

## **Institutional Public Statements – Policy | O’Brien Institute for Public Health**

1. Intent: To define the circumstances and context in which the O’Brien Institute will issue public statements.

2. Context:

- a) For the purposes of this policy, a public statement is an official written statement drafted by, or on behalf of, the leadership of the O’Brien Institute, with society at large as its intended primary audience, which will address, contextualize, or bring attention to issues or events taking place that align with the [Institute’s strategic areas of focus](#). This document will be available publicly, on the O’Brien Institute website.
- b) The Institute is, first and foremost, a research institution. Due to the nature of public health research, however, it is an institution that operates at the intersection of academia and society. As such, its members believe their work does not end at publication, and feel an obligation to directly apply said research, and their professional expertise, to the betterment of society.

3. Considerations:

- a) The Institute recognizes that its members are at liberty to make public statements, based on academic freedom and the principles of open discussion and free discourse by which the Institute abides. Members are independent of the Institute and are encouraged to engage in free and public discourse in a manner that is thoughtful and professional, and that advances their fields and positively affects public health.
- b) Given that a Public Statement released from “The O’Brien Institute” could imply a consensus in opinion and ideology among its members, and that such consensus is impractical to secure, the Institute will release Public Statements from “The Directors of the O’Brien Institute,” and name the members who have assisted in the creation of the Statement.
- c) Because achieving consensus among the membership is unrealistic, the Institute’s Public Statements will identify a variety of evidence-informed policy options, rather than advocating for a particular practice or policy change.
- d) Considerations for when an institutional public statement may be helpful and can be issued:
  - i. When there is an important public health issue, a public health-related current, or long-standing, event or issue, especially in the case that the event or issue relates to one of the O’Brien Institute’s strategic areas of focus, and,
  - ii. When a statement would offer something new to the discourse, such as novel public health insights, suggestions on how to move forward, or how we are, or will serve, as an example by doing things differently, and,

- iii. When the O'Brien Institute can identify a public health expert to speak to the topic using an evidence-informed public health lens.

4. Institute-supported alternatives to issuing a public statement:

- a) One of the Institute's core functions is to support its members through all phases of their work, through to, and including knowledge exchange. Although the Institute is unable to endorse members' public opinions or scientific conclusions, we believe it is important to assist in their dissemination. This approach is based on our belief that free and open discourse is the most honest and equitable path to solving the large and complex problems at the heart of current public health challenges.
- b) As such, without providing a position statement or endorsement, the Institute has other means by which it can potentially support members as they inform and shape practice and policy. These include:
  - i. Assisting in the production of policy briefs or primers generated by members and disseminated by Institute communication assets;
  - ii. Assisting members in producing and delivering knowledge exchange initiatives, such as events and seminars, writing and submitting op-eds, social media campaigns, conducting media relations outreach, building project-specific websites, and others.

5. An evergreen policy:

- a) The aspects determining this policy are subjective, and are rooted in a particular time and place. A "one-size fits all" approach will inevitably have its limitations and may be inadequate. As such:
  - i. The policy will be reviewed periodically;
  - ii. It will be open to discussion and refinement by both Institute leadership and Institute membership.