

## ADVOCACY EVALUATION THEORY AS A TOOL FOR STRATEGIC CONVERSATION: A 25-YEAR REVIEW OF TOBACCO CONTROL ADVOCACY AT THE CANADIAN CANCER SOCIETY

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**Abstract:** Advocacy evaluation has been considered difficult, even in specific and uncomplicated situations. This article describes a short evaluative review of a series of tobacco control policy advocacy activities involving multiple parties over 25 years. Despite its obvious limitations, the effort suggests that the retrospective development of a structured contribution analysis and “key event” stories from documentary and key informant information can generate compelling circumstantial evidence for impact. Perhaps more importantly, the study was found to provide what appear to be valuable insights and lessons for the planning and management of future advocacy initiatives.

**Résumé :** L'évaluation des efforts de revendication est considérée comme une entreprise difficile, même dans des situations précises et peu complexes. Cet article fait état d'une brève revue évaluative d'une série d'activités de revendication en matière de politique de lutte contre le tabagisme impliquant plusieurs intervenants sur une période de 25 ans. En dépit de ses limites évidentes, cette étude suggère qu'une analyse structurée ultérieure des contributions et la compilation des « événements clés » relatés dans la documentation et des renseignements fournis par les informateurs clés permettent d'en arriver à des preuves indirectes convaincantes concernant les répercussions des efforts de revendication. Peut-être plus important encore, des idées et leçons qui semblent utiles pour la planification et la gestion d'initiatives futures de revendication se dégagent de l'étude.

## INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Cancer Society (CCS), among its various functions, conducts advocacy to governments with regard to many areas of public policy. Its most prominent effort has undoubtedly been its advocacy for tobacco control and, although this work had been recognized as important over the years, a systematic review of the effort had not been conducted as of the end of 2009. Given the Society's development of a new strategic plan to fight cancer, there was senior leadership interest in a retrospective review of impact and lessons regarding its tobacco control advocacy over the last quarter century. The objective of the advocacy analysis described here was to describe key elements of the CCS's tobacco control advocacy story with a view to highlighting achievements and key lessons learned.

The initial intended objective was to map the alignment of advocacy activities with outcomes. In practice, the challenge of collecting documentation resulted in the realignment of the project to collect metrics to show promising evidence of influence and to provide both a framework and an approach that could be used to evaluate advocacy strategies at a future date.

### The Theory

The evaluation of policy advocacy has been noted as being difficult or impossible. Notwithstanding its difficulties, policy advocacy can be addressed systematically, according to Patton (2008) and others (Egbert & Hoehstetter, 2007).

Inherent in Patton's approach to advocacy impact evaluation is the assumption of usefulness of the evaluation to inform decision making. "As a pragmatic approach, UFE (utilization focused evaluation) advocates no particular evaluation model, theory, values, system or criteria and indicators, methods or procedures" (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007, p. 439), but instead advocates for an out-of-the-box approach to evaluation that is iterative and flexible. Based on Scriven's (2007) General Elimination Method (GEM; as cited in Patton, 2008, p. 2), Patton presents advocacy evaluation as a "kind of inverse epidemiological method" in which both the cause—in our case CCS tobacco control advocacy strategies—and the effect—changes in tobacco control advocacy policy over 25 years—are known, but what is not as clear is the connection between these two. Retrospective case study methodology is then used by Patton to document the connection. Similarly, Patton's theory assumes that retrospective historical

data are important to the study design (Patton, 2008). Finally, and also critical to our analysis, Patton acknowledges that retrospective analysis takes time, ideally some form of real time such as the case he presented in his review of influence of a major court decision by a not-for-profit.

Unfortunately, the tobacco control policy advocacy team did not have the luxury of either much time (there was a three-month window to serve strategic planning needs) or real time (many key developments in tobacco advocacy happened decades ago). In addition, the focus was not on a single advocacy effort but rather on a 25-year set of interventions in different areas over time. This made the task daunting. In short, was any kind of retrospective analysis using an evaluation paradigm of any kind even possible in these circumstances?

Fortunately, owing to the unwavering support of CCS senior leadership, the existence of several early indications of some recorded history, and perhaps the adventurous nature of the study team, a basic low-cost design was evolved to address the need.

