

Title: Public Policy Advocacy in the Canadian Context: A Review of the Current Literature

Background: Public policy advocacy is an important competency for students from healthcare and social service programs to develop; however, integration of policy advocacy within university curricula remains inconsistent. Identifying the knowledge and skills that healthcare and social service professionals use in policy advocacy supports the development of educational competencies to achieve entry-to-practice objectives. A review of the literature published on the topic of public policy advocacy in higher education was undertaken to determine the current state of this evidence.

Methods: For this scoping review, CINAHL, Scopus, and Nursing and Allied Health (ProQuest) databases were searched using the following terms and Boolean phrases: “public policy” AND “advocacy” AND “physician*” OR “nurs*” OR “social worker*” OR “allied health profession*”. After applying limitations (full-text, peer-reviewed, English, last five years) and inclusion and exclusion criteria, 12 articles were retrieved. Two additional articles were included from a hand-based search for a total of 14 articles.

Results: Findings were organized into three themes: ‘policy advocacy in higher education’, ‘facilitators and barriers to policy advocacy’, and ‘considerations for successful policy advocacy’. The literature review highlighted limited evidence as to how providers are prepared to engage in policy advocacy and there is little guidance on how such advocacy should be taught. Furthermore, few primary studies were available, and most research findings originate from the United States.

Discussion: A new study is proposed to address this evidence gap by identifying the knowledge and skills used by Canadian-based healthcare and social service providers to advocate for public policy reform or development.

Keywords: public policy, advocacy, university education, health care, social service