

OVERVIEW

A significant imbalance was identified between the critical need for policies aimed at reducing injury and violence and the discomfort many individuals feel when using policy-related skills.

To address this gap and gain further insights, Safe States Alliance hosted its first-ever Policy Forum in Columbia, South Carolina.

STATES REPRESENTED

Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas.

TAKEAWAYS



PARTNERSHIPS ENABLE PROGRESS

When direct advocacy isn't allowed, IVP professionals can still engage in policy and influence change by supporting partners with data and expertise.



BARRIERS EXIST, BUT CHANGE IS POSSIBLE

Legal, cultural, and political challenges make policy work hard; however, success is possible with trust, timing, and smart collaboration.



POLICY MUST BE EVIDENCE-BASED

Too often, reactive or symbolic policies replace proven strategies. Data and research must guide prevention efforts, and engagement from IVP professionals is critical.

ENGAGING IN POLICY

The Role of Partners in Policy Engagement

Given the restrictions on working directly with policymakers, unless formally approved, it is beneficial for IVP professionals to build partnerships with those who are better connected and able to engage freely with policymakers in support of IVP.

Partners often have more flexibility, fewer restrictions, and access to grants that support advocacy- or policy-related activities. Their efforts have been instrumental in advancing legislation, especially when state programs are limited to offering technical input or high-level talking points.

While direct advocacy or policy work by governmental agencies may be constrained, their support remains critical. **Providing data, expertise, and alignment with partner goals helps amplify impact.** Effective policy engagement in public health depends on strong partnerships, where agencies support and partners lead when and where permissible.

Strategies for Engaging Partners to Advance IVP Policy Goals



Build Relationships Early and Sustain Trust: Start engaging with partners well before specific policy opportunities arise. Consistent, evidence-informed collaboration over time helps establish your program as a trusted and reliable partner.



Clarify Your Role and Offer Public Health Expertise: Clearly communicate your program's strengths, especially in areas like data analysis, evaluation, and public health evidence. Position your team as a go-to resource for partners.



Leverage and Share Data Effectively: Provide partners with relevant data, ensuring it is correctly interpreted and reaches the appropriate audience. Emphasize your role as a credible data source, as effective policymaking often relies on robust evidence.



Support Community Led Advocacy: While governmental agencies may have limitations in advocacy, they can still empower community partners. Help them understand the evidence, refine their messaging, and navigate policy processes independently.



Engage at All Levels of Your Organization: Involve staff in partner engagement from various roles, not just leadership. This approach strengthens and sustains relationships, especially during workforce changes or political transitions.



Identify and Elevate Policy Champions: Partner with credible individuals, such as health professionals, researchers, or community leaders, who can lead policy initiatives with broader influence. Supporting the right champion can amplify your program's impact.



Leverage Local-Level Influence: Local health departments may have fewer restrictions and closer relationships with legislators. State programs can support these local entities by offering data, guidance, and technical expertise when direct advocacy is not permitted.



Engage with Established Coalitions and Committees: Participating in multidisciplinary task forces, review panels, or coalitions, such as child fatality review boards or domestic violence coalitions, offers valuable opportunities to share expertise, build trust, and inform policy discussions organically, which often carry greater legitimacy than proposals from a single agency.

SE/SW Policy In Action

Participants emphasized several effective partnerships that significantly advanced policy initiatives within their states.

LOUISIANA



- **Domestic Abuse Fatality Review:** In 2021, the Louisiana Department of Health collaborated with the Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence to draft a bill to formally establish a Domestic Abuse Fatality Review Panel. With leadership support, they included language that protects the IVP program by ensuring that activities would not be mandated if funding were unavailable. The bill passed, demonstrating the importance of strategic language and partnerships in achieving policy success.
- **Child Access Prevention Study Resolution:** In the 2025 Legislative session, a study resolution passed that asks the Louisiana Department of Health to summarize child firearm-related mortality data, evidence around child access prevention laws, and recommendations for Louisiana. Due to an ongoing partnership with the New Orleans Health Department, who worked directly with legislators on a proposed bill and then the final study resolution, the Louisiana Department of Health's injury and violence prevention team was consulted beforehand on the language and feasibility of leading the study resolution.
- **Child Passenger Safety:** Changes to child passenger safety laws in 2019 were introduced following recommendations from the Louisiana Child Death Review panel, which included highway safety and law enforcement partners. Because the proposal came from a multidisciplinary group, rather than solely the health department, it gained stronger traction and support. The legislation successfully passed as one of the strongest (at the time) CPS laws in the US.

NORTH CAROLINA



- **NC Safe Campaign:** Following grassroots support and broad stakeholder alignment, the NC CFTF's dedication to protecting children ages 0-17 from injuries and deaths caused by unsecured firearms ultimately led to the statewide NC Safe campaign housed at the NC Department of Public Safety (NCDPS) in 2023. Beginning in 2017, the NCDHHS IVPB provided subject matter expertise and staffing support to the NC CFTF's series of meetings focused on safe firearm storage in 2017. Despite multiple years of bipartisan legislative support, the state budget did not include the task force's funding recommendation for a coordinator to work with communities on safe firearm storage education and events. With the financial support of the Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, part of NCDPS, the statewide campaign provides education with specific messaging for gun owners, parents, healthcare providers, and schools along with information on obtaining free or reduced cost gun locks.
- **Longstanding Participation in the NC Child Fatality Task Force:** Recognizing the limitations on direct advocacy, staff from the NC Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) Injury and Violence Prevention Branch (IVPB) have served as expert, non-voting members of the state's Child Fatality Task Force, a legislative study commission. IVPB's ongoing involvement has informed policy discussions around topics such as child passenger safety, impaired driving, overdose prevention, suicide prevention, and youth mental health by providing valuable data and evidence-based prevention insights over time.

- **Local Capacity Building:** Recognizing their limited role in state-level advocacy, NCDHHS IVPB partnered with the University of North Carolina Injury Prevention Research Center to build community capacity through training academies and policy workshops. For example, a 2020 Academy educated community teams about family-friendly workplace policies (FFWPs) like paid leave and their role in violence prevention. Participants also learned how to communicate about these policies' importance and benefits to families, communities, and businesses. The Academy empowered participants to engage with local businesses, community leaders, and elected officials, and to advocate for establishing FFWPs.

TENNESSEE



- **Youth Sports Safety (Safe Stars Initiative):** In partnership with Vanderbilt University and led by Dr. Alex Diamond, an evidence-based youth sports safety program was adopted by 82 schools and eventually passed into law without direct involvement from the Tennessee Department of Health. This illustrates how partners can lead policy changes that are later integrated into state responsibilities.

Public health professionals can effectively contribute to policy development- even within organizational constraints- by working through coalitions, empowering partners, and strategically sharing expertise and data. These examples illustrate that setting up for success requires good timing, trust, persistence, and the right partnerships.