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EDITORIAL

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Tips for Writing an Effective Policy Brief for Health Programs

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ABSTRACT

Policy briefs are essential tools for communicating evidence-based recommendations in the field of public health. Given the complexity of health data and the sector's broad societal impact, the ability to write clear, concise, and actionable policy briefs is vital. This paper outlines five fundamental components for producing high-quality health policy briefs: identifying target objectives and audiences, constructing coherent and succinct structures, using plain language with a focus on public impact, incorporating strong evidence and credible data sources, and applying accessible design principles. Emphasizing clarity and brevity, the paper highlights how policy briefs can bridge the gap between research and decision-making, ultimately contributing to more effective and responsive health policies.

Keywords: policy brief; health sector; evidence-based recommendations

INTRODUCTION

In the world of public policy, policy briefs play a very important role. Policy briefs are a communication tool between policy makers and decision makers.⁽¹⁾ Health is a sector that is full of complex data and high social impact, so writing a good policy brief is very crucial in order to ensure that program recommendations in the policy brief can be easily understood, so that they have more potential to be accepted, and in turn can be implemented effectively.⁽²⁾

Based on the background above, special competence is needed for policy makers to write policy briefs, so that the policies that are prepared can be immediately accepted and implemented. There are at least five things that must be considered in writing a good policy brief, namely: 1) ensuring the objectives and audience; 2) creating a clear and concise structure; 3) using simple language and focusing on impact; 4) including strong evidence and data; and 5) paying attention to the appropriate format and design.

ENSURING OBJECTIVES AND AUDIENCE

This first step is an effort so that the compiler can understand exactly who the policy brief is intended for. In the health sector, policy briefs can be aimed at health ministry officials, local governments, international donor agencies, and so on. By understanding the intended audience, policy makers will easily determine the language style, depth of analysis, and delivery format. In the health sector, many audiences do not have a medical or health education or expertise background, so clarity and simplicity of language often have to be important considerations.⁽³⁾

CREATING A CLEAR AND CONCISE STRUCTURE

In general, policy briefs are intended to provide recommendations for a policy to be implemented, so they must be written in a typical structure.⁽⁴⁾ The following are examples of policy structures that are often used, namely:

- 1) A provocative title, in the sense that it can attract attention and reflect the main issues of the proposed policy.
- 2) Executive summary, which shows brief information that does not exceed one paragraph, which contains the contents of the policy brief.

- 3) Background of the problem, namely the presentation of facts and data on the health issues raised, for example, the quality of primary care, maternal mortality rates, coverage of maternal services, the burden of infectious diseases, health resilience and so on.
- 4) Problem analysis, which contains a description of the root of the problem and existing policy barriers.
- 5) Policy recommendations, which contain solutions offered to address the problem, with several requirements, namely realistic, evidence-based, and measurable impact.
- 6) Closing and call to action, which contain an invitation to the audience to support or adopt the recommendations given.

USING SIMPLE LANGUAGE AND FOCUSING ON IMPACT

Technical language is often a barrier to effective communication.⁽⁵⁾ Therefore, in writing a policy brief, it is better to use terms that are easily understood by the general public, except in technical contexts that are indeed necessary. Data on impact should also be included: for example, how certain interventions can save lives, improve the quality of service, reduce the burden on hospitals, increase community productivity or reduce the prevalence of certain diseases.

INCLUDING STRONG EVIDENCE AND DATA

Data is the basis for the legitimacy of a policy brief.⁽⁶⁾ Therefore, in compiling a policy brief, data should be used from credible sources such as WHO, the Ministry of Health, or local research results including research conducted by the policy brief compiler within the limits of no conflict of interest in it. Data visualization in the form of simple graphs, infographics, or concise tables is also very useful for increasing audience appeal and understanding.

PAY ATTENTION TO THE APPROPRIATE FORMAT AND DESIGN

Visual design is very important in presenting a policy brief. In this case, the compiler should choose a format that is easy to read, such as short paragraphs, the use of bullet points, emphasizing keywords, and sufficient white space. This is important so that busy policy makers can still grasp the main message in just a matter of minutes. One source stated that a policy brief should be able to be read quickly, namely no more than seven minutes; in a relaxed situation, for example during a coffee break.⁽⁷⁾

A good policy brief must be able to simplify complexity without reducing accuracy, and be able to bridge the gap between science and policy action. Especially in the health sector, this approach can be the difference between mere discourse and real change for society.

CONCLUSION

Developing a high-quality policy brief in the health field demands a solid grasp of the core issues and the skill to convey intricate information in a clear, organized, and persuasive manner. When policy makers tailor their message to the appropriate audience, use straightforward language, support their points with robust data, and present it all through effective visual design, their recommendations become both convincing and feasible. In essence, a well-crafted policy brief serves as a conduit that converts research-based knowledge into tangible, impactful health policies.

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