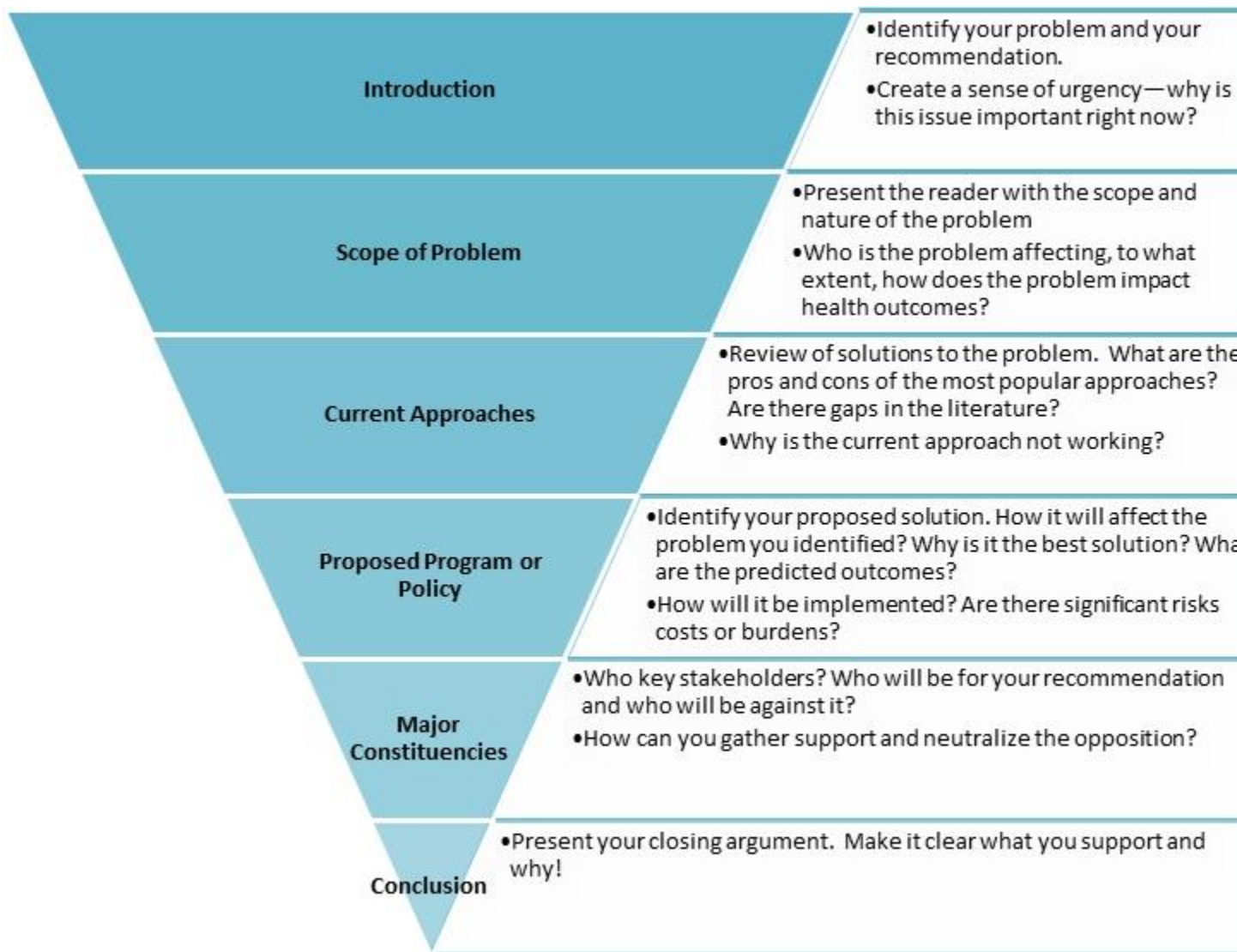## Policy Memos

A policy memo is a paper written to provide an analysis or recommendation of an issue to a specific audience (37). In public health, they are frequently used as a tool to inform and influence busy decision-makers (38). This section provides a brief overview of the organization and style of a policy memo.

Organization

In contrast to an academic paper, the organization of a memo is an "inverted pyramid"– the essential information is emphasized first and is followed by the less important points in order of significance (37). The organization of a memo is generally as follows (38–40):

Introduction
- Identify your problem and your recommendation.
- Create a sense of urgency—why is this issue important right now?

Scope of Problem
- Present the reader with the scope and nature of the problem
- Who is the problem affecting, to what extent, how does the problem impact health outcomes?

Current Approaches
- Review of solutions to the problem. What are the pros and cons of the most popular approaches? Are there gaps in the literature?
- Why is the current approach not working?

Proposed Program or Policy
- Identify your proposed solution. How it will affect the problem you identified? Why is it the best solution? What are the predicted outcomes?
- How will it be implemented? Are there significant risks costs or burdens?

Major Constituencies
- Who key stakeholders? Who will be for your recommendation and who will be against it?
- How can you gather support and neutralize the opposition?

Conclusion
- Present your closing argument. Make it clear what you support and why!

Format and Style

Memos are known for a clear, professional format and style. Make your memo into a "mini roadmap" to guide your reader through it (39). Each section should have a header that summarizes the main point of the section and keeps the reader's interest (39,41). Likewise, paragraphs should have a topic sentence

that summarizes the main point. Your reader should be able to skim the memo to understand your main ideas (39).

Bullet points, tables, and figures can also simplify your message to the reader (39,41). When displaying data, explicitly link how the data fits into your argument (41). When writing about data, emphasize the claim rather than the source and methods (41,42):

- **Needs Improvement**: The Health of Boston Report derived from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2009 reported that 10% of public high school student smoke (43).
- **Improved**: Ten percent (10%) of public high school students in Boston smoke (43).

Your reader can check your references for more specifics about the numbers and sources.

For more resources on writing policy memos, visit:

- [Worksheet : Planning and Outlining Your Policy Memo](#)
- [Memo Writing by Purdue OWL](#)
- [Policy Memos by Harvard Kennedy School](#)
- [Policy Memo by Duke Writing Center](#)
- [Tips on Writing Policy Memos by Peter Wilcoxen](#)
- [How to Write a Policy Memo by University of Michigan-Dearborn](#)
- [Framing Memo: The Affirmative Action Debate by Certain Trumpet Program](#)