Limitations were recognized. Information was collected, categorized, synthesized, and validated, but the actual linkage between activities and their direct outcomes were not fully mapped. (After all, memories and recorded data fade over time.) Instead, strategies that likely contributed were identified, based on a contribution analysis “rendering a simple cause-effect conclusion” (Patton, 2008) to policy, legislation, and smoking rate changes over the 25-year time period. Three key substrategies were used:

1. noting the sequencing of CCS and coalition activities and subsequent government and other stakeholder reactions, demonstrated commitments, and policy decisions over time
2. noting the media prominence given to certain CCS and coalition actions, including media assertions regarding influence
3. adopting a conservative approach to impact estimation in terms of policy time advancement.

The following sections outline the study purpose, challenge, systems description, and linkages and results “mapping.”

## Purpose

The purpose of this case study was to document 25 years (1985–2009) of the Canadian Cancer Society’s (CCS) Tobacco Control Advocacy

Story. Specifically, the objective of the retrospective study was to determine the extent to which CCS tobacco control advocacy influenced Canadian tobacco policy and smoking outcomes over the last 25 years and to document the key apparent relationships and influence trajectories. The second objective was to provide a learning opportunity for the CCS in its future advocacy efforts.

The scope and methodology for this study relied on three lines of enquiry:

1. a media content analysis of 1,244 related media records
2. content analysis of various documents, publications and videos
3. interviews with key CCS and anti-tobacco advocacy partnership members.

## The Challenge

In a perfect world, advocacy analysts collect the necessary documentation to trace their stories. In the real world, as the advocates in this story told us, they were much too busy fighting the tobacco industry and trying to change Canadian tobacco control policy to document activities and outcomes.

Because advocates' strategies for achieving their policy goals often evolve without a predictable script, advocates must regularly adapt their strategies in response to changing variables and conditions. (Harvard Family Research Project, 2009, p. 4)

At best, advocacy evaluation is intended to measure the effectiveness of advocacy strategies. The challenge is determining what metrics should be measured, especially in light of the fact that "advocacy has long been considered too hard to measure and so far relatively few advocates, funders, or evaluators have taken the challenge" (Harvard Family Research Project, 2009, p. 3).

In light of the above, the study team adapted our plan to the needs of the stakeholder and aligned methods by mapping the nature of the Canadian tobacco advocacy control scenario retrospectively over a 25-year time period. The first order of business in doing this was to map the different policy fronts and general strategies used by the tobacco advocacy effort of the Canadian Cancer Society and its emergent coalition.

## Describing the Systems and Linkages in the Advocacy Story

Advocacy evaluation typically focuses on the policy changes journey rather than just the destination. It captures the changes advocates make on the way to achieving policy goals. (Harvard Family Research Project, 2009, p. 37)

Documents, interviews, and video records suggest that the tobacco control advocacy fight took place on several fronts.<sup>1</sup> These can be viewed as part of a system 'landscape' as follows.

### The primary public policy front

The primary public policy front relates to policy and rule makers, the federal-provincial/territorial and regional/municipal governments. (It also includes international governing bodies in certain situations.) These groups set policy and govern what other actors do.

### Intermediary front

The legal and court system can also be viewed as a set of intermediaries, as they review and rule on legislation, as well as being part of the enforcement chain (e.g., the Supreme Court of Canada declaring the Tobacco Products Control Act of 1988 unconstitutional in 1995 was a major setback and opened the door to more aggressive tobacco promotion by the industry). Some other key actors include intermediaries such as (a) inspectorates and government agencies who need to uphold the rules; (b) public and private providers who must adhere to the laws and in some ways promote the spirit of them (e.g., originally airlines, and eventually the public space managers of buildings and then food and entertainment establishments, needed to uphold policies against tobacco use); (c) promoters of arts and sporting events who may take promotional funding from tobacco companies in return for some types of product or brand promotion; and (d) groups who will be interested in promoting either tobacco use (typically tobacco industry lead groups) and those interested in promoting tobacco control. This latter group make up key candidates for CCS and advocacy partner efforts.

### Intermediary media front

The CCS and its advocacy partners clearly worked through, with, and occasionally against the mass media in terms of tobacco control messaging.

