

Policy Makers' Advisors, Scientific Knowledge and Knowledge Sharing: Highlights of a Literature Review and Key Lessons

Knowledge sharing and public policy series

November 2017

This summary is part of a series of documents focused on sharing knowledge in the context of public policy development. All of the documents available to date in this series may be found at ncchpp.ca > Projects > Knowledge Sharing.

This document summarizes a literature review produced by the NCCHPP,¹ devoted to the subject of policy advisors: their profiles, the way they use scientific knowledge and their influence in government circles. The detailed analysis in the original document is based on 70 documents published between 2000 and 2014 that present empirical data; in other words, this analysis reflects the observations of advisors, policy makers and scientists regarding the interplay between scientific and political circles.

Why take an interest in the advisors of policy makers? Because these actors, although often overlooked, play an important role in the development of public policies, and more particularly in determining whether and how scientific knowledge is used during this process. These advisors can therefore be useful contact persons for professionals and researchers who wish to share public health knowledge in the hope that this knowledge will help shape public policies.

Summary
For up-to-date knowledge relating to healthy public policy

What are you seeking?

A **detailed analysis** including:

- Numerous verbatim statements made by advisors themselves that lead to a better understanding of their positions;
 - Bibliographic references;
 - Key considerations for public health actors hoping to share knowledge with advisors.
- ⇒ **Refer to the original document.**¹

A **"shortcut"** including:

- Highlights of the analysis;
 - Key considerations for public health actors hoping to share knowledge with advisors.
- ⇒ **Refer to this document.**

¹ Morestin, F. (2017). *The advisors of policy makers: Who are they, how do they handle scientific knowledge and what can we learn about how to share such knowledge with them?* Knowledge sharing and public policy series. Montréal and Québec, Canada: National Collaborating

Centre for Healthy Public Policy. Available at: http://www.ncchpp.ca/181/publications.ccnpps?id_article=1670



Box 1 – Which advisors, exactly?

The term "advisors" in this document applies to persons based *within government structures*, whose *professional* role is to advise policy makers (such as ministers, members of legislative bodies, mayors or municipal councillors) on public policy matters. This definition therefore excludes persons based outside of government structures who occasionally give advice to policy makers.

This document is structured as follows:

1. Advisors: who are they?
 - 1.1. Different types of advisors
 - 1.2. Advisors' professional backgrounds
2. Advisors: what do they do?
 - 2.1. Overview of advisors' tasks
 - 2.2. Tasks involving scientific knowledge
 - 2.3. Initiative taken by advisors
3. To what extent do advisors influence the circulation of scientific knowledge and the development of public policies?
 - 3.1. Advisors as gatekeepers of knowledge
 - 3.2. The position of advisors relative to other sources of information for policy makers
 - 3.3. Impact of advisors on public policy development.

In each of these sections, we present:

- **Highlights** from our literature review;
- **Key considerations** for public health actors who wish to share knowledge with policy makers' advisors (green boxes). Because each context is unique, most of these considerations are presented in the form of questions to help public health actors analyze their own contexts and determine the approach to knowledge sharing best suited to their needs;
- Where applicable, the **limitations of the literature** that we studied.

² Central agencies are those that surround the Prime Minister/Premier and those that control government finances. For example: the Privy Council Office (within the Government of Canada), the *Ministère du Conseil exécutif* (within the

1. Advisors: who are they?

1.1. DIFFERENT TYPES OF ADVISORS

Highlights:

