

# An Introduction to Priority Setting

When starting to set priorities, there are a variety of options to choose from. The purpose of this document is to introduce users to some of the methods available that can help focus your work. Setting priorities allows you to focus efforts and use limited human and financial resources effectively. For more details, including tools and guides for priority setting, please visit the Skill-Building Resources Section of the Parachute website.



## When do I need to do Priority Setting?

- ◆ When there are many ideas on the table, and your organization or community group needs to make decisions on which ideas will become priorities, a priority setting process is necessary.<sup>1</sup> An example for this could be choosing which injury-types to work on reducing in your community.
- ◆ You may also need to do a priority setting exercise when you are starting a new program, or revisiting a current program, and need to plan your program goals and objectives.
- ◆ Prioritization will be needed at many stages of the planning process. For example, you may choose priorities about your:
  - vision
  - mission
  - goals
  - audiences
  - activities
  - evaluation indicators

Decisions and priority setting will be made through consultation with many different stakeholders: your organization, your community representatives, your funders, and others.<sup>1</sup>

## Types of Priority Setting Methods

The Health Communication Unit (Public Health Ontario) offers four different priority setting methods: *dotmocracy*, *paired comparisons*, *decision boxes*, and *grid analysis*. For information on how to use these methods, visit [www.ohpe.ca/node/11169](http://www.ohpe.ca/node/11169)<sup>1</sup>

A Priority Setting Process Checklist is also available from Public Health Ontario to help you prepare for using one of these four methods, at [www.thcu.ca/infoandresources/resource\\_display.cfm?resourceID=1341&translateto=english](http://www.thcu.ca/infoandresources/resource_display.cfm?resourceID=1341&translateto=english)<sup>2</sup>

A common process found in priority-setting is called **Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA)**. MCDA can be used to describe and compare different options using a process that

usually involves: selecting meaningful criteria to make comparisons across options; applying weights to those criteria; and scoring each option under consideration based on its performance.<sup>3</sup>

Priority setting using the MCDA typically involves a common set of steps:

- Step 1:** Review and set the criteria to be considered during the priority setting process
- Step 2:** Consider the relative importance of different criteria
- Step 3:** Synthesize information by describing the intervention options across the criteria
- Step 4:** Score each intervention option against each criterion
- Step 5:** Calculate the total weighted value score

The EVIDEM framework is a type of MCDA application. For more information and instruction on applying this framework, visit the EVIDEM website at [www.evidem.org/evidem-overview.php](http://www.evidem.org/evidem-overview.php)

## References

1. van Boxmeer, N., & Thesenvitz, J. 2010. Priority Setting- Four Methods for Getting to What's Important! Retrieved July 16, 2014 from Ontario Health Promotion E-Bulletin 651, Volume 2010, No. 652: <http://www.ohpe.ca/node/11169>
2. Thesenvitz, J., Hershfield, L., & MacDonald, R. (2011). Priority Setting Process Checklist. Retrieved July 16, 2014 from THCU Resource Library, Public Health Ontario: [http://www.thcu.ca/infoandresources/resource\\_display.cfm?resourceID=1341&translateto=english](http://www.thcu.ca/infoandresources/resource_display.cfm?resourceID=1341&translateto=english)
3. Adapted from Goetghebeur et al. 2008. Evidence and Value: Impact on Decision Making- the EVIDEM framework and potential applications. *BMC Health Services Research*, 8:270 doi: 10.1186/1472-6963-8-270

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