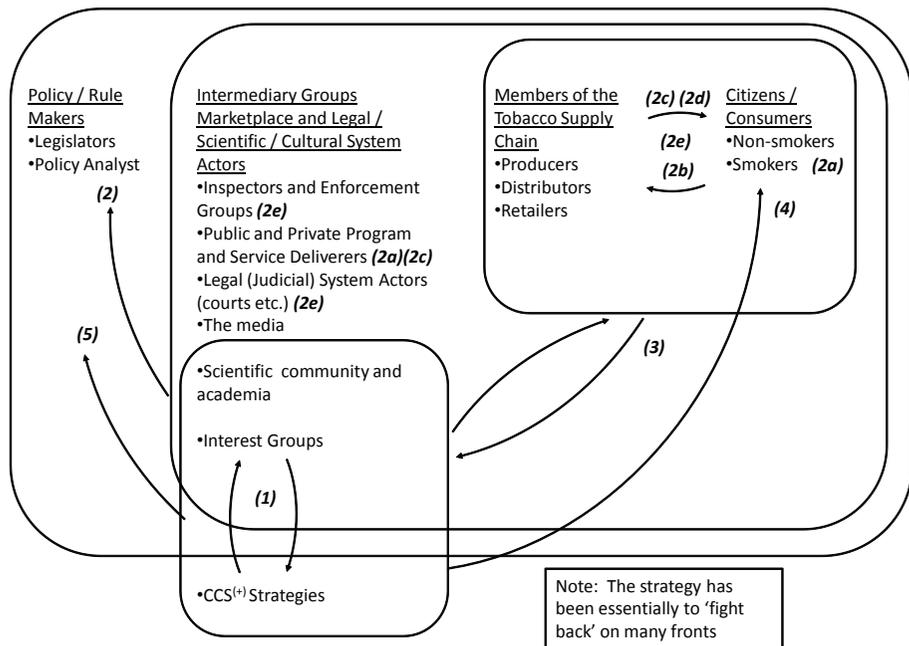
Direct front

A more direct set of system actors include the members of the tobacco supply chain, including the producers, manufacturers, distributors, and retailers of tobacco products. In order for tobacco control policies to work, these groups must also at least adhere to the policies and laws which pertain to them.

Key stakeholder front

Finally citizens and consumers—both smokers and non-smokers—need to be considered as key stakeholders. These are summarized in Figure 1 and the key strategies described in it.

**Figure 1**  
**The Tobacco System Landscape and Tobacco Control—A Fight on Many Fronts**



Key Strategies:

- (1) Engagement and collaborative work with key partners, Smokers Rights, physicians
- (2) Policy rule makers including legislators
  - (2a) Smokers when they smoke
  - (2b) Taxes on tobacco
  - (2c) Restrictions on advertising
  - (2d) Restrictions on marketing
  - (2e) Battling contraband
- (3) Direct contact/communications with the public
- (4) Direct support to smokers
- (5) Worldwide advocacy—ad bacco, smoking bans, graphic warnings and taxes all adopted by other countries

In summary, the CCS tobacco control advocacy addressed virtually every possible system in the tobacco policy landscape. It can therefore be said that the battle was fought on many fronts. Evidence from media and interview sources also suggested that it did so consistently over time.

