

Public Involvement Policy
of
the Veterinary Drugs Directorate

Health Products and Food Branch
Health Canada

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Prepared by Strategic Planning and Stakeholder Relations
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I. Introduction

Health Canada is committed to public involvement which is integral to decision making and providing quality service. The departmental vision is that Canadians are informed on health issues and engaged on key federal decisions that affect health. The Veterinary Drugs Directorate is part of Health Canada and its mandate is to ensure the safety of foods such as milk, meat, eggs, fish, and honey from animals treated with veterinary drugs as well as to ensure that veterinary drugs sold in Canada are safe and effective for animals. This is the basis for VDD's strategic objective to create an open, transparent, leading-edge, proactive organization that will enable its stakeholders/partners and the public to understand and contribute to VDD's priorities, capacity and performance. It also contributes to VDD's statutory responsibilities as a regulator.

Recognizing that an innovative organization needs to consult and take into consideration other opinions and other points of view on key issues, the aim of this public involvement policy is to create and foster a consultative culture within the Veterinary Drugs Directorate and among its stakeholders. A further intent is to develop an understanding among stakeholders as to how their input is considered in the decision-making process at VDD.

II. Definitions

Terms such as "consultation," "public involvement," and "citizen engagement" are often used interchangeably, although they mean different things to different people. The following Health Canada's definitions should help to develop a common understanding of the usage of language.

Public: individuals, consumers, citizens, special interest groups and/or stakeholders.

Stakeholder: an individual, group or organization being affected by or having an interest in an issue and its outcome (e.g; specific matters relating to health, environment, consumers, volunteers, industry, science)

Consultations: techniques for engaging stakeholders in a two-way flow of information to exchange ideas and concerns, offer options for consideration and encourage feedback, such as additional ideas or options from the public.

Citizen Engagement: the techniques that facilitate an informed dialogue among citizens and government officials, elected and/or non-elected, and encourage participants to share ideas or options and undertake collaborative decision making, sometimes as partners.

Public Involvement: the level of participation by the public, or the extent to which the public is actively involved, in understanding, assessing or resolving issues of public concern.

III. Why public involvement matters to VDD

Since its establishment in 2001, one of the main strategic priorities for VDD has been to develop linkages that contribute to enhanced partnerships and continuous exchange of information with stakeholders. With public health issues becoming increasingly complex, and the public requesting a more direct role in policy and program development, public involvement represents an opportunity to:

- ⇒ Build positive relationships with the public and encourage cross-stakeholder deliberations;
- ⇒ Reflect a wider range of public concerns and solutions in decision-making;
- ⇒ Increase public confidence and trust in the directorate's work and decisions;
- ⇒ Ensure that decisions and policies incorporate knowledge and expertise that otherwise would have not been available;
- ⇒ Build broader understanding and support for the directorate mandate, strategic priorities and initiatives.

IV. Principles of good public involvement

The following principles drive Veterinary Drugs Directorate's public involvement activities:

Inclusiveness

- ⇒ Public involvement activities will encourage the participation of people affected by or interested early in the process in defining the issue and before decisions are made.
- ⇒ Affected and interested parties will be given equal opportunity to participate in the public involvement activities and receive equal access to information.
- ⇒ Public involvement activities will be sensitive to the needs of particular groups to maximize their ability to contribute.

Openness and Transparency

- ⇒ Information relating to the consultation will be made publicly available to allow stakeholders to make informed and timely contributions.
- ⇒ Information relating to the consultation can be readily accessed by all those involved before key decisions are made.

- ⇒ Relevant information is presented in an easily understood format.
- ⇒ In some instances certain information can not be fully disclosed because of provisions of *Privacy Act*.

Responsiveness

- ⇒ VDD will consider and respond to contributions from all participants.
- ⇒ Public involvement activities will be transparent. All stakeholders will have a clear understanding of how their feedback and comments are to be used.
- ⇒ VDD will maintain openness and take into consideration new ideas when developing a course of action in the interest of public health.

