

CREATING AND DISTRIBUTING PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS (PSAs)



What Are PSAs?

PSAs are advertisements that serve the public interest. They are designed to increase education and awareness of significant social or mission-driven issues to change the public's attitudes and behaviors and stimulate positive change. PSAs include education on how members of the community can help improve public health issues.

PSAs are distributed via donated media—media placements on television, radio, websites, or newspapers that have not been purchased. They are always produced by a nonprofit or government agency and printed or broadcast for free. If you're already using paid advertising as part of your marketing budget, a PSA campaign may complement this effort.

It is important to select a media outlet whose priority audience is a good match for the audience you are trying to reach. For example, pitching a PSA to your community public access TV station to reach a collegiate 18- to 21-year-old audience is not advised, since that demographic primarily watches streaming and digital television channels. Consider your audience's daily routine and their media consumption habits when selecting those media outlets to reach out to for PSA placement.

You are competing with other nonprofits and government agencies for the same limited PSA space available. Each media outlet will have its policies and criteria, as well as priority audience(s). PSA content relevant to the outlet's general audience and important to their priority audience has a better chance at airtime. You will also need to work with each outlet directly to adhere to the necessary requirements.

There are limitations to PSAs:

- Since the airtime is donated, media outlets may not track or report when your PSA is aired.
- PSAs are often scheduled during times with low viewership since the airtime is shared with paid commercial spots. Print PSAs are easier to track, but prime column/print space isn't guaranteed.
- While PSAs are designed to promote positive change in communities, there is a risk that your PSA's call-to-action might not be well received by those opposed to your campaign's mission.

PSA Production

There are two main options when producing a PSA:

- 1. Use or repurpose existing video or audio content.**
 - Consider existing assets that can be repurposed into a PSA, such as images, video clips, testimonials, or previously produced ads.
 - Edit existing material to get a message out quickly and cost efficiently.
 - Find opportunities to customize or include content to better reach your specific audiences.
- 2. Produce new content.**
 - Developing a new PSA can be more beneficial when you want to control the creative process.
 - You can tailor the imagery, length, and script to create an emotional response, humor, or a surprise to catch the attention of your priority audience.

Budgets for producing TV and radio PSAs can vary widely, so consider all your options, resources, and finances.

PSAs ARE:

- **Mission driven.**
- **Focused on increasing education and awareness to change public attitudes and behaviors.**
- **Designed to promote positive change in communities.**
- **Placed for free in media.**
- **Produced by a government agency or nonprofit.**

PSA Formats

PSAs may be developed for:

- **Print**, such as newspapers and local community magazines.
- **Broadcast**, including television and radio stations as fully developed TV and radio spots, or scripts for announcers to read (radio only).
- **Out-of-home**, including bus shelters, bus sides and interiors, and billboards.

Print

Print and online versions of local newspapers, specialty print publications, and local magazines are great media for PSA placement. You can look for print publications that are most likely to be seen by your intended audiences, such as in specific neighborhoods or communities, racial or ethnic groups, faith communities, and age demographics.

Design your print PSAs as you would your paid advertising— focus on strong visuals, concise and expressive headlines, and body copy that includes education on how members of the community can help improve public health issues while telling a story that stands out and is memorable.

Radio Stations

Local radio stations provide excellent platforms for PSA placement. For most stations, there are 24 hours of airtime to fill every day. A 15- or 30-second message designed to educate and/or raise awareness is often a welcome addition for local programming.

Options for radio PSAs:

1. Write, produce, record, and deliver fully crafted radio PSAs as audio files. This is the most expensive option, but you have full control of the content.
2. Draft a script and work with a radio station to get one of their hosts to do “live reads” (a reading of your script during their show). These are the least expensive option, but you have limited control of the tone and delivery of the radio personalities who read the scripts.
3. Work with a radio station to get one of their hosts to prerecord your script. This option has minimal costs and provides some control of the PSA’s tone and delivery.

Patience, flexibility, relationship-building, and management are the keys with radio PSA placement. Follow the station’s guidelines for submitting a PSA. Start with a cold call or email to the radio station for their submission requirements.

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)



This print PSA features the NHTSA’s two mascots, Vince and Larry, sharing one simple message: “You could learn a lot from a dummy. Buckle your safety belt.” It is a memorable campaign that was released as states were passing seat belt use laws. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, America’s tendency to buckle up increased from 14% in 1984 to 90.7% as of 2019, a sixfold increase since the PSA’s debut.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

If you’re struggling with prescription opioids, there is hope. Recovery is possible.



This print PSA features four individuals in recovery as part of CDC’s Rx Awareness campaign. Launched in 2017, the campaign aims to tell the stories of people whose lives were impacted by prescription opioids.

