

Effective Communications

Communications may serve an entire local health department (LHD), a single unit or program, or a specific LHD-led project that involves external partners. Effective communications reach target audiences, large and small, and stretch far beyond a news release and printed brochures to include branding, public and media relations, social marketing, advertising, community outreach, crisis communications, and emergency risk management.

LHDs require effective communications at all levels to help promote healthy behavior in the community, build support for local public health efforts, demonstrate the value and cost-effectiveness of local public health programs, and increase a department's impact and influence with policymakers, the media and the public. To capture the attention of policymakers and the public, keep messages dynamic, memorable, and local.

Keep it Constant - Communicate regularly, reporting progress to the public, partners, and policy-makers even in the absence of crisis or changes in direction. Regular contact lays the foundation for calling on those relationships for support and assistance at key moments.

Keep it Dynamic - Take advantage of a wide range of sometimes overlapping activities to accomplish communications goals including public and media relations, strategic communications planning, market research, branding, advertising, social marketing, crisis and emergency risk communications, telephone and electronic conferencing, network development and support, and community engagement.

Keep It Local - Local stories, local people, and local data are the most interesting to media and consumers and most persuasive to policymakers.

Make It Memorable - Memorable messages include stories about the people in your community who are affected, NOT the programs, initiatives, or objectives. Tell stories to illustrate what you seek to achieve.

Some Examples of Successful LHD-Led Public Education Campaigns

- ❖ **Tobacco control campaigns** in the 1990s and 2000s were highly effective public health communications using an array of communications interventions—creative advertising, media relations, report dissemination, youth outreach, and partnerships with business, labor, health care

providers, and consumer associations—to help achieve stricter regulations on marketing of tobacco products, raise state excise taxes on tobacco products, fund state tobacco control programs, develop clean indoor air ordinances, and reduce tobacco use overall.

- ❖ **Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)** advertising promoted placing babies to sleep on their backs
- ❖ **Auto safety** campaigns focused on seat belt use and drunk driving
- ❖ Local crisis alerts advised of temporarily unsafe sources of **drinking water**
- ❖ **Lead paint** information campaigns raised public awareness about the risks to children and animals
- ❖ Post-Hurricane Katrina education of opinion leaders about LHDs' energetic responses to the disaster
- ❖ Lyme disease awareness campaigns