- There are several types of advisors to policy makers:
 - Some are public servants in ministerial departments or local governments.
 - Others are political advisors that policy makers hire and fire at will. They are found in ministerial offices and in legislative bodies (either in the personal teams of legislators, or in caucus research offices).
- Public servants have a technical mission, in that their public policy analyses should be non-partisan. In contrast, the mission of other advisors is political: their analyses are expected to integrate political concerns (for example, the consequences a public policy may have in electoral terms).
- In ministerial departments, two types of advisors coexist more or less harmoniously: public servants who contribute to public policy development and advisors in the minister's office. The latter are often influential.
- Some advisors are specialists in a subject area while others are generalists to varying degrees. Political advisors tend to fit a more generalist profile than do most public servants. However, generalist public servants can be found, in particular, in central agencies,² in the upper hierarchy of other government departments or in small local governments.
- Figure 1 positions the various types of advisors, from the most specialized (on the left) to the most generalist (on the right), while differentiating them based on their missions (those with a technical mission are at the top of the Figure and those with a political mission are situated at the bottom).
- Job titles vary from one jurisdiction to another and do not always reflect the fact that a person plays the role of a public policy advisor.

Government of Québec), the Executive Council (within the Government of Saskatchewan), departments of finance, treasury board secretariats, etc.

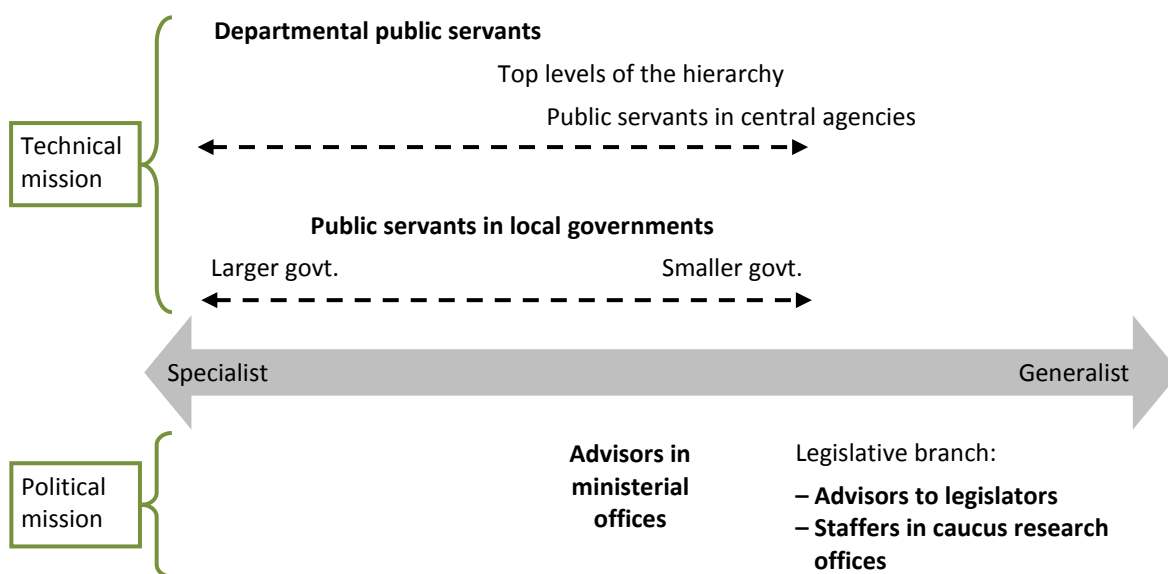


Figure 1 – Major types of advisors, by mission and level of specialization

➤ **Key considerations for public health researchers and professionals:**

- What type(s) of advisors do you plan to contact?
 - Do they provide advice of a technical or a political nature?
The nature of their advice may influence the type of knowledge likely to interest them and the way they might use it.
 - In the context of their work, do they dedicate themselves to exploring one policy area in detail, or do they deal with several policy areas at once?
This likely has an impact on their mastery of a policy area and the time they can devote to it. Do you adapt your speech or your writing so as to take this reality into account?
 - Were they appointed by a policy maker?
Advisors who are appointed by policy makers are usually closest to them, but tend to remain in their positions less long than public servants. Will they remain in position long enough to keep circulating the knowledge you are sharing until it contributes to policy change?
- Job titles may lack precision. When you are trying to locate advisors in a governmental organization, inform yourself about the

mandates of the different teams, and about job titles and their associated tasks and responsibilities: they may not be identical to those that you have observed in another organization.

