

Health Communication

Public Health Communication is the strategic and timely art, science and technique of informing, influencing, motivating and engaging individual, institutional, and public audiences about important health issues. The scope of health communication includes disease prevention, health protection and promotion, health care policy, emergency response and the business of health care as well as enhancement of the quality of life and health of individuals within the community.¹

Communication is a cornerstone function of Public Health. The essential components of the communication process are: channel, source, receiver and message. Three considerations emerge:

1. Information is received and processed through individual and social prisms that not only determine what people encounter, but also the meaning derived from the communication.
2. It is reasonable to expect discrepancies between messages disseminated and received.
3. Communication is a dynamic process in which sources and receivers of information continuously interchange their roles.²

Essential to planning effective health communication is some variation on these steps:

- Review background information to define the problem (What's out there?)
- Set communication objectives (What do we want to accomplish?)
- Analyze and segment target audiences (Who do we want to reach?)
- Develop and pretest message concepts (What do we want to say?)
- Select communication channels (Where do we want to say it?)
- Select, create and pretest messages and products (How do we want to say it?)
- Develop promotion plan/production (How do we get it used?)
- Implement communication strategies and conduct process evaluation (Getting it out there)
- Conduct outcome and impact evaluation (How well did we do?)³

¹ Healthy People 2010. http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/healthy_people/hp2010/hp2010_final_review.htm. Accessed July 9, 2014.

² Why health communication is important in public health. <http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/87/4/08-056713/en/>. Accessed on July 9, 2014.

³ What is Health Communications. <http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/healthbasics/whatishc.html>. Accessed July 9, 2014.

Appendix

Accreditation Background

Various criteria in the Public Health Services standards were identified as unmet at the last accreditation visit in 2013.

1.9 The organization shares the results of the most recent community health assessment with key stakeholders and the general population using a variety of methods.

5.3 The organization and partners communicate essential public health information at multiple levels using appropriate language and different media.

5.5 The organization regularly assesses the effectiveness of its communication strategy and uses this information to make improvements.

The visit feedback included the following comment: “The organization is encouraged also, to evaluate their communication strategy and ensure the WRHA is strategic in the use of various tools such as social media. The heads up campaign, where social marketing was used effectively, is an example of such evaluation that could help inform other program information campaigns. Other evidence based strategies need to be considered. There is also a considerable non English speaking population where print material is not yet translated. The organization’s programs are encouraged to look at various tools to effectively reach these and other priority populations and provide consistent key messages.”

The noted deficiencies influenced identification of Health Communication as a PPH strategic priority.

Key Documents or Resources

[Communication](#) (PHAC – points to other resources)

[Gateway to Health Communication & Social Marketing Practice](#) (CDC Atlanta - points to other resources)

[Health Communication Message Review Criteria](#) (Explains minimum criteria for developing a persuasive message. Based on McGuire's Hierarchy of Effects.)

[Health Communication Outcomes: At the Heart of Good Objectives and Indicators](#) (Series of outcomes at the individual, network, organizational, and societal levels.)