

OVERVIEW

A Best Practices Approach to Health Promotion



What is our “Best Practices Approach” to Health Promotion?

Best Practices is an evolving field that focuses on improving the way we do our work.

There are different views about what best practices means in health promotion. Our Best Practices Approach is based on a review of best practices documents and consultation with those working in health promotion. From this, we are developing an approach that we think will contribute to the development of effective programs and policies for promoting health in Nova Scotia.

This framework defines best practice as a continual process of reflecting on how to improve and enhance our practice. It involves a systematic examination of health promotion work and uses a process of critical reflection to draw out our collective knowledge of what we know works well.

Our Best Practices Approach has four essential elements:

- *It utilizes critical reflection for examining our approach to health promotion.*
- *It acknowledges the importance of a research-based approach.*
- *It supports adoption of a comprehensive and systematic approach to health promotion work.*
- *It acknowledges the uniqueness of each situation.*

The key question in our approach to best practices is: “How do we continue to improve our practice?” The Best Practices Framework can be used as a guide to enhancing health promotion initiatives in Nova Scotia.

This overview has been developed to introduce you to the Nova Scotia Best Practices Framework.

Why is Critical Reflection Important to a Best Practices Approach?

Critical reflection is a powerful tool for social change. It enables us to uncover the wealth of knowledge and insights we’ve gained through years of life experiences and to draw forth the collective wisdom of the group.

Although each of us has this inner wisdom, it often goes untapped. Critical reflection works as a trigger to focus our

attention on crucial pieces of information. Reflection, like hitting the pause button, stops the action long enough for us to focus on this useful information. Bit by bit, a new picture emerges that can provide fresh insights and new vision for our work.

For each of the components in the Framework, the five key critical questions are:

- What are our current practices?
- What are the difficulties and challenges we presently face?
- What are our collective solutions and insights for how to meet these challenges?
- What is our ideal vision of how we would like to work with this component?
- What steps can we take to move in that direction?

Components of a Framework for a Best Practices Approach to Health Promotion

Unit 1: *Foundation*

- **Component 1: Assumptions**
- **Component 2: Values**
- **Component 3: Principles**

Assumptions, Values, and Principles form the underlying foundation of all health promotion practice. Like the foundation of a building, they provide the underlying shape and support for the rest of the structure.

Unit 2: *Scientific Underpinnings*

- **Component 4: Theories**
- **Component 5: Determinants of Health**
- **Component 6: Research Information (Data, Community Input, Evidence)**

These three components form the core of the scientific underpinnings of health promotion practice. **Theory** and **Research** have an intricate relationship in all of the social and natural sciences. Theories are actually built up, over time, based on concrete research. Theories in turn are used to guide research. Understanding how the **determinants of health** and their interrelationships influence health is a key element of health promotion and a “*Population Health Approach*.” Research continues to provide us with new insights regarding the “determinants” and their dynamics. Using **research information** to guide our work is valuable as it allows us to see what kinds of solutions have been tried in other areas, agencies, or sectors. We can begin to understand exactly how and why this might have worked and evaluate the applicability to our own situation.

Unit 3: Planning Process

- Component 7: Assessment
- Component 8: Action Planning
- Component 9: Implementation
- Component 10: Evaluation

The four components in this Unit all relate to a planning process: **assessment**, **action planning**, **implementation**, and **evaluation**. The purpose of using a planning process is to ensure a systematic and comprehensive approach to our work. Using a well-developed planning process can make program development and decision-making more effective and improve outcomes.

Unit 4: Approaches

- Component 11: Strategies for Action
- Component 12: Partnerships and Intersectoral Collaboration

Approaches are the ways in which action is taken to address an issue. Your planning process will assist you in determining your organization's approach to its identified issue. Consideration of various population groups, addressing the determinants of health, the setting you work with, and the strategy you employ are some of the factors that determine your approach. *Strategies for action* are the types of action your program or a group of programs take to address an issue. *Partnerships and Intersectoral Collaboration* are important techniques to use to accomplish our objectives, however, working with partners is also essential if we want to apply a comprehensive, coordinated mix of interventions and strategies.