What the literature does not say: As Figure 1 illustrates, the various types of advisor differ from one other with regard to their respective missions and degrees of specialization. However, the data we found predominantly focus on one type of advisor: departmental public servants. Data on advisors in ministerial offices, in the legislative branch and in local governments are rare.

Box 2 – Who and where? Our approach in this document

In this document, we will indicate when the data we found concern a specific type of advisor or one country in particular. However, when the data reveal the same trends for different types of advisors or in different countries, we will refer to "advisors" in general and the countries concerned will not be specified.

1.2. ADVISORS' PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUNDS

Highlights:

- In Canada, about half of **departmental public servants** who contribute to public policy development hold a master's or doctoral degree, which suggests they are familiar with some forms of the scientific process. On the other hand, given the disciplines in which they were trained, the vast majority of them are not familiar with public health. Many are not subject matter experts either: generalist profiles (trained in political science, business management, public administration) dominate, in both Canada and Australia. In these countries, some public servants (up to 30% in some departments) have previously worked in research environments. Public servants who are familiar with research methods due to training or experience are somewhat more numerous in the health sector. But generally, the recruitment and ongoing training policies of departments do not seem to prioritize competency in handling scientific knowledge. Moreover, this competency is perceived as lacking only by some persons in ministerial circles.
- The rare data we found on other types of advisors indicate that the ability to handle scientific knowledge varies greatly among **public servants in local governments** in the United Kingdom. With regard to **political advisors** in ministerial offices or in legislative bodies, according to Canadian and American data, many of them are young, inexperienced and do not have the qualifications required for their positions. It seems that, in some cases, these positions are awarded more on the basis of political loyalty than on the basis of merit; on the other hand, it is difficult to recruit more experienced candidates for these precarious positions with demanding schedules.

➤ Key considerations for public health researchers and professionals:

- Do the advisors with whom you plan to make contact have professional backgrounds that make them familiar with scientific knowledge? With public health?
- Do you adapt your speech or your writing to take into account the background of the persons you are addressing? If you are unsure of their background, it is safer to proceed as though they are unfamiliar with the topic presented.

What the literature does not say: The data we found do not describe in much detail the background of advisors in ministerial offices, in the legislative branch or in local governments.

2. Advisors: what do they do?

We present here an overview of the tasks performed by advisors in various work contexts (departments, legislative bodies, local governments), followed by an examination of their tasks that involve scientific knowledge; and finally, we explore the initiative taken by advisors.

2.1. OVERVIEW OF ADVISORS' TASKS

Highlights:

- In **ministerial departments**, tasks vary depending on the type of advisor.
 - Public servants who contribute to public policy development (which includes mid-level managers to some degree) perform strategic analyses, collect and analyze information, consult stakeholders, examine and formulate public policy options, and plan and implement those that are adopted. Directors determine the work priorities of public servants, provide advice to ministers based on staff analyses, work on getting proposals adopted, negotiate support from stakeholders and direct policy implementation.
 - In Canada, ministerial advisors intervene in the work of public servants by transmitting instructions on behalf of their minister, monitoring the departmental policy development process and discussing the policy options being considered with departmental staff. They also consult with stakeholders and analyze proposed public policy options from a political perspective. Based on this, they advise the minister.
- Political advisors in **legislatures** in the United States (the only data we found are from this country) gather information, draft statements for legislators, draft bills, and monitor public policy

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implementation. Those who support committee work³ also organize hearings.⁴

- With respect to public servants in **local governments**, the data we found concerns mid-level managers in a municipality within the United Kingdom. The latter organize and conduct meetings, develop networks and alliances, search for and analyze evidence and convey it to policy makers, and provide the latter with policy options.
- In ministerial departments, the various tasks attached to public policy development tend to be divided among individuals or teams. In legislative bodies and in some local governments, where there are fewer advisors, a single advisor may be called on to participate in all these tasks.

