



# A prevention systems change framework

The Prevention Centre is a leader in applying systems thinking to the prevention of chronic disease with the development of new tools and methods to advance research in this field.

In a new publication, “[From understanding to impactful action: systems thinking for systems change in chronic disease prevention research](#)” we have shared how prevention researchers can develop a pathway for creating system change through deep systems analysis and reflective learning, followed by the development and implementation of a theory of systems change.

The Prevention Systems Change Framework (PSCF\*) can be used to guide systems-based research planning, monitoring, study team reflective learning, and research evaluation processes to strengthen the links between research and impactful action.



The framework progresses through four key steps in the context of prevention research:

1. Applying a **systemic lens** to the prevention problem being studied
2. Holding an **implementation focus**
3. **Integrating** the systemic lens and implementation focus
4. **Developing** a theory of systems change.

## 1. Applying a systemic lens

Systems characteristics	Questions
Policies	What gaps in policy exist to build the system?
	What additional policies and programs are needed?
	Are the current policies evidence-based and relevant to the system?
Connections and boundaries	How are government departments, non-government organisations, industry, and community groups working together e.g.: in siloed or well connected ways? What needs to change?
	How well do government stakeholders, non-government organisations, industry, and community groups trust each other and share information, data, and resources?
Power and control dynamics	How much do the different policy actors within the policy community (government departments, non-government organisations, technical experts, and researchers) have real influence over intersectoral policy decisions, processes, plans, and options?
	How do different government departments share decision making power around policies?
	Is decision-making power shared across all levels of government (federal, state, and local)?
System regulations	Do any current policies or procedures get in the way of the overall goal of working towards achieving chronic disease prevention? If so, which ones need to change?
	What new policies and procedures are needed to support the overall goal?
	How does the current policy context motivate intersectoral action to create changes to facilitate systems changes?
Values and norms	What attitudes and values held by policy decision makers might obscure proposed changes?
System interdependencies	To what extent and how do system variables interact with each other and provide each other with feedback?
	What are the key leverage points for addressing the issue?

## 2. Having an implementation focus

Component and definitions	Key elements for review and discussion
Readiness	<p>Policy actors' (i.e., government departments, non-government organisations, technical experts, and researchers) perceptions of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Awareness:</b> General awareness of the targeted change</li> <li><b>Valence:</b> Change would provide personal or system benefits</li> <li><b>Management support:</b> Local leaders are committed to the change</li> <li><b>Discrepancy:</b> Change is necessary</li> <li><b>Self-efficacy:</b> Change is feasible and system actors can implement the new behaviours</li> <li><b>Contextual and structural factors:</b> Change is supported by the institutional context.</li> </ul>
Contingent capacities	<p><b>Knowledge of the system</b> Understanding of the form and function of the system. Understanding of how targeted problems emerge from current system characteristics.</p> <p><b>Relational capacity</b> Strong formal and informal ties between policy actors.</p> <p><b>Change capability, for example:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Reshaping capability:</b> System actors manage change effectively.</li> <li><b>Development capabilities:</b> The availability of resources to support the change.</li> <li><b>Engagement capabilities:</b> The ability of the system to authentically involve constituents in decision-making.</li> <li><b>Absorptive capabilities:</b> The capacity of system actors to value, assimilate, and use new knowledge.</li> </ul> <p><b>Innovative specific capacity</b> Skills and knowledge sets needed to implement a specific change-related innovation.</p>
Diffusion	<p>Promoting broad scale awareness of change effort across system actors.</p> <p>Encouraging the adoption of the innovation.</p> <p>Ensuring the actual and appropriate use of the new information about the chronic disease prevention system.</p> <p>Expanding the use of chronic disease prevention study findings across system sectors.</p>
Sustainability	<p>Maintaining effective new policies and procedures.</p> <p>Institutionalisation of new mindsets and practices.</p> <p>Sustaining capacities and supports needed to ensure that successful intersectoral collaborations are kept in the long run.</p>

## 3. Integrating a systemic lens and implementation focus

Key components	Key elements
Simple rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaging diverse perspectives</li> <li>Thinking systemically</li> <li>Incubating change</li> <li>Effectively implementing change</li> <li>Adapting quickly</li> <li>Pursuing social justice</li> </ul>
Systemic action learning teams	Applying the PSCF to conduct systemic action learning as a team, and integrating the lessons learned into further activities
Small wins	Identifying small wins for maintaining motivation and morale.

## 4. Developing a theory of systems change

Systems characteristics	Key elements
Prospective	<p>Developing a theory of systems change for planning purposes.</p> <p>Articulating actions and reactions to create systems change (e.g., who will do what, who that will impact on and what else will occur, and what is going to change with what outcomes).</p>
Retrospective	<p>For review, reflection and future planning purposes.</p> <p>Articulating and refining your systems change hypothesis and assumptions.</p>

\*Adapted from: Foster-Fishman, PG and Watson ER. The ABLe change framework: A conceptual and methodological tool for promoting systems change. Am. J. Community Psychol. 2012, 49, 503–516