Unit 5: Context

- Component 13: Processes
- Component 14: Social, Organizational, and Physical Context

These two components draw attention to the overall context within which we carry out our health promotion work. *Process* has to do with how we interact with one another. Processes, like assumptions, can be taken for granted. They can operate as familiar, comfortable patterns that may or may not bring out the full contribution of each player. When used consciously, process can enhance the quality and effectiveness of our work. Similarly, the *social, organizational, and physical context* can be critical in influencing the quality and outcome of our work. All health promotion interventions are implemented within a specific context that can work to support or hinder the work.

Unit 6: Results

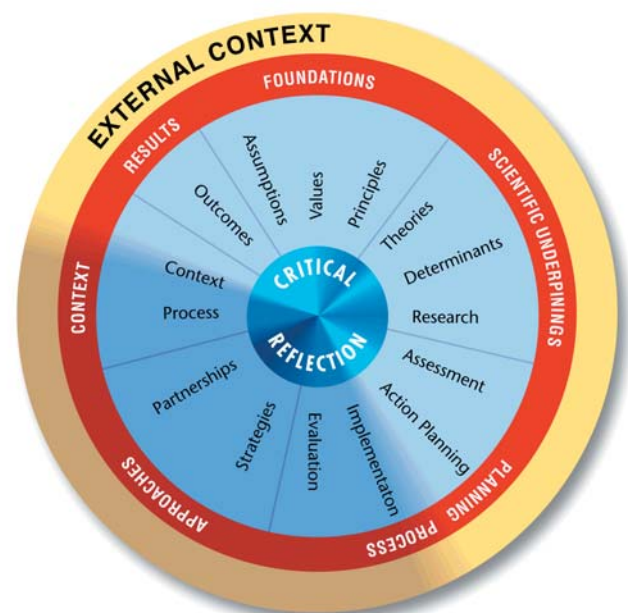
- Component 15: Outcomes

Examining *outcomes* is an essential part of all health promotion work. Reflecting on what can be learned so that we can continue to improve on our practice is an essential part of a best practices approach to health promotion. Several aspects of outcomes are identified in this component: program outputs, program outcomes, program sustainability, enhanced capacity for health promotion work, and long-term social and health impacts.

Framework Summary for a Best Practices Approach to Health Promotion

The graphic below and the table on the next page provide a summary of the Nova Scotia Best Practices Framework.¹ Down the left hand column of the table you will find a list of all the Framework components. Across the top of the table are five key questions for critical reflection.

- What is our current practice/understanding of this component?
- What challenges and difficulties have we encountered with regard to this component?
- What are our collective insights and solutions for how to work with this component?
- What is our vision of how we would like to work with this component?
- What actions can we take to move in this direction?



Component	Current Practice	Goals	Challenges & Difficulties	Insights & Solutions	Future Actions
FOUNDATION					
Assumptions					
Values					
Principles					
SCIENTIFIC UNDERPINNINGS					
Theories					
Determinants of Health					
Research					
PLANNING PROCESS					
Assessment					
Action Plan					
Implementation					
Evaluation					
APPROACHES					
Strategies for Action					
Partnership & Intersectoral Collaboration					
CONTEXT					
Process					
Organizational, Social & Environmental Context					
RESULTS					
Outcomes					

Conclusion:

The central purpose of the Nova Scotia Best Practices Approach is to enable us to continually improve and enhance our practice through using critical reflection to:

- Identify current practices
- Name the challenges we face
- Develop collective solutions and insights
- Create a vision of our ideal situation
- Clarify steps needed to move in that direction

By continually reflecting on what we are learning and integrating these insights into the next stage of our work, we can enrich and enhance our practice and develop more effective approaches.

WHERE CAN I OBTAIN A COMPLETE COPY OF THE BEST PRACTICES FRAMEWORK?

The Best Practices Framework provides more detail on each of the 15 components. In the Framework you will find: a more complete explanation of each component and how they work together, examples, definitions of terms, a set of critical questions, and six case studies of Nova Scotia health promotion initiatives which illustrate the Framework components.

The full version of the Framework is available through the Health Promotion Clearinghouse at <http://www.heart-health.ns.ca/hpc> or call 1-877-890-5094 or 902-494-1917

¹ The work of Kahan and Goodstadt in developing the Interactive Domain Model Framework (IDM) has been an insightful resource in developing this Nova Scotia Best Practices Framework.