

**Name:** Chuck Sepers

**Location:** Lawrence, KS

**Name of workplace:** University of Kansas Workgroup for Community Health and Development

**Title:** Graduate Research Assistant

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**Please describe your primary workplace and role:**

Affiliated with the Department of Behavioral Science and the Schiefelbusch Institute for Lifespan Studies, the KU Work Group works collaboratively with grant makers and other partners to support and evaluate efforts to build healthier communities. The KU Work Group's mission is: promoting community health and development collaborative research, teaching, and public service. To support this mission, the KU Work Group, a World Health Organization Collaboration Center, works with strategic partners at the local, national, and international level to affect community and public health (e.g., prevention of substance abuse and violence; promotion of physical activity and healthy nutrition), child/youth health and development (e.g., prevention of adolescent pregnancy; promoting healthy youth development), and community and capacity development (e.g., urban neighborhood development; training of leaders and change agents).

The goals of the KU workgroup include: a) Learning and discovering what works in building healthier communities, and under what conditions; b) Having an impact on conditions that affect community health and development, including for underserved and marginalized groups; and c) Enhancing leadership and building capacity for this work locally, nationally, and globally. These goals are supported by the Work Group's capabilities for community evaluation and community-based participatory research (via an enhanced Online Documentation and Support System) and by building capacity for community health and development through the use of the Community Tool Box and curriculum—the world's largest resource for building capacity for community health and development. I am currently in the joint PhD in Behavioral Psychology (Community Health and Development) and Master of Public Health program at the University of Kansas. As a graduate research assistant for the KU Work Group, my role consists of supporting ongoing projects through project development, technical assistance, and dissemination of relevant findings.

**Please describe any work you do related to public policy (paid or voluntary):**

My work related to policy consists primarily of identifying the federal, state, and local policy environment affecting community level childhood obesity. From this, their effects on health behavior determined. In addition, I work with communities to select policy-level best practices that affect the prevention of chronic disease, address health inequality, and promote long-term health and well-being.

**What training/education do you have in community psychology? How has this training contributed to your work in public policy?**

The core curriculum of the PhD/MPH program features professional training in Community Health and Development, Legal/Ethical Issues, and Community Intervention Practicum. This training, particularly Community Health and Development, has contributed largely to my work in public policy. This training has allowed me to be responsive in conducting community assessments to identify problems and issues that are influenced positively by policy development that alters the community environment to alter widespread health behavior to bring about long-term population-level outcomes and strategies. In addition, my training allows me to identify the community context relevant to policy-level community change, including: outlining stages; identifying assets and challenges;

discovering allies and opponents; and selecting targets and agents necessary for policy development, as well as considering the importance of community member representation during the process.

**What other training or experiences helped prepare you for your work in public policy?**

Representative policy experiences include work at the county and national level. At the county level, I have served on planning committees focused on increasing access to healthy food and physical activity. Planning products included the selection of policies and programs aimed at increasing access to the selected issues. This work included collaborating with community partners and planning committee members for policy advocacy and implementation to bring about improved population-level health outcomes.

Additionally, I am working with the KU Work Group within the Project Measurement Sub-Committee of the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute's Healthy Communities Study: How Communities Shape Children's Health, a national childhood obesity study including more than 260 target communities. This investigation features the first systematic investigation of policies and programs surrounding physical activity and nutrition behavior change efforts and their effects on child body mass index trajectories and the prevention of long-term chronic disease in relation to childhood obesity.

**What advice might you give to students and others thinking about working in public policy?**

Working in public policy is a rich and rewarding experience, but it takes the help of community collaborations, strategic partners, and dedicated colleagues to affect meaningful and sustained change. Importantly, policy selection should stem from those that benefit, based on identified need, and be based in a grounded framework of action and change. Lastly, take time to celebrate the small successes of initiative efforts along the way.

**Is there anything else you would like to say about your involvement in public policy?**

**Please list any professional affiliations that relate to your involvement in public policy.**

University of Kansas Work Group for Community Health and Development

Society for Community Research and Action Policy Committee