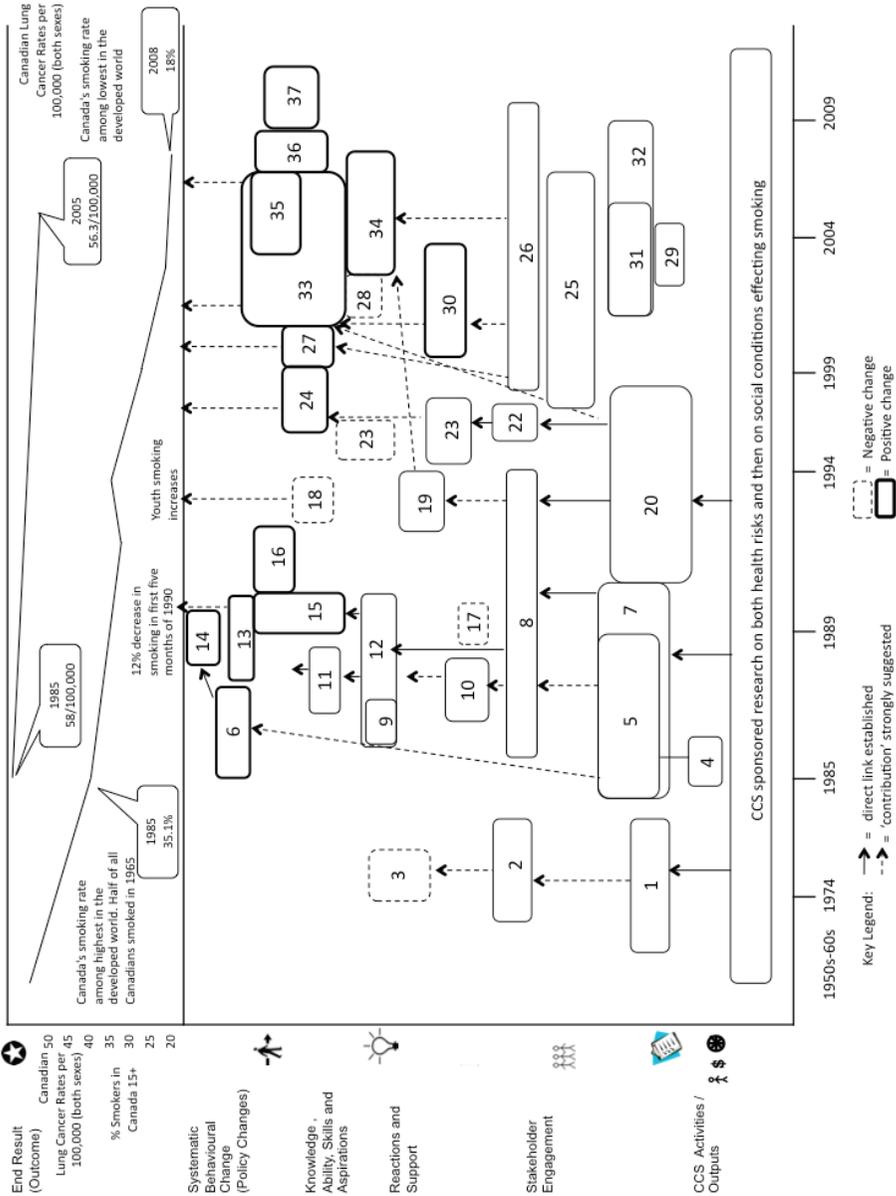
## Results Mapping Retrospective

Mapping developments over time became another key element in the analysis. Figure 2 summarizes a few key developments over the 25 years from 1985 to 2010 (the actual mapping working papers contain many more change points). It is important to note two important features of this descriptive chart:

1. The hierarchy of changes displayed on the vertical axis essentially shows elements under the CCS and coalition control at the bottom, proceeding to engagement, reactions, support, and the development of knowledge, ability, skills, and aspirations leading to policy changes across institutions and governments. The top of the chart shows end outcome results of policy change—smoking rates—and at the very top lung cancer rates as a proxy for overall cancer burden. This adaptation of the Bennett hierarchy (Bennett, 1979, as cited in Patton, 1997, p. 235) over time lays out the sequence of events differentiated by “closeness” to direct CCS attribution (i.e., the higher one goes in the chart, the higher the level of outcome and generally the less direct the attribution to CCS advocacy activities).
2. The time series depiction seeks to differentiate elements that appeared to show compelling direct cause-effect evidence (e.g., the Coalition advocated for a tax increase of \$4 per carton, which was reflected in media and directly reflected in volunteer take-up and eventually in an actual policy change increasing taxes by \$4 per carton) versus those for which the team had not been able to establish a compelling direct link. These are depicted by solid and dotted lines, respectively. (Note: Given more time, the team would proceed to build stronger direct link cases for a number of the events on this map—and beyond.)

This overall summary was also qualitatively validated by constructing key spark plug events or important sequences of key events. These events are described in the full case study (Canadian Cancer Society, 2010).

**Figure 2**  
**Visual Mapping of Canadian Tobacco Advocacy Control 1950–2009<sup>1</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> This chart shows summary highlights only and is supported by over 100 pages of charts covering each year from 1985-2010 in detail. It is also supported by a set of 'key elements' write-ups. For more on these see the full case study.

### Legend for Figure 2

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- 1 1950-1970s – First large-scale epidemiological study showing association between lung cancer and smoking and related messages on cancers related to tobacco use. Various messages on cancers related to tobacco use.

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  - 2 1970s – Media pick-up and report on Canadian Cancer Society presentations on hazards of smoking.

