

Innovative STD Prevention Campaigns at Work

STD Prevention
**SUCCESS
STORIES**



Social marketing campaigns are a crucial tool for agencies to get the word out about public health issues, but they're not one-size-fits-all. Successful campaigns require careful planning and consideration to make sure the right people get the right message at the right time.

Take STD prevention campaigns — some are carefully crafted to address a specific disease in a certain group of people, like chlamydia among young adults. Others tackle more general issues, like encouraging condom use.

Social marketing campaigns deliver specific, targeted messages to influence health behaviors. Campaigns meet people where they are — which could be radio or television public service announcements, posters and brochures in doctors' offices, or snappy tweets and Facebook posts — all to raise awareness about a specific health issue in a community.

Here are two stories of STD programs that created innovative, buzz-worthy STD prevention campaigns to raise awareness and promote action in their communities.



Using Public Transit to Raise Syphilis Awareness in Oregon

At first glance, Oregon's syphilis prevention campaign — called SyphAware — looks and reads like a magazine travel ad: "Oregon is known for many things: natural beauty, coffee, beer, and pinot noir. Did you know that Oregon is also known for syphilis?"

It's true. Between 2007 and 2015, syphilis rates in Oregon skyrocketed by 1,500% — a trend that hit gay and bisexual men living with HIV hardest. When Oregon Health Authority (OHA) and the Multnomah County Health Department saw this alarming trend, they requested backup: in 2014, CDC scientists traveled to Portland to study the city's syphilis problem.

CDC recommended developing a social marketing campaign to raise awareness about syphilis, including education around signs, symptoms, and testing. The OHA team thought a public transit campaign would be a great fit, since Portland has a robust transit network that reaches areas with the highest syphilis rates.

To build the campaign, OHA created simple, attention-grabbing messages based on findings from CDC's interviews with men. They placed the ads on buses, trains, and light rail cars around Portland, and created a SyphAware website for more information.

A major benefit of transit campaigns is "the grandma factor," says Ruth Helsley, OHA's HIV and STD Prevention Program Manager. Carried by a network of public transit vehicles, messages reach not only the at-risk population, but also people who care about them — friends, caretakers, and... grandmas, Helsley explains. "They might see an ad and ask their gay grandson if he's heard about syphilis."

"It got people talking without being stigmatizing," says Ferrer.

Josh Ferrer of OHA is pleased with the media coverage the campaign has generated — and he's heard from clinicians that screening rates have increased. SyphAware is moving Portland one step closer to being syphilis-free.



Using State Pride to Combat Chlamydia in Alaska

In 2012, Susan Jones and Donna Cecere from the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) were charged with developing a campaign to help curb the high chlamydia rates in their state — one of the highest rates in the country, in fact.

With a limited budget and a small population spread out over a large geographic area, Jones and Cecere knew they had to get creative.

The resulting campaign — called Wrap It Up Alaska — is, as Jones puts it, "very Alaskanized." DHSS developed and tested messages with teens and young adults, their main target audience. With punchy slogans like "Drill Safely" (accompanied by an image of an oil tower), and "Keep Your Head Covered" (shown with an image of a snowmobiler), the team knew their campaign materials would turn heads.

A range of partners worked together to reach Alaska's diverse populations through the campaign: tribal health centers, family planning clinics, universities, and military clinics, to name a few. Partners distributed condoms and posters with the slogans to people across the state.

"People thought they were great conversation starters," Cecere says. "They would get a laugh — then they'd start to talk."

And Wrap It Up Alaska didn't stop there — online ads directing people to the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium's webpage (IKnowMine.org) continued to capture interest. In fact, traffic to the site tripled after the campaign.

Those who work in public health know that prevention messages are often very serious business. Wrap It Up Alaska is proof that positivity and a little sense of humor can go a long way.