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Taxpayer-funded health advocates talk the public into exhausted acceptance

Ask any social change campaigner and they will tell you that it is a very, very long road to travel before social attitudes and laws change. Change neither comes easily nor quickly. Tobacco control is one example; another would be the long fight for gender equality.

Social change takes so long and is so difficult because every person has an opinion and changing opinions and emotions takes a slow drip-feeding of challenging facts and expert opinions. The effort to sustain this quickly eats up private funding so taxpayer funding is increasingly essential to maintain a sustained campaign for changing our society. Government funding also removes the need for raising money from members of the public, which is a useful test of the real level of public support.

Once you have taxpayer funding, it is just a matter of hard work and constant grind to push out the messages consistently week in and week out, year after year. The goal is to build in the public's mind a sense of inevitability that the social change must eventually occur and will come about. The public simply gets exhausted of arguing the topic and lets the activists have their way. Politicians fear being on the wrong side of history so they stop resisting.

In effect, members of the public are simply harassed into acquiescence. Their opposition is ignored and counts for nothing against professional taxpayer-supported advocates, often academics, keeping up a steady drumbeat for change.

Ironically, if the social change advocates were truly supported by the public in any great number, they wouldn't need to be funded by the taxpayer.

So who decides which groups of advocates get taxpayer funded? In a few cases it is politicians; in other cases it's left up to the bureaucracy to fund those groups they wish to see prosper. In a couple of Australian states, it is also funded by quangos such health promotion agencies.

In the United Kingdom this is called sock puppetry – the central government funding NGOs to push policies in the media and to lobby the political class for change.