# What's in the 'Public Health Toolbox'

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## Opinion

We have frequently been asked whether film is a 'Public Health Tool' that can be used to address the complex, some would even say wicked challenges facing public health today [1-3]. Tools, and the expertise to use them skilfully, have defined crafts and specialities throughout civilisation. This remains true in today's societies. Take the development of a sky-scraper for example. The engineer, architect, developers, builders, surveyor, to mention a few, all have defined roles and have the skills and tools to help them fulfil these roles. Whilst the metaphor of a 'Public Health Toolbox' could be used to aid discussion and debate about the contribution of the profession to tackling today's wicked health issues, significant challenges exist to applying this metaphor to public health, not least how we identify the tools, how we ensure that they are of sufficient quality and how we can demonstrate their contribution to tackling public health issues.

**Table 1.**

| Tool | Knowledge (Information or facts in a particular profession required to operate or appraise outcomes from the use of a tool) | Skills (Technical abilities needed to wield a tool in order to achieve an outcome) | Outcome (Results from the use of a tool) | Profession |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hammer/ chisels/ etc. | Building and engineering | Brick-laying, carpentry, etc. | House, buildings | Construction industry |
| Paintbrush | Fine arts | Painting | Picture | Fine artist |
| Camera | Visual arts | Photography/ film-making | Still photograph or film | Film industry |
| Stethoscope | Medical sciences | Clinical skills in medical examination | Diagnosis | Medicine |
| Public health tools? | Public health sciences (epidemiology, biostatistics, etc.) | Critical appraisal, public health evaluation, etc. | Population health | Public health |

Take the example of fitness trackers, these devices track and influence health related behaviours and are used widely, not just by people wishing to promote public health. This brings us back to the question of what is in the Public Health Toolbox? We suggest that public health tools can take many forms and will vary considerably depending on the situation, place and time. Physical objects and devices that safeguard or promote population health such as seatbelts, barriers to prevent falls or fitness trackers may be included as well as chemical or biological modulators such as vaccines, vitamin supplements and fortifications, water fluoridation, soap (Table 1). Equally we argue that cultural products such as films, books, social media, video games, TV and newspapers that influence health behaviours should be included along with more up-to-date software tools such as programs and

apps that aim to do the same. Lastly political and legal devices such as legislation, international agreements and taxation that create a healthy environment must also be considered for our toolbox. These are a broad and diverse list which reveals the vast scope of public health and acknowledges the non-linearity of our work on population health outcomes. It also highlights where we may overlap with other professions who use the same or similar tools thereby facilitating joint understanding and collaboration between stakeholders who all potentially wield tools for public health good.

## Conclusion

We present a conceptual device, the ''Public Health Toolbox' to stimulate discussion about how public health tackles the challenges facing today's populations, and how it can work with a diverse range of stakeholders towards the goal of healthier populations.

## Acknowledgement

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