➤ **Key considerations for public health researchers and professionals:**

- Advisors can be expected to be more interested in knowledge (scientific or other) that can help them perform their tasks.
- Regarding the scientific knowledge you wish to share: which task(s) of advisors listed in this section can this knowledge assist with?
- Do the advisors you are planning to approach perform these tasks? If not, it would be preferable to target other advisors.

What the literature does not say: We found limited data on the tasks of advisors in the legislative branch and in local governments: what is the situation in countries other than the United States (for advisors to legislators), in other municipalities in the United Kingdom and elsewhere (for municipal public servants)?

2.2. TASKS INVOLVING SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE

Here we briefly examine the reasons that advisors may be motivated to use scientific knowledge, and then describe the tasks involved in using it: seeking such knowledge, examining it, "translating" it to meet the needs of political circles, and then conveying it to other political actors.

³ In legislative bodies, a committee is a working group composed of a small number of legislators studying projects related to a specific sector.

2.2.1. Scientific knowledge, what for?

Highlights:

- According to public servants, the situations in which they use scientific knowledge are, essentially, when developing new policies and, to a lesser extent, when determining priorities that require public intervention and when assessing existing policies.
- One of the objectives of public servants who use scientific knowledge is to gain knowledge that allows them to perform their work more effectively.
- Other objectives, mentioned by various types of advisors, are related to their interaction with other actors. These advisors use scientific knowledge to:
 - Brief policy makers or other advisors;
 - Persuade them to consider problems or to adopt policies;
 - Demonstrate their proficiency at using such knowledge; or to
 - Lend scientific credibility to their proposals in order to convince actors within or outside of the government (stakeholders, the population) of their value.
- In pursuing some of these objectives, advisors instrumentalize scientific knowledge. This is also the case when they use it simply to justify a predetermined course of action.
- Advisors may use scientific knowledge to pursue several goals at once.

➤ **Key considerations for public health researchers and professionals:**

- Can you determine what objectives the advisors you wish to approach are pursuing when they use scientific knowledge?
- Based on your assessment of the possible consequences for you and/or your organization, do you deem it acceptable to support them in their endeavour? If so, it might be relevant to indicate to these advisors how the knowledge you are presenting can help them reach their goal.

⁴ During these hearings, committee members listen to the perspective of "witnesses" (experts or stakeholders) on a topic.

What the literature does not say: The data found do not enable us to specify whether some objectives are more frequently pursued in certain types of government.

Secondly, the question of whether there are particularities associated with different types of advisor is not always well detailed in the data we found, but merits attention. Some authors suggest that public servants tend to make more technical use of scientific knowledge, whereas advisors in ministerial offices tend to make more strategic use of it. This is not surprising, given that the latter have a political mission. That said, a range of variations in the behaviour of both types of advisor probably exists and would merit exploration.

Finally, the data found almost exclusively reflect the point of view of advisors; statements from other actors could shed light on other objectives pursued by advisors when using scientific knowledge.

2.2.2. Seeking scientific knowledge

Highlights:

- When surveyed about *research* data, the vast majority of public servants and advisors to legislators reported that they rarely consult it.⁵ Public servants in the health sector do so slightly more often.
- The value assigned to scientific knowledge, not only by the individual, but especially by the organization in which an advisor works, has an impact on whether or not it is consulted.
- Other factors also seem to be determinant: the extent to which advisors' professional backgrounds have familiarized them with research, the amount of time available for seeking scientific knowledge, its accessibility, and whether or not seeking such knowledge is considered part of their work (this is generally not the case for the most senior advisors).
- Many advisors view grey literature and raw data as scientific knowledge and, on some levels, these meet their needs better than scientific literature (grey literature more often includes concrete "how to" details; raw data allows

advisors to conduct analyses that precisely meet their needs).

