



CRITICAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC HEALTH LAW:

Strengthening Injury Prevention in State Health Departments

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A PROBLEM

Injuries are the leading cause of death between ages 1 and 44, cause substantial morbidity, and are costly in human and financial terms. Car crashes, suicides, and falls in the elderly are examples of injuries with substantial public health burden

Most activity in public health agencies in communicable disease control and maternal and child health despite the fact that these are no longer the most important contributors to poor health in the US.

Policymakers and the public largely unaware of the burden of injuries and that most injuries are predictable and therefore preventable

Infrastructure and funding for injury prevention are far below what the burden suggests they ought to be.

WHERE DOES LAW FIT IN?



Government agencies function within an “authorizing environment” defined by statutes, rules and regulations.

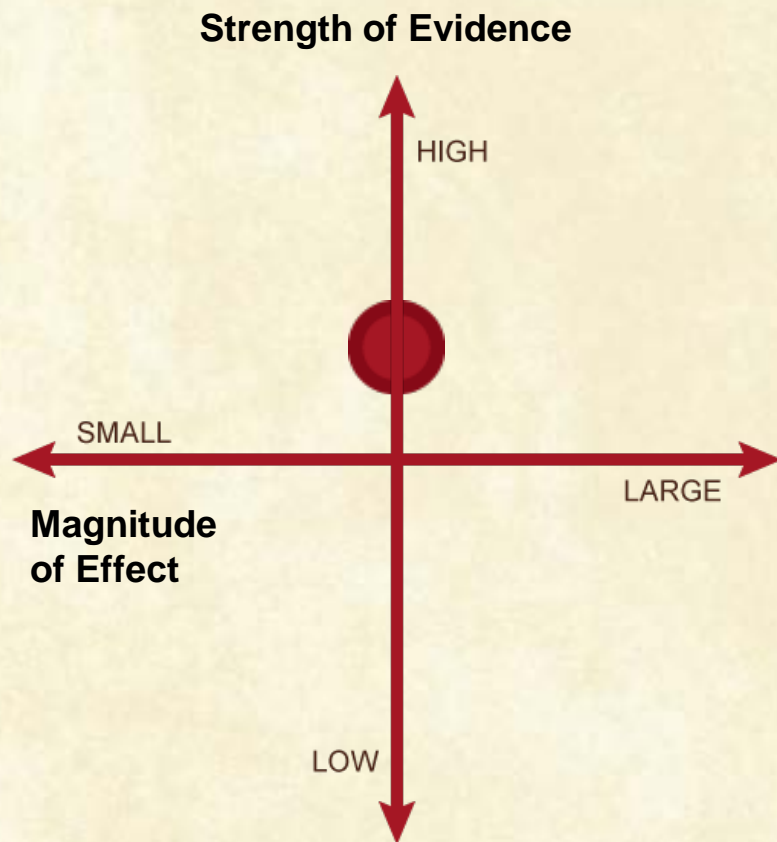
Unambiguous authorization for state health departments to undertake the full spectrum of injury prevention could help programs

- *access injury prevention data*
- *work with partners*
- *address politically sensitive issues*
- *garner funding*

Adoption of a model statute could help strengthen injury prevention

- *Public discussion useful to educate policymakers and public*

EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THE REFORM



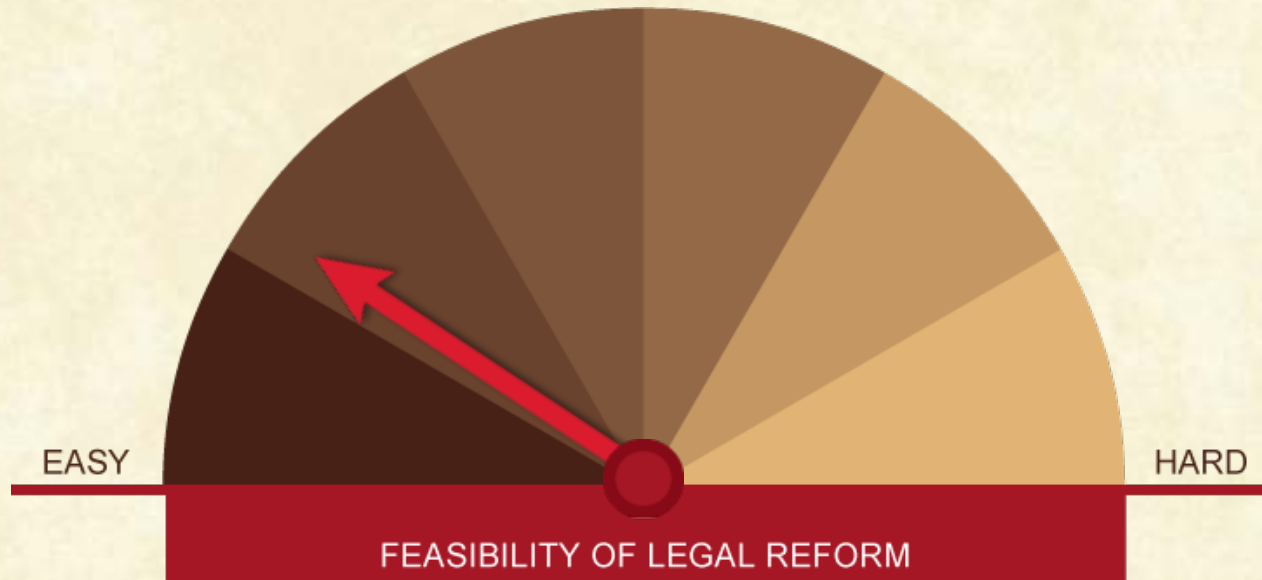
Only 10 out of 50 states have explicit statutory authority for injury prevention that is comprehensive

Experience from many areas of policy work suggests that public discussion about a bill is useful for raising awareness and reframing an issue

Anecdotal evidence from programs in states with comprehensive laws suggests they are helpful

Legal authorization alone does not prevent injuries, but helps build an infrastructure to do so

A WAY FORWARD



Framing the issue is key to success in political environment

- Not an expansion of government since generally existing broad authorities are legally sufficient. But it will help make government more efficient and effective
- Need to ensure lack of explicit authority is not used to justify cutting programs

Critical to tailor efforts to promote adoption to the specific context in each state.