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  - 3 1974 – Private members Bill C-242 (non-smoking sections in buses, planes, and trains) was approved at second reading but did not receive final approval.

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  - 4 1986 – Canadian Cancer Society hires full-time advocate, Ken Kyle.

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  - 5 1986 – Lobby to ban smoking on planes. Coalition formed, Kyle's office, the War Room, 'new tactics' – aggressive approach (e.g., Canadian Cancer Society advocates that members fly Air Canada to counteract threatened industry boycott over flight smoking bans).

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  - 6 1987 – Smoking is banned on domestic flights 2 hours or less, Air Canada voluntarily extends ban on flights to New York, Montreal, and Toronto (in 1988 ban extends to other US destinations).

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  - 7 1989 – Lobbying for tax increase of \$4 per carton.

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  - 8 1989 – Various media reports of Canadian anti-smoking coalition that include Canadian Cancer Society efforts and messages.

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  - 9 MP "commitment questionable." Minister Epp notes difficulties.

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  - 10 2000 – CCS advocates for health warnings to increase awareness of negative effects of smoking. Various Canadians increase awareness of issue.

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  - 11 1988 – Parliament passes Tobacco Products Control Act, banning advertising (Bill C-51), and Non-Smoker's Act (Bill C-204), restricting smoking in federally regulated workplaces and public places. Both come into force in 1989.

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  - 12 1986 – Volunteer lobby. Canadian Council on Smoking and Health; Canadian Medical Association; Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada; Non-Smokers' Rights Association; Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada. *Sustaining a successful policy: the treatment of tobacco taxation in the 1991 Federal Budget. A submission to the Minister of Finance, the Honourable Michael Wilson.* (See Cunningham, 1996.)

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  - 13 1988 – Tobacco Products Control Act & Non Smokers Health Act passed, with assent in 1990.

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  - 14 1989 – Smoking prohibited on all Canadian air carrier flights. International Civil Aviation Organization ban smoking on all flights.

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- 15 1989 – Federal tobacco tax increases by \$4 per carton.
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- 16 1988 – Start of tide of various voluntary smoking bans across Canada.
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- 17 1989 – Supreme Court of Canada refuses Canadian Cancer Society as intervener.
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- 18 1994 – Tobacco tax rollback.
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- 19 Knowledge that packaging dissuades teens.
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- 20 1988 – Coalition rendered various aggressive communication tactics. Cancer Institute of Canada-CAPCA science connections.
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- 21 1995 – Tobacco Control Products Act struck down by Supreme Court of Canada.
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- 22 1998 – Various engagements by Minister Dingwell.
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- 23 1994 – Commitment Minister.
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- 24 2000 – Bill C71 Act to amend Tobacco Act passed.
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- 25 Key engagements and positive reactions noted by key provinces re: public space ban – Division-by-Division mobilization and action.
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- 26 Various media mentions of Canadian Cancer Society and now others re: pronouncements on tobacco issues. Canadian Cancer Society (R. Cunningham) prominent in media quotes from this point on.
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- 27 Taxes increase (e.g., all provinces and territories raise tobacco taxes in 2002).
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- 28 2004 – Constitution challenge to tobacco legislation by industry.
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- 29 2004 – Canadian Cancer Society led fight on constitutional challenge.
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- 30 2004 – Canadian Cancer Society accepted as intervener by the Supreme Court of Canada.
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- 31 Major Canadian Cancer Society advocacy efforts in each Division begin regarding smoking bans.
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- 32 2001 – Influence Federal Tobacco Control Strategy and Federal-Provincial policy, Canadian Partnership Against Cancer.
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- 33 Multiple provinces and municipalities implement public space smoking bans across Canada.
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- 34 2001-2006 – Government of Canada increases investment in policies advocated by Canadian Cancer Society from \$20m to \$291m over 5 years.
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- 35 Estimates of 80% of workplaces smoke-free by mid 2000s
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- 36 2005 – Supreme Court of Canada upholds tobacco amendments retracting promotion.
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- 37 2007 – Nova Scotia bans smoking in vehicles with children. Others follow.
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## CONCLUSION

Case evidence suggests that from the mid 1980s onwards tobacco control policies began to distinctly change on several fronts. A chain reaction of strategic spark plug events arguably ignited a tide of events that turned Canadians and politicians off cigarettes over the 25-year period, including:

- restricting promotion of tobacco (event sponsorship);
- restriction of tobacco products (flavoured cigarillos and packaging (“light” or “mild” cigarettes, warnings, and graphics);
- limiting how tobacco could be sold (power wall and how sold restrictions);
- bans—public spaces and workplaces (restrictions on where tobacco could be smoked);
- taxes on cigarettes; and
- battling contraband (smuggling and illegal distribution—selling to youth).

