

# Communicating Health Risks AND Solutions

**Barbara MacKinnon**

THE  LUNG ASSOCIATION™  
L'ASSOCIATION PULMONAIRE  
New Brunswick/Nouveau-Brunswick

**Children Count:  
Getting the whole Picture  
Data Research and What We Can Learn**



**Hazard-** Something that has the potential to cause us harm.



**Risk-** A calculation of how much danger we are in when we come in contact with the hazard. Based on the nature of our contact, how long we have contact and how high the exposure is.

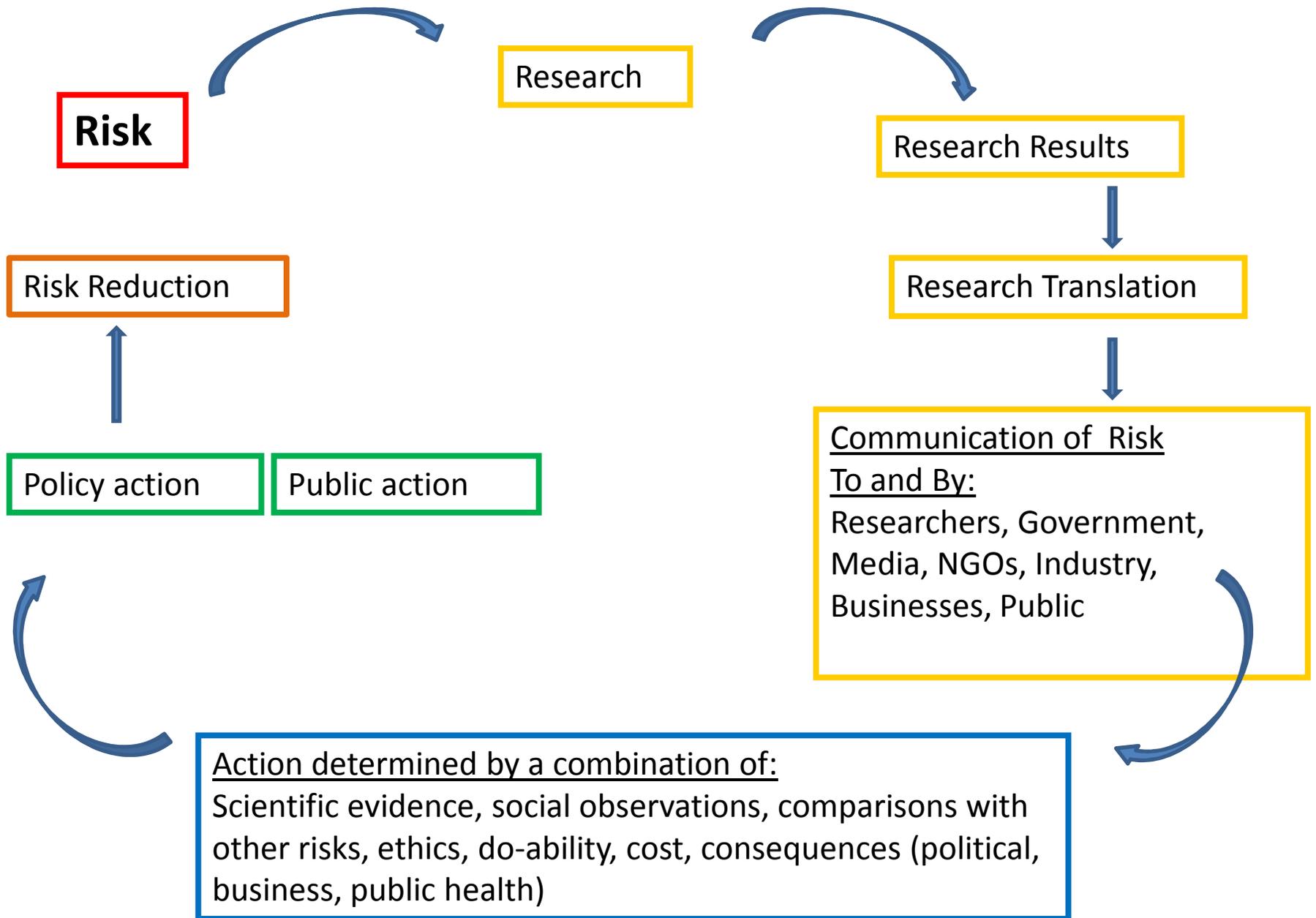


## ***Why do we communicate risk?***

To take action, as necessary, to protect our health:

- ➡ Better policies and laws
- ➡ Better personal behaviours to reduce risk

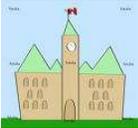






## Scientists

Provide research-based evidence , not policies  
Not all the necessary research is undertaken  
Hard to reach for quick media comment  
Translation of science can be difficult for some



## Government

Follow internal policies for messaging and changing regulations  
Stick to messaging once formulated  
Government of Canada has framework for the use of scientific evidence and the precautionary principle in risk communication



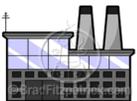
## Public

Need best choice options rather than risk dialogue  
Credibility of messenger is important  
Need the risk to be contextualized- ranked against other risks  
May take actions other than those recommended  
Will reduce what risks they can even if small



## Media

Want their name “out there”. Want to topple yesterday’s story. Go for conflict articles. Have limited resources to evaluate scientific evidence.



## Industry

Want to maximize profit and reduce loss.  
This results in push-back against policies to reduce risk.

## Bis Phenol A Story

Science showed good evidence for elevated risk for infants and young children. Less evidence for elevated risk for adults.

Health Canada policies for action resulted in regulatory action for children's Products. Did not link to in- utero risks.

Public heard messages also from Environmental Defense and others.

Continuum of messages, lots of press.

Resulted in a larger perception of risk than communicated by Health Canada.

Subliminal messages from stores taking baby bottles off shelf before regulated to do so, and taking other products off shelves (marketing ploy as much as safety concern).

People stopped using plastic water bottles and other items.



## Communicating Risk

### Example message template:

The issue is...

The science shows....

The uncertainties are...

The vulnerable population is...

The approach of those with opposing viewpoints..

“...may be intended to \_\_\_\_\_ but....”

Our organization urges (who) the public, industry, government...

To...

Take xxx action

or

Recommends the following choices of best practices....

## Include the Good News

Need to balance the scary news with positive messages:

- Mention improvements in the past
- We have the knowledge to fix this
- Good actions that others are taking
- You can take action

Look around you

We are all here to improve our children's environment

We not only can do it, we are doing it!

