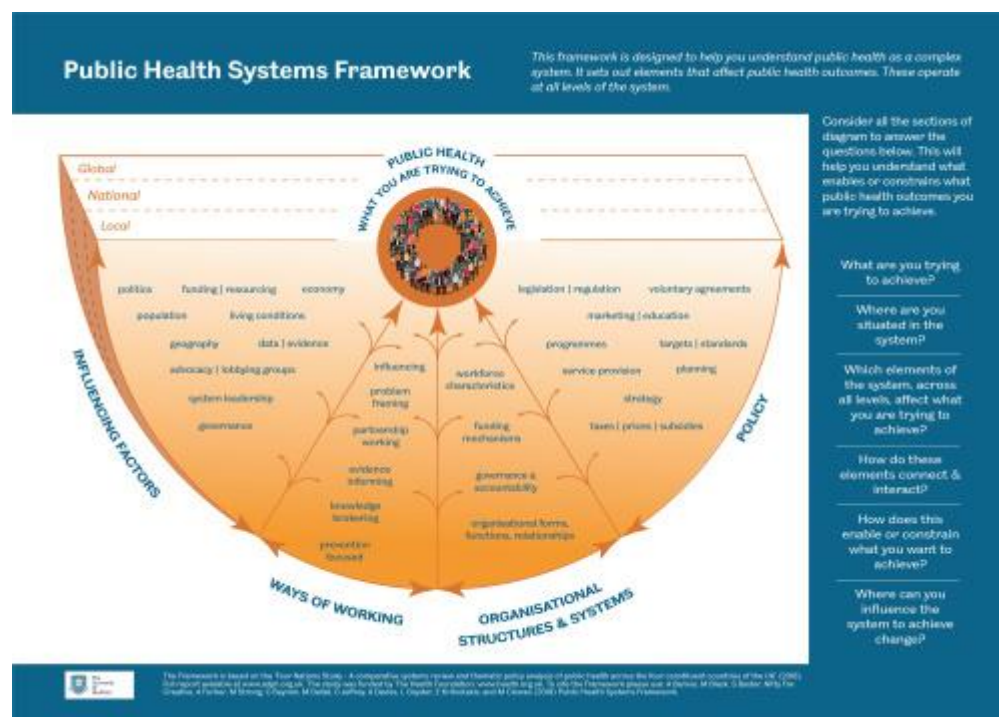




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Visualising the public health system in a way that engages, and levers change



Public Health is ‘the art and science of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organized efforts of society’. We know a fair amount about ‘*the science*’ of what social, economic and environmental conditions enable good health and wellbeing, but we know a lot less about ‘*the art*’ of affecting change to create those conditions, largely because public health is complex.

The constituent parts of **what** makes up a public health system are quite well known and famously visualised through the Dahlgren and Whitehead rainbow model (fig 1).

Fig 1 Dahlgren and Whitehead model



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(Source: Dahlgren and Whitehead, 1991)

Trying to work out how to influence this complex public health system is hard. Some of the difficulty is being able to conceptualise ‘a system’ and unpick what we can do to influence change.

This is why we’ve been working on an APDH and Health Foundation supported study looking at public health policy and systems across the four constituent countries of the UK. As part of this project, we developed a public health systems framework, drawing on the views of stakeholders and refined through two systematic reviews. With the help of a graphic designer, we have created a picture of the public health system which was both true to our research findings and useful to those trying to bring about change.

Whilst this will not give us the answer, it helps us ask the right questions. For example, the way that politics shapes the type of policy that is developed, as well as organisational relationships and day-to-day partnerships work; the way politics intersects with systems leadership; or how systems leadership itself might affect how public health problems are framed. The list could go on!

The visual is included here (fig 2). We’ve called it a Framework as it as a way to frame our understanding of the elements that affect public health outcomes at different levels. We see it as one way to help promote reflection on how to reshape the system, and as sitting ‘under the Dahlgren and Whitehead rainbow’.

Fig 2 Public Health Systems Framework

[illegible]

Consider all the sections of diagram to answer the questions below. This will help you understand what enables or constrains what public health outcomes you are trying to achieve.

Where are you situated in the industry?

How do these elements connect &

How does this

what you want to achieve?

Where can you influence the system to achieve change?

By reflecting on these elements, we think that the visual framework can help us build up a more detailed understanding of the public health system and develop a strategy for who and how to engage to lever system-level change.

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