Policy advocacy at PATH: a catalyst for change

Leveraging resources, expertise, and influence to maximize health impacts

PATH’s advocacy is playing a vital role in ensuring that policies meet the needs of the most vulnerable people and expand access to lifesaving interventions. PATH’s advocacy is grounded in a strong evidence base drawn from our own technical experts working across the globe. Our advocacy focuses on cross-cutting issues impacting global health as well as specific health areas such as maternal, newborn, and child health; malaria; and HIV/AIDS. The breadth and scope of PATH’s programs, combined with a thoughtful, methodical approach to our advocacy strategies and policy positions, has earned us a reputation as an integral advocacy ally in the global health arena.

PATH’S UNIQUE ADVOCACY ROLE

What makes PATH’s policy advocacy work unique is our ability to leverage diverse areas of expertise—as a research and product development organization, as an implementer, and as an advisor on key global health platforms—to improve policies that will ultimately accelerate the delivery of global health services and innovations that save lives. PATH spans this spectrum of expertise in global health and effectively draws upon this experience to ensure that the most reliable, scientific evidence guides our advocacy approach. This model enables PATH to influence and shape policy as it is being developed and implemented.

PATH’s model for informing policy begins by identifying where the need for policy change is greatest and its potential impact is high, followed by collecting evidence on best practices to maximize outcomes. The evidence is then used to inform policy decision-making at the national level as well as influence initiatives and priorities at the global level. PATH recognizes the potential of all global health stakeholders to play a role in advocacy—from researchers to beneficiaries and program implementers—and we harness their voices, experiences, and expertise to inform our advocacy efforts.

PATH’S GUIDING ADVOCACY PRINCIPLES

With more than 30 years of experience working on the ground in more than 70 countries, PATH understands that the root causes that contribute to global health problems are complex. We recognize that the successful introduction and scale-up of lifesaving interventions is not possible without in-depth analyses of the policy and financial barriers that hinder progress and prevent widespread access. We see an enabling policy environment as an essential component of ensuring sustainable health improvements. With this understanding, PATH takes a holistic approach to developing our advocacy strategies, based on a number of guiding principles.

Advocacy as a science

At PATH, advocacy is considered a science. Our advocacy platforms are developed through a methodical process based on experiential and scientific evidence. Working from PATH’s “Ten Steps to Developing a Strategic Advocacy Agenda,” we use policy analyses, literature reviews, case studies, and research—often from PATH’s program work—to develop a well-informed position. Practitioners and advocates across PATH use this method to draw on a depth of data, evidence, and experience to inform our advocacy and to communicate the potential impact in a deliberate, persuasive, and clear manner.
Advocacy highlight: Safeguarding essential vaccines through advocacy

PATH coordinated the advocacy efforts of partners and public health experts worldwide to ensure the final language of a global treaty on mercury did not restrict access to vaccines containing the preservative thiomersal, which is safe but includes a small amount of ethyl mercury.

The success of our advocacy efforts demonstrates the importance of partnerships and cross-sector collaborations. By engaging a range of stakeholders—including the World Health Organization, the GAVI Alliance, and animal health experts, among others—and linking health and environmental ministries at the country level, PATH mobilized our partners to protect this vaccine preservative from unnecessary restrictions.

Evidence as the foundation for change

Evidence guides all of PATH’s advocacy efforts. PATH draws on specific technical expertise to inform evidence-based global health decisions, policies, and funding. PATH’s advocacy team works closely with health and program experts to stay abreast of new trends and developments and identify emerging opportunities that will impact health outcomes.

Bridging gaps between science and policy

PATH’s policy and advocacy program serves as a coordinated knowledge hub, working to connect our health experts with our advocates, our global work with our country programs, and our strategic partners with key policymakers. We have learned that we are most effective when we identify gaps in knowledge, capacity, or skill and fill in those gaps. We do this by translating technical information into language that is accessible to and appropriate for different audiences by tapping into our network of advocates to bolster our evidence or position, or by bringing unlikely partners to the table to lend a different voice or perspective to an issue.

Cross-sector collaboration to strengthen impact

PATH’s reputation is built on the foundation that no individual, organization, business, or government can solve a problem alone. Advances in global health are achieved through cross-sector collaboration and participation, and we view advocacy similarly. At PATH, we work with a multitude of partners, and we pride ourselves in our ability to convene the top experts and advisors from all sectors. By including nontraditional partners and building allies across the health and policy spectrums, we expand our pool of influencers and strengthen our policy positions.