- Among the forms of media that advisors consider to be sources of scientific knowledge, the most frequently consulted are newsletters to which they subscribe, documents published by certain organizations (particularly governmental agencies), databases of raw data and the news media. Only some advisors consult scientific journals: these are mainly public servants in departments with a mandate rooted in the natural sciences.
- However, the sources of knowledge that advisors most value are *persons* who are part of their professional network: firstly their colleagues, but also external experts with a variety of profiles. For the most part, those who say they consult public health researchers and professionals are public servants in the health sector.

➤ Key considerations for public health researchers and professionals:

- Given the factors and sources listed in this section, does it seem likely to you that the advisors you are targeting will locate by themselves the scientific knowledge you want them to consider?
If not, take the initiative to share this knowledge with them.
- Have you approached advisors to indicate your areas of expertise and your willingness to answer their questions?
If your efforts to become part of the network of experts that they consult are fruitless, could you convey the knowledge through another expert who is already part of this network?
- Since advisors often consult each other, could you ask an advisor you already know to recommend you to colleagues or to convey some knowledge to them?

What the literature does not say: There is a lack of data on how ministerial advisors and public servants in local governments habitually search for scientific knowledge.

⁵ However, as evidenced by other highlights presented below, for many advisors, "scientific knowledge" is not limited to research data.

2.2.3. Examining the scientific knowledge found or received**Highlights:**

- When advisors have scientific knowledge in hand, they sort it according to its credibility and its relevance.
- Advisors usually assess the credibility of knowledge based on the credibility of those who produced, funded or published it – rarely by examining the methods used to produce the knowledge. Some advisors who work on health-related issues do this, but most advisors do not feel they have the skills required either to assess these methods or to interpret contradictory data.
- Advisors assess the relevance of scientific knowledge based on how well it aligns with:
 - The topics they are currently working on;
 - The mandate of their team or organization (which may place knowledge that points to cross-cutting actions at a disadvantage);
 - In some cases, their perception of their policy maker's intentions.
- Sorting can sometimes resemble self-censorship: some advisors, including public servants, discard scientific knowledge which they believe to be relevant, but which runs contrary to the dominant view within their organization or within public opinion.

➤ **Key considerations for public health researchers and professionals:**

- What is your credibility rating in the eyes of the advisors you want to reach?
If it is not optimal, can you convey your knowledge through other persons or organizations that are viewed more favourably?
- What level of methodological detail do the advisors you want to reach prefer to have? Minimally, if the knowledge you are presenting seems to contradict other knowledge that is circulating on the same topic, provide background information to help the advisors interpret this divergence.
- Have you analyzed whether the knowledge you are presenting ties in with the mandate or program of the governmental organization you are targeting?
If this knowledge suggests cross-cutting actions (that may involve several teams in an

organization, or several organizations), reflect on your strategy:

- Should you approach advisors in the various teams concerned?
- Should you also (or rather) approach advisors with a more generalist profile, for instance public servants working in teams higher in the hierarchy that coordinate a department's action?
- Do you keep abreast of what is currently on the agenda of the advisors you are addressing, in order to seize the right moment to introduce knowledge?
- Do you emphasize (to the extent possible) the connections between the knowledge you are presenting and the mandate or program of the governmental organization in which the advisors you are targeting work? The connections between this knowledge and the issues they are currently working on?
- Although public servants may not make immediate use of the knowledge you are presenting to them because they deem the context unfavourable, they may circulate it later on, for example, when other policy makers take office.
- You may also share knowledge with the advisors of legislators of opposition parties in the hopes of inserting this knowledge into the political debate and raising the awareness of those who may come to power in the future. However, it is likely that this knowledge will be used in political confrontations: have you analyzed what consequences this might entail for you and your organization, and do these seem acceptable to you?

2.2.4. Translating scientific knowledge**Highlights:**

- For scientific knowledge to be usable in political circles, advisors must "translate" it: restate it in everyday language, summarize it (because policy makers do not have the time to examine the details), and highlight how this knowledge would help their organization address issues that fall within its mandate.
- During this translation process, advisors weigh scientific knowledge against other factors, such as practical feasibility and political context. Certain studies indicate that some advisors, including public servants, sometimes manipulate

scientific knowledge to support conclusions that are better aligned with these other factors or for purposes of persuasion. Often, even if advisors have relied on scientific knowledge, it does not appear in its original form in the proposals they present to policy makers.

