Policy Formulation: Agenda Setting

PHC 6102
Principles of Health Policy and Management
Objectives

• Describe the agenda setting of the policy formulation phase of the policymaking process

• Describe how decisions are made about possible solutions in agenda setting

• Describe the nature of problems that drive health policy agenda setting

• Describe interest group involvement in agenda setting
Overview of the Policy Formulation Phase

EXHIBIT 3.1 A Model of the Public Policymaking Process in the United States: Agenda Setting in the Policy Formulation Phase

Preferences of individuals, organizations, and interest groups, along with biological, cultural, demographic, ecological, economic, ethical, legal, psychological, social, and technological inputs

Policy Formulation Phase
- Agenda Setting
  - Problems
  - Possible Solutions
  - Political Circumstances
- Development of Legislation
- Window of Opportunity*

Policy Implementation Phase
- Bridged by Formal Enactment of Legislation
- Rulemaking
- Operation

Policy Modification Phase
- Feedback from individuals, organizations, and interest groups experiencing the consequences of policies, combined with the assessments of the performance and impact of policies by those who formulate and implement them, influences future policy formulation and implementation.

*The window of opportunity opens when there is a favorable confluence of problems, possible solutions, and political circumstances.
Agenda Setting

EXHIBIT 3.2
Agenda Setting as the Confluence of Problems, Possible Solutions, and Political Circumstances

Problems
Possible Solutions
Political Circumstances

A Place on the Policy Agenda
Problems that Drive Policy Formulation

• Those policymakers broadly identify as important and urgent
  – Depends on its public salience & the degree of group conflict surrounding it (salience must be high & conflict low)
• Trends in certain variables reach unacceptable levels
  – E.g., growth in number of uninsured & cost escalation in the Medicare program
• Those spotlighted by widespread applicability or impact on a small group but powerful
  – High cost of prescription medications
• Those linked to other problems that already occupy secure place on agenda
  – Cost escalation in Medicare & growth of the federal deficit
Possible Solutions in the Policy Formulation

• Existence of possible solutions to problems help determines agenda setting
  – Well-conducted health services provides policymakers with facts that might affect their decisions
  – Research plays an important documentation role through the gathering, cataloging, and correlating of facts related to health problems and issues
  – Research informs, and thus influences, the health policy agenda through analyses to determine which solutions may work
Making Decisions About Alternative Possible Solutions

**EXHIBIT 3.3**
The Rational Model of Decision Making

1. Define the problem.
2. Develop relevant alternative solutions.
3. Evaluate alternatives.
4. Select a solution.

Criteria based
Political Circumstances that Drive Agenda Setting

• Political circumstances surrounding any problems/potential solutions include
  – Relevant public attitude, concerns, and opinions
  – The preferences and relative ability to influence political decisions of various groups interested in the problem
  – The positions of involved key policymakers in the executive and legislative branches of government
Interest Group Involvement in Agenda Setting

• Lobbying
  – Communicating with policymakers to influence their decisions to be more favorable to, or at least consistent with the preferences of the lobbyist

• Electioneering
  – Using resources at their disposal to aid candidate for political office

• Litigation
  – Challenge existing policies, seek to stimulate new policies, or try to alter aspects of the policy implementation in courts

• Shaping Public Opinion
  – Creating television, radio, and print advertising that seek to protect and preserve their views or preferences
Influential Role of Chief Executives in Agenda Setting

• Ability to present a unified position on issues
• Ability to emphasize problems and preferred solutions in a number of ways including press conferences, speeches and addresses
• Ability to appoint special commissions or tasks to address the issue
• They are well-positioned to focus the legislative branch on the development of legislation and to prod legislators to continue their work on a favored issue
Summary

• The policy formulation phase involves agenda setting and development of legislation

• Agenda setting is the function of the confluence of three streams of activity: problems, possible solutions to those problems, and political circumstances
  – When all three flow together in favorable alignment, a window of opportunity opens, allowing a problem/potential solution combination, which might be developed into a new public law, or amendment to an existing law

• Interest groups influence agenda setting by lobbying, electioneering, litigation, and by shaping public opinion

• The chief executive (the president, governor, or mayor) also influence policy agenda by the institutional resources inherent in the executive office
Questions

• Discuss the formulation phase of policy making in general terms.
• Identify and discuss the three stream of activities in gender setting
• Describe the nature of problems that drive policy formulation
• Describe the ways that interest groups influence agenda setting
• Describe the role of chief executives in agenda setting at the federal level
Sources