V. Inventory of involvement mechanisms

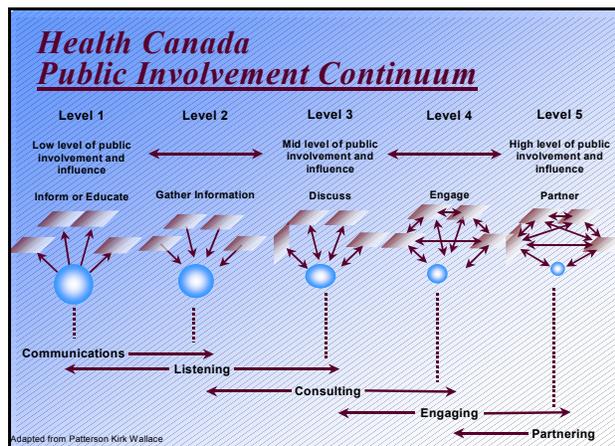
VDD public involvement activities are guided by Health Canada’s Public Involvement Continuum. Health Canada has defined five levels of public involvement, which are highlighted in the following chart. The continuum is intended to guide the planning process by highlighting the main objectives of public involvement process. Combinations or hybrids of techniques may be required depending upon objectives, available resources and other factors.

Level 1- Inform/educate the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the issues, alternatives, and/or solution by using the web site, fact sheets, info kits and exhibit; and to enable them to make informed choices by emphasizing our health promotion role.

Level 2- Gather information/views to obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions through focus groups, surveys, public meetings, web site consultation.

Level 3 - Discuss the work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered using such tools as advisory committees, issue conferences, and workshops.

Level 4 - Engage the public in components of the decision-making including the development of alternatives and the identification of preferred solutions by organizing such mechanisms as meetings, retreats and round table discussions.



Level 5 - Partner with the public on decision-making through mechanisms such as consensus conferences, citizen's panel, study groups and think tanks.

All the above levels of public involvement contribute to more informed decision-making. However, final decisions rest with VDD, as the regulator.

VI. How will VDD conduct public involvement

Every public health and health protection theme or issue requires a unique process for informing and engaging the public. Public involvement (PI) plans are an important part of the process of addressing, establishing or reviewing new policies, programs and/or legislation. They lay-out the mechanisms of public engagement in the decision-making process and define the scope and the level of involvement.

In planning for a successful public involvement activity, VDD designs a public involvement plan that builds on the issue analysis and environmental scan prepared by policy and science experts. The plan consists of:

- 1. The issue identification** that defines clearly the nature and scope of the issue that is the basis for the consultations. This document also describes the legislative, legal and jurisdictional context of the issue.
- 2. The purpose for the public involvement process**, which lists the benefits of public involvement and provides the reasons why the public should be involved in that particular decision-making process.
- 3. Target Audience Profile.** This is a key part of the plan where affected and interested stakeholders are identified. This list also includes stakeholders that are perceived to have an interest in the issue at stake. The complete list should reflect a balance of interests based on geography, sector, gender, culture, language and relevant experience or expertise.
- 4. Public Involvement Activities.** Based on the Public Involvement continuum mechanisms are identified to be used in meeting the specific objectives.
- 5. Identification of time frames and resources.** In establishing timelines for the project, VDD strives to strike a balance between the need for timely results and the equal need for stakeholders to engage meaningfully with each other on the issue.

Funding of a public involvement process is important in respect to enabling all the stakeholders to be involved equally. Funding of stakeholder participation would be decided on a case by case basis but generally only for the voluntary sector.

- 6. Evaluation of results.** This section describes the criteria to measure the participation in, and satisfaction with the process, and recommendations for a set of best practices for future reference. Feedback from stakeholders is assessed and incorporated into the policy document.

VII. Who coordinates public involvement in VDD

Since the early establishment of VDD, Strategic Planning and Stakeholder Relations Division (SPSRD) coordinates all VDD public involvement activities to achieve consistent and quality consultation. Also, since various VDD divisions may need to consult with stakeholders within the same time frame, it is important that SPSRD coordinates and manages the public involvement process. In addition, SPSRD is the contact point for Branch, Departmental level and Government of Canada public involvement activities

VIII. Key References

A number of documents and web sites were consulted for this policy. The key documents that guide the planning and implementation process at VDD are:

- ⇒ OCAPI Public Involvement Framework and Guideline
- ⇒ Health Canada's policy document "Policy Toolkit for Public Involvement in Decision Making"
- ⇒ Government of Canada Policy on consulting and Engaging Canadians
- ⇒ VDD Strategic Plan