- Advisors do not all feel they have the skills required to translate scientific knowledge. Some (particularly in the legislative branch) would like scientists to facilitate their task by summarizing and simplifying knowledge, or even formulating recommendations. Other advisors believe that they alone should formulate recommendations. Still others work together with scientists to do this.

➤ **Key considerations for public health researchers and professionals:**

- Do the advisors you are approaching expect you to submit recommendations?
Even if this is not the case, try to facilitate their task (and to prevent errors of interpretation) by presenting knowledge in simple language, with no more detail than desired, and by highlighting connections to the issues that concern them.
- Do you see an opportunity for dialogue with advisors when they are engaged in translating scientific knowledge you have sent them?
By making it known that you are available, you might be able to prevent certain reinterpretations of that knowledge.

What the literature does not say: The data we found on the manipulation of scientific knowledge originate from three studies on departmental public servants in the United Kingdom. The situation for other types of advisors and in other countries should be verified.

2.2.5. Conveying scientific knowledge

Highlights:

- When policy makers rely on large teams, most of their advisors do not have the opportunity to address them directly: advisors' analyses are conveyed through the intermediary of more senior advisors, who can choose to filter or modify them. The weight carried by this hierarchy of advisors is greater in large organizations (departments, large municipalities)

than in smaller organizations or teams (small municipalities, ministerial offices, legislators' teams).

- Sometimes departmental public servants call on well-respected researchers with good communication skills to convey knowledge to their minister, rather than doing so themselves.

➤ **Key considerations for public health researchers and professionals:**

- Do your contacts have direct access to the policy maker for whom they work? Is there a strongly established hierarchy in their workplace and, if so, where are your contacts positioned within it?
Would it be relevant and feasible to try to target more highly-placed advisors?
- Have you informed the advisors you are in contact with that you are available to meet their policy maker?
Do you think you have the requisite profile? If not, would another expert be in a better position to convey the knowledge for you?
Could training help you to develop your skill in communicating scientific knowledge?

Box 3 — The time issue

Highlights:

- The pace of work for all types of advisors is fast and unpredictable, particularly for those working in the legislative branch.
- In the majority of situations, advisors lack the time to carefully examine scientific knowledge.

➤ **Key considerations for public health researchers and professionals:**

To what extent can you facilitate the task of advisors when they are working on an urgent matter?

For example, by making yourself readily available to answer their questions (even if this means sharing preliminary results, because the policy decision will not wait until your project is completed), or by disseminating knowledge in an accessible format and through sources without barriers to access.

2.3. INITIATIVE TAKEN BY ADVISORS

Highlights:

- Advisors have a degree of latitude in carrying out the information processing tasks that policy makers assign to them, and some take the opportunity to act strategically in order to shape public policy decisions.
- This said, they do not necessarily seek to substantially reshape their policy maker's position: some advisors demonstrate initiative in seeking to have their proposals adopted, while nevertheless keeping these proposals aligned with the course of action advocated by their policy maker.
- According to studies from the United Kingdom, departmental public servants, who are, in principle, independent of political influence, believe that their careers can be positively or negatively affected by the proposals they present to policy makers. This may explain why their initiative taking is kept within boundaries.

➤ Key considerations for public health researchers and professionals:

Do the advisors that you plan to contact limit themselves to pursuing their policy maker's agenda, or do they take initiative to try to reshape it?

If the latter is the case, you should analyze not only how the knowledge you wish to share fits in with the policy maker's positions, but also how it fits in with those of the advisors, to identify which ones might become allies.

What the literature does not say: The data we found raised two questions that remain unanswered:

- Do advisors take more or less daring initiatives depending on whether the subject or policy in question is more or less controversial?
- In countries other than the United Kingdom, how concerned are public servants with the impacts that the initiatives they take could have on their careers?