The Canadian Cancer Society was involved in advocacy for all of these policies. Some of them showed directly attributable changes in terms of specific suggested changes, timing, and events, and others require a stronger leap of faith at times to suggest clear attribution.

Interviews and documentary evidence show that a strategy of coalition building was employed throughout the time period under examination. The closeness of the coalition relationship is qualitatively documented by interviews, books, diaries, and video records, while a quantitative analysis of media pick-up suggests that the advocacy partnership was consistently quoted or referred to as a coherent group. This appears to have extended an already impressive reach and credibility (due to CCS’s long-term affiliation with the National Cancer Institute of Canada) even further in both science circles and other major advocacy groups. A testament to the value of this network was its ability to mobilize a thousand phone calls from across Canada on the eve of the vote on the renewal of the Tobacco Act bill C-71 in 1997 (Micay, 1997) to counteract last-minute efforts by the pro-tobacco lobby to scuttle key elements.

A time series analysis suggests that on several key occasions, major CCS and coalition efforts were precursors to significant policy and legislative changes.

In summary, this case example demonstrated how a structured results logic can be constructed as a retrospective time series to help provide a plausible, if not fully verified, version of the nature of policy work and its influence.

As we started by noting Patton's approach as inspiration, so we must finish by referring to two of his key tenets:

1. *Build a case.* Both Patton (2008) and, in Canada, Mayne (2001) have suggested that it is important to lay out a theory and to develop evidence in support of that theory (and then to challenge it). Patton likens it to a court case. In our situation, perhaps it is a civil case, where we are not looking for proof beyond a reasonable doubt but rather are seeking to establish on balance that the CCS influenced Canadian Tobacco policy and that in turn this helped Canadians. The case can further be helped by asking: "Given this evidence, what is the likelihood that the CCS-Coalition advanced the adoption of various key elements of tobacco control policy?" In order to get a minimum quantification we can further ask: What is the likelihood that the CCS-Coalition efforts advanced policy by 2 years? 3 years? 5 years? Again, using our civil case and a jury trial as an analogy, what would reasonable people conclude from this circumstantial evidence? The jury could determine not "damages" but rather time advance benefits. In this case, while a full "jury trial" was not conducted, the reasonable-person test strongly suggests that policy was advanced at least 3 years and perhaps 5 years, while some knowledgeable (though possibly biased) experts have suggested as much as 10 years. The point is that, even if the advance caused by CCS-Coalition advocacy was 1 year (a point even staunch opponents would likely concede), a crude cost-benefit analysis suggests that the investment in tobacco control advocacy produced a cost-effective investment compared to other investments in prevention over this time period.<sup>2</sup>
2. *Evaluate for the users.* Early evidence suggests that the CCS senior leadership, having requested the study, is already using the results, not just to demonstrate success but, perhaps more importantly, to use the lessons learned in strategies, tactics, and activities in current policy advocacy work. The framework and stories established here are being used to

foster dialogue and continuous improvement. This is the essence of utilization focused evaluation.

While the results of this short evaluative effort at a policy-advocacy study are encouraging, they are at best a humble beginning. Perhaps the most important immediate outcome of this work for the CCS is its demonstration of the value of such work as the Society rolls out its new assertive strategy to fight cancers over the years to come. In this way evaluative thinking is beginning to be seen as an integral part of strategy, planning, and management at the Canadian Cancer Society for advocacy and, ideally, for all organizational initiatives.

## NOTES

- 1 The “fight” analogy is prominent in the history of tobacco control. G. Mahood, the Executive Director of Non-Smoker’s Rights Association, Canada says in a 1997 video, *Up From the Ashes: The Fight for a New Tobacco Act*, “You simply have to fight for every single inch of turf.” In the same video, lead CCS advocate Ken Kyle continues the fight analogy: “[We’ve] got to find ways to inject major funds to match the opposition.”
- 2 The detailed analysis for this assertion involves some confidential cost information not shareable in this article.

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