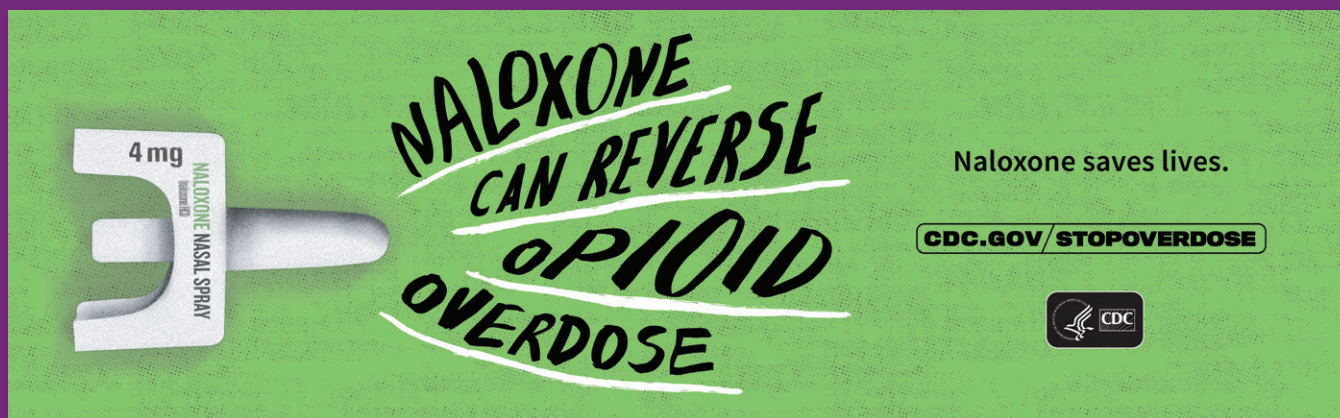
Note the names of the people you speak to and any air times they mention or any tips they share with you for placement. When submitting your PSA, include a cover letter with an introduction to your agency and campaign, and a brief outline of the PSA. You can strive to make strong relationships with PSA coordinators at a radio station by referring to the contacts you spoke with before submission and thanking them for their assistance. Cultivate those relationships by calling or emailing your thank-you once your PSA airs; thank them for their station's impact in your community to increase your chances of success with regular radio PSA placement.

Out-of-home

Out-of-home opportunities include local billboards; bus shelters; bus backs, sides, and interiors; local subway, metro, or trains; movie theaters; and airports. Depending on your local area, you may have one or more of these opportunities available.

Out-of-home PSAs may be developed as print or video spots; work closely with local outlets to determine their needs and required formats for placing this type of creative.

You may be able to tailor creative and focus placements the same as you would a paid advertising campaign. You can place a PSA along bus routes that serve your priority audiences or place spots in movie theaters that are in your priority neighborhoods and where your audiences frequent. You can build relationships with community service representatives of local outlets to explore these opportunities. It is important to come prepared to the conversations with your research about your audience's media consumption habits so you can make a strong case for where to place PSAs.



Billboard PSA by CDC

This billboard PSA was used by CDC in its naloxone campaign. Launched in 2021, the campaign highlights naloxone, a life-saving medication that can reverse an overdose from opioids—including heroin, fentanyl, and prescription opioids—when given in time.

Television

While the expense for TV PSAs may be intimidating, it is possible to create and place them. Start by looking in toolkits provided by CDC and local organizations for relevant TV PSAs already produced. Determine if they will reach and engage your priority audiences and meet local format requirements. If none of the choices are suitable, work with local television stations to develop TV PSAs. This can help manage the high costs of developing a TV spot. If you have established relationships with stations, consider reaching out to them for help and guidance.

PSA Placements

Every media outlet has its own policies and procedures for PSA placement, and each will have its own priority issues and causes for donated free space and time.

PSA placement decisions are usually determined in the community service department of media outlets. To engage these departments, you can:

1. Research public service/community engagement practices to tailor your requests and understand each outlet's track record for PSA placement.
2. Prepare a clear case or pitch about why the outlet should care about your health campaign topic and run your PSA.
3. Complement your pitch with information about your organization and your commitment to the health topic.
4. Provide multiple sizes and variations to accommodate size, airtime, and space available.
5. Pitch media outlets via email with phone follow-up.

You may have the greatest chance for PSA placement success with outlets from which you already buy paid advertising. You also may find it helpful to tap into personal connections and identify local media personalities or representatives who may have personal stories about your health campaign topic; they may be more likely to help advocate for placement of your PSAs.

Sample Radio PSA Pitch

Dear Public Affairs Director/PSA Manager:

Thank you for taking the time to explain KABC's policies and requirements on submitting PSAs when we spoke on Month, Day. When I first called in, John Doe helped clarify that you are the point of contact for PSA placement, as you oversee all public interest programming for KABC.

Per your instructions, all audio recordings for the PSAs we produced are in separate, single files according to spot length. You'll also find brief descriptions of each spot we've included. Attached to this email/Enclosed in this envelope/In the link are:

- Two 15-second spots
- Three 30-second spots
- Three 60-second spots

Please let us know when we've been scheduled in your programming so that we can tune in to hear our PSA being aired.

Everyone has a role to play in helping to prevent fatal and non-fatal drug overdoses in (City, State), and we're grateful for KABC's role in supporting CDC's Stop Overdose campaign. To learn more about drug overdose and why it's so important to raise awareness for your listeners, please visit <https://www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose>.

Best,

Additional Tips to Consider

- Be flexible with your PSA placement requests—think of non-traditional locations/outlets.
- Accept “no” as an answer—these are free placements; sometimes it is just not possible.
- Accept that you can't dictate when they will air; these are free placements generally not aired during peak programming.
- Be ready with a spokesperson just in case the outlet requests an interview after you contact them about PSA placement.
- Track your PSA performance by including a dedicated phone number or URL since the media may not provide a schedule or performance report as they do for paid advertising campaigns.