3. To what extent do advisors influence the circulation of scientific knowledge and the development of public policies?

3.1. ADVISORS AS GATEKEEPERS OF KNOWLEDGE

Highlights:

- Because they are mandated to process information, advisors have a certain amount of control over the knowledge that reaches policy makers.
- They can also act as gatekeepers to persons who have scientific knowledge and who wish to address their policy maker, by choosing whether or not to recommend them (since advisors are also called on to identify experts and to find out about those seeking to meet with their policy maker).
- Advisors can also filter information in the reverse direction, choosing whether or not to share with producers or conveyors of scientific knowledge internal information that can enable them to act more effectively (indicating, for example, what issues their policy maker is concerned with at a given time).
- This sharing of information is especially likely to take place when relationships of trust have been established. Data suggest that public servants are more open than political advisors and policy makers to being approached by scientists they do not know, which may provide an opening for interaction that could eventually lead to information sharing.

➤ Key considerations for public health researchers and professionals:

When you (or an executive from your organization) wish to approach a policy maker, do you first contact one of that person's advisors to prepare the ground?

3.2. THE POSITION OF ADVISORS RELATIVE TO OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR POLICY MAKERS

Highlights:

- If advisors are in a position to act as gatekeepers, it is because they are one of the main sources of information for policy makers.
- However, policy makers also consult other sources of information which, depending on the context, compete with their advisors to a greater or lesser degree. In contexts where advisors seem poorly positioned among information sources, some observers recommend addressing policy makers directly.
- Some advisors (public servants, in the cases we found) rely on external experts to defend ideas before their policy maker when they cannot do so themselves. They sometimes help set up meetings between these experts and their policy maker.

➤ Key considerations for public health researchers and professionals:

Should you try to approach policy makers directly? The relevance of this probably depends on the context:

- In the setting you wish to target, to what extent do advisors (or certain types of advisors) have the ear of the policy maker?
- Even if they are rarely heard, could they help you gain access to the policy maker or provide useful internal information?
- Do they appear to you to be seeking external allies because their freedom of speech is limited?

What the literature does not say: To share scientific knowledge, should one directly contact ministers, or should one go through ministerial advisors, or through departmental public servants?

We found conflicting data in studies on the United Kingdom and Australia. It would be helpful to verify whether this is due to differences in administrative culture, and what the situation is in other countries.

3.3. IMPACT OF ADVISORS ON PUBLIC POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Ultimately, it is by observing their impact on public policy development that one can measure the influence of advisors.

Highlights:

- Advisors to legislators (according to studies from the United States) and some public servants in local governments (according to European studies) seem well placed to influence:
 - The **agenda** of policy makers, that is, the list of issues that they consider to require public intervention; and, above all,
 - The **public policy options considered** for addressing these problems.
- Departmental public servants *contribute* to shaping these elements, directly for the most highly placed, indirectly for others.
- The influence of advisors over which policy options are considered derives from the fact that one of their core tasks is to examine and formulate possible options, which gives them the opportunity to highlight some of these. On the other hand, when policy makers have a strong prior preference for one option, their advisors seem much less able to advocate for others.
- However, public servants play a key role in **planning the implementation** of public policies and can take advantage of this role to adjust certain aspects of these policies.
- The factors that strengthen the ability of advisors to influence public policy development are:
 - Their insider knowledge of political circles, which allows them to act strategically;
 - Their involvement throughout the public policy development process and in the detail of the preparatory work; whereas the involvement of policy makers is less sustained; and
 - For public servants, the fact that they generally remain in their positions longer than policy makers (although staff turnover exists and can undermine this source of influence).

