Behaviour change policies are ways of implementing intervention functions such as education, persuasion, training etc. These policies are in the hands of authorities and are not necessarily relevant for self-change or change by other groups or individuals. There are seven broad categories of policy:

Guidelines: The development and dissemination of documents that make recommendations for action in response to defined situations.

These are most useful when there is a need to educate people about what needs to be done and why, and there is little or no resistance. Case studies can model good practice.

Environmental and social planning: Architecture, urban and rural planning, object and location design, and planning for housing, social care, employment, equality, benefits, security and education.

These are a very broad range of policies that affect our macro-environment and how we live our lives as well as making changes to our 'micro-environment' such as placing of items on supermarket shelves or the shape of beer glasses.

They are relevant when the focus is not so much on changing people but changing the physical and social environment they inhabit.

Communications and marketing: Mass media campaigns, digital marketing campaigns, and correspondence.

These policies are most relevant when there is a need to educate people about what to do or why it is important, or to persuade them of its importance and to trigger action.

Legislation: Use of laws, bylaws and similar instruments to set the boundaries for acceptable behaviour with penalties for infringement

These policies are typically reserved for behaviours that are fundamental to security, safety, the wellbeing of society as a whole and the protection of rights. They generally use threat of punishment. Even if they cannot be universally enforced, they can set standards that influence behaviour.

Service provision: Provision of any kinds of service or material resource and aids, whether they be structured or ad hoc, financed or unpaid.

These are most relevant when the task is to improve people's ability to change their behaviour. A major challenge is getting people to engage with services that are provided even when it would be to their benefit.

Regulation: Development and implementation of rules regarding behaviour that instruct the behaviour and possibly provide rewards and punishments for conforming

For governmental institutions these policies lie in the space between guidelines and legislation. For groups and organisations they are one of the key forms of control, creating social norms and using rewards and punishments to shape behaviour of members.

Fiscal measures: Use of taxation and tax relief.

The aim here is to incentivise and disincentivise behaviours where one has authority to levy taxes. This approach can conflict with the revenue-raising objectives of taxation but sometimes reducing tax rates to encourage a behaviour can result in an overall increase in revenue as a result of the behaviour change.

Choice of policy options will often depend on practical, structural and resource constraints. Often intervention designers will start with a particular policy option (e.g. development of digital marketing campaigns or producing guidelines) and their task is to devise the best intervention using that option.

Combining policy options is often the best strategy for a large or complex behaviour change task. For example, in promoting smoking cessation a social marketing campaign can be used to encourage quitting and its impact amplified by the offer of free clinical cessation support.

Reading: Michie S, Atkins L, West R (2014) The Behaviour Change Wheel: A Guide to Developing Interventions. London: Silverback Publishing. www.behaviourchangewheel.com