policies, practices or rules.
8. Ask each youth to identify the top three challenges they want to prioritize and discuss further.
9. Tally the number of annotations for each challenge and identify the challenges with the most votes. Ask the group to indicate whether these top challenges should inform the focus of their efforts moving forward, using the following scale:

    1 — These challenges do not reflect my experiences or interests.

    2 — I agree with some of the priority challenges but not others.

    3 — I feel positive about moving forward with these priority challenges to identify our group's policy goal.
10. Ask the youth to share the number that best represents their feelings. Note whether a clear preference for addressing a particular challenge has emerged. If the outcome is mixed, remind the group that this discussion will continue.
11. Invite the youth to continue thinking about the challenges identified and to consider which of them they feel most passionate about or motivated to change. Encourage them to find out more about these challenges. This can be accomplished via online research, discussion with friends, or polling of peers and adults in their life. Remind them that the direction of future workshops and policy advocacy targets is intended to be led by them with the support of facilitators and other adult allies.

Facilitator Tips

- This activity starts building consensus for the focus of the group's policy advocacy. Consider which of the priority challenges have associated policies that could be best targeted for change. Explore, with the help of your network, whether there are other groups working on addressing similar issues. Connecting the youth with these groups can create a powerful network of allies, increasing motivation and impact, strengthening relationships, and informing new knowledge and skills.
- The group may need further time to think about the identified priorities before consensus is achieved. Revisit at the start of the next workshop, if needed.

Connect & Close: Your Rights as a Tool for Advocacy

1. Play the workshop theme video *National Child Day: Understanding children's rights in Canada*.

2. Ask the group to share their thoughts about the video. Was there anything that stood out to them? Call attention to The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) document introduced in the video.
3. Ask the youth to answer the following question by providing a thumbs-up to indicate "yes" or thumbs-down for a "no" response: *Have you heard of the Convention on the Rights of the Child?*
4. Ask the group to briefly share what they think are the key characteristics of human rights. Key points to offer to the discussion:
    a. Rights belong to every person.
    b. Every person is born equal in their rights.
    c. All rights are important.
    d. Rights cannot be taken away.
    e. The rights for survival, development, protection and participation mentioned in the video relate to strengthening the social determinants of health, and therefore mental health.
    f. CRC Article 12 states that you have the right to give your opinion and for adults to listen and take it seriously. This is the right to be heard that you can use as a tool to support your efforts to be heard and contribute to decisions that affect you!

5. Summarize that human rights are rights that belong to every person, simply because they are human. We all have the responsibility to respect, protect and promote human rights.
6. Ask the youth to get a writing implement and paper. Explain that they will be drawing personal mind maps. Explain the structure of a mind map and if needed draw one . Each person's should place them at the center, with connections to themselves showing the ways they personally make use of human rights or support the rights of others. Some examples could be:
    a. The right to education by attending school.
    b. The right to apply for a part time job regardless of your age.
    c. The right to a safe home for all children.
7. Distribute the AWE survey and allow a few minutes for everyone to complete. If any youth doesn't want to do so immediately, ask that they complete it before the next meeting.
8. After the group finishes the survey, thank them for their participation and close the workshop.
9. After the workshop closes send a link to the AWE survey by email for those who did not complete it during the session.
10. Prior to the next workshop, collect information relating to the challenges identified by the youth during this workshop that might assist the group in achieving consensus or to identify a policy target.

Workshop 6: Resource: Challenge Tree

Leaves
What challenges do you see facing your community?

Trunk
What structures, practices and policies institutionalize the challenge?

Roots
What are the underlying historical, social or economic causes of these challenges? Why do these structures or policies exist?

Workshop 6: Resource: Challenge Tree Trunk and Roots