➤ **Key considerations for public health researchers and professionals:**

- With regard to the knowledge you wish to share: what stage(s) in the development of a public policy can it inform (getting an issue on the agenda, examining possible policy options for addressing it, decision making, implementation of the policy adopted)?⁶
- Who are the advisors involved at that stage, and do they seem influential in determining the outcome (in general, and in this particular case given the policy maker's stance)? (Reminder: in ministerial departments, several types of advisors may be involved at a given stage).
- Do not neglect the influence of public servants, which may be more subtle, but may potentially be rooted in the long term.
- Do you regularly touch base with your contacts among advisors to find out about staff movements?

You may sometimes need to rebuild a relationship with a new advisor, but you may manage to get introduced by his or her predecessor in the position, i.e., the advisor with whom you were in contact before. Take advantage of the fact that those new to a position will need briefing time, and you can be proactive in offering your assistance. Do not assume they are up-to-date on the knowledge you shared with their predecessors.

What the literature does not say: To better assess the impact of advisors on public policy development, it would be useful to have more data on certain types of advisors: advisors in ministerial offices, public servants in local governments, and advisors to legislators in countries other than the United States.

In addition, to complete the picture, data are needed from different countries on the movement of staff in departments and on how this impacts public servants' contribution to public policy development.

Conclusion

In the end, our literature review reveals a nuanced picture of the behaviour of policy advisors toward scientific knowledge. This is inevitable, if only because the mission of political circles in a democratic system is not to follow scientific prescriptions to the letter. That said, advisors undeniably carry weight in political circles because of their information-processing mission, their knowledge of the system, and their presence throughout the public policy development process and sometimes, even beyond policy makers' terms. They can be valuable allies inside political circles for actors who convey scientific knowledge, and sometimes seek the help of the latter. Therefore, we invite readers to use the observations and questions for reflection included in this document to analyze the position of policy advisors in the government settings they wish to approach, in order to develop a relevant knowledge-sharing strategy.

⁶ For insight into these stages and the type of knowledge that is useful at each stage, see: Benoit, F. (2013). *Public policy models and their usefulness in public health: The stages model*. Montréal and Québec, Canada: National Collaborating

Box 4 – Using the green boxes in this document to refine your knowledge-sharing strategy

What to use: It may be that not every question and observation offered in these boxes will be useful in the context in which you wish to share knowledge. Select those that seem relevant to you.

By whom:

- You can select questions and attempt to answer them:
 - By yourself;
 - With your colleagues or work partners;
 - With other public health actors who have previously interacted with the political circle you wish to approach;
 - With advisors with whom you wish to share knowledge (if you have already developed a relationship of trust);
 - With other advisors or other actors you know and who agree to be your guides in this political circle.
- Some persons are well placed to answer certain questions, but on the other hand, certain questions are quite sensitive: think carefully about to whom you should pose these questions and how to formulate them, so as not to compromise your future knowledge-sharing strategy.

How:

- To piece together answers, you can draw on your own knowledge and/or that of other persons, analyze the website or documents of the governmental organization you wish to approach, participate in public events that it organizes, keep abreast of media coverage of the public policy area that interests you, etc.⁷
- This search for information is key to building a relevant knowledge-sharing strategy. However, avoid turning this into an overly formal and burdensome process, especially if you are seeking answers from other persons – you do not want to bother them. Prioritize your questions and do not expect to find precise answers to all of them.
- It is interesting to write down the answers for future reference, without however, spending too much time polishing your writing, since this will be a simple working document.

When:

- You would benefit from carrying out an analysis of this type whenever you wish to approach a new political circle or new advisors.
- Besides, when one is aiming to influence public policy, immediate success is rare. Often, one must sustain the effort of sharing knowledge over a relatively long period. Moreover, political contexts evolve over time, as does one's understanding of them. Regularly re-reading answers you have recorded at some point, and revising them if necessary, could deepen your reflection and lead you to adjust your knowledge-sharing strategy.

⁷ In 2018 we will be publishing another document with more details on how to go about this (based on advice gathered from interviews with Canadian municipal public servants). It will be made available at: ncchpp.ca > Projects > Knowledge Sharing.

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