PATH’S ADVOCACY APPROACH

PATH’s approach to advocacy is methodical, yet nimble and flexible when necessary. We are committed to ensuring that our expertise in health guides our decisions and progress. As new evidence emerges that could impact a policy, we mobilize our resources and develop a strategy based on the latest data and technology available. Our approach requires constant coordination between health experts and advocacy efforts across the globe.

Expanding the network of global and country advocates

PATH engages a range of stakeholders—from researchers to implementers and policymakers—as advocates. We aim to strengthen the capacity of current and potential advocates by providing policy advocacy support and training. In this way, PATH not only grows the number of advocates but ensures sustained advocacy for priority issues.

Advocacy highlight: Strengthening advocacy capacity across the globe

PATH created a unique ten-step process to developing a strategic advocacy agenda. Recognizing the potential of in-country implementers and advocates to lead policy change, PATH regularly conducts workshops in the countries where we work to build a cadre of advocacy strategists and implementers.

For example, after an intensive PATH-led advocacy strategy training in December 2012, civil society leaders and former tuberculosis (TB) patients from five African countries launched the African Coalition on TB (ACT!). PATH continues to provide support to ACT! as the group develops advocacy national strategies that address the social and political roots of TB throughout Africa.

Linking global and national efforts

Our efforts are most successful when we pursue linkages between our global advocacy and our advocacy at the country level; we believe that one must inform the other to achieve true and lasting change. PATH seeks to leverage our global presence and network to ensure that changes and commitments made at the global level inform country policy advocacy. Similarly, we work to ensure that the voices and experience of country stakeholders inform the priorities and decisions of global policymakers and help hold leaders accountable.
Cultivating partnerships

Recognizing that progress stems from mutual support, collaboration and the efforts of multiple stakeholders, PATH is a leader in building coalitions among partners seeking to influence policy change. PATH is often called upon by agencies and organizations to add an advocacy arm to policy and program efforts, and as a convener of advocacy coalitions and committees across the health spectrum. It is our ability to convene a wide body of experts across many different sectors that makes PATH a chosen advocacy partner for policymakers, scientists, researchers, academics, businesses, and nongovernmental organizations.

Leveraging PATH’s global presence

PATH’s technical expertise is often sought out by global and national decision-making bodies to inform their priorities and programs. Our role as a trusted advisor to country governments and multilateral institutions gives us credibility and access to leaders with the power to make the policy changes we seek. PATH’s global- and country-level access, relationships, and proven track record contribute to our abilities to identify, inform, and influence policy change.

Advocacy highlight: Coordinating approaches to advance health technologies through partnerships

PATH serves as the secretariat for the Global Health Technologies Coalition (GHTC), a group of more than 25 nonprofit organizations working to increase support for the development of new and innovative technologies that save lives in developing countries. Through policy analysis, strategic alliances, and outreach to US policymakers, the coalition advocates for new vaccines, microbicides, drugs, devices, and diagnostics that will improve health in developing countries.

By bringing together advocates for product development across disease areas and product platforms, PATH and the GHTC have made product development a priority for US and global policymakers in a way like never before.

Advocacy highlight: Leading advocacy to support better women’s and children’s health

In the spring of 2013, PATH was tapped to help lead joint planning and advocacy efforts to achieve the recommendations made by the UN Commission on Life-Saving Commodities for Women and Children. The Commission is part of the Every Woman Every Child movement and aims to increase access to 13 lifesaving products in 50 of the world’s poorest countries. To deliver on the promise of saving the lives of millions of women and children, the Commission recommends ten time-bound actions that, if applied, could save six million lives in five years.

From gathering the background evidence that helped to inform the Commission’s recommendations, to sitting on the technical working groups that developed them, PATH is uniquely positioned to convene the advocates who will now ensure that political leaders at the global and country levels carry out their commitments to the implementation of the recommendations.

PATH: A CATALYST FOR EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY CHANGE

PATH is committed to ensuring that evidence drives global health policies and priorities to help maximize investments and achieve greater health outcomes. With our breadth and depth of technical expertise as well as our advocacy approach and large network of partners, PATH is poised to play an increasingly critical and distinctive advocacy role at both the global and country levels.

As we engage an ever-growing set of stakeholders to pursue policy change for maximum impact, we look forward to continuing our role as a key leader in ensuring evidence is consistently used to inform policies that expand access to existing lifesaving interventions—and develop innovative new products and approaches not yet available—that meet the needs of the world’s most vulnerable people.