Health communication is the study and use of communication strategies to inform and influence choices people make about their health. Messages are spread through channels such as mass media, print materials, social media, and face-to-face conversations. Social marketing is the use of strategic marketing practices to influence social behaviors and benefit the target audience rather than the marketer.

This brochure is designed to help public health program planners, community advocates, educators, and policymakers find proven intervention strategies—including programs, services, and policies—to develop successful health communication and social marketing interventions and campaigns. It can help decision makers in both public and private sectors make choices about what intervention strategies are best for their communities.

This brochure summarizes information in The Guide to Community Preventive Services (The Community Guide), an essential resource for people who want to know what works in public health. Use the information in this brochure to help select from the following intervention strategies you can use in your community:

- Design health communication and social marketing campaigns that use a variety of channels, including mass media
- Develop interpersonal communication interventions, such as one-on-one conversations or group education
- Combine health communication and social marketing with other strategies to increase awareness and encourage appropriate health behaviors

The Community Guide provides evidence-based findings and recommendations from the Community Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) about community preventive services, programs, and policies to improve health. Learn more about The Community Guide and what works in health communication and social marketing by visiting www.thecommunityguide.org/healthcommunication.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides administrative, research, and technical support for the Community Preventive Services Task Force.
The Guide to Community Preventive Services (The Community Guide) is an essential resource for people who want to know what works in public health. It provides evidence-based recommendations and findings about public health interventions and policies to improve health and promote safety. The Community Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force)—an independent, nonfederal, unpaid body of public health and prevention experts—bases its findings and recommendations on systematic reviews of the scientific literature. With oversight from the Task Force, scientists and subject matter experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conduct these reviews in collaboration with a wide range of government, academic, policy, and practice-based partners.
SUMMARIZING THE FINDINGS ON HEALTH COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL MARKETING

All Task Force findings and recommendations on using health communication and social marketing for behavior change are available online at www.thecommunityguide.org/healthcommunication. Some of the Task Force recommendations related to health communication and social marketing are below.

- **Health communication campaigns** that combine multiple channels, one of which must be mass media, and distribution of free or reduced-price health products. These campaigns can increase the use of products—such as pedometers, nicotine replacement therapy, or bike helmets—that encourage healthy behaviors, help stop harmful behaviors, or protect from disease or injury. The Task Force recommends supplementing mass media campaigns and product distribution through additional communication channels, including small media, interpersonal communication, community events, and social media. For example, a campaign to increase physical activity may combine newspaper and billboard advertisements about the benefits of walking with free pedometers and brochures on how to use them.

- **Small media**, such as videos or printed brochures, can be used to inform, educate, and motivate people. Studies have found them to be effective interventions for getting more people screened for breast, cervical, and colorectal cancers.

- **Interpersonal communication** can be used successfully to promote cancer screening, increase use of child safety seats in motor vehicles, and reduce violence in schools. These are usually one-on-one or group education efforts. Depending on the problem being addressed, these types of interventions may be conducted in a variety of settings, including healthcare facilities, schools, worksites, or the home.

- **Comprehensive community-wide approaches** use multiple health communication, social marketing, and other strategies to improve a variety of behaviors, including increasing folic acid supplement use in women of childbearing age, and an increase in vaccinations in targeted populations. These types of interventions are broad-based coordinated efforts targeted to the entire community.

For more information on related interventions for specific public health topics, see www.thecommunityguide.org/about/whatworks.html

PUTTING THE FINDINGS TO WORK

As a public health decision maker, practitioner, community leader, or someone who can influence the health of your community, you can use The Community Guide to create a blueprint for success.

- Identify your community’s needs. Review the intervention strategies recommended by the Task Force and determine which ones best match your needs. Adopt, adapt, or develop evidence-based health communication and social marketing campaigns to support your programs, services, and policies.

- Explore Cancer Control P.L.A.N.E.T.'s Research-Tested Intervention Programs (RTIPs) community-based and clinical programs that have been evaluated, found to be effective, and published in a peer-reviewed journal. Look for the National Cancer Institute’s Cancer Control P.L.A.N.E.T icon on The Community Guide website or visit rtipscancergov/rtips to read about real-world programs that might be adaptable to your needs. You can learn more about RTIPs at www.thecommunityguide.org/cancer/screening/client-oriented/rtips.html.

- Use CDCynergy at www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/cdcynergy to plan, manage, and evaluate public health communication and social marketing programs.

- See how other communities have applied the Task Force recommendations for health communication and social marketing practice at www.thecommunityguide.org/CG-in-Action. Get ideas from their Community Guide in Action stories.

- Consult CDC’s health literacy resources at www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy to develop plain language messages and materials for your health communication and social marketing campaigns.


- Use NCI’s Making Health Communications Programs Work (also known as the Pink Book) at www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/cancerlibrary/pinkbook to guide your communication program planning.
Communities Use Media to Bolster Prevention Efforts

For many public health topics covered in The Community Guide, The Task Force recommends supplementing interventions with communication and marketing activities. Stories in The Community Guide in Action series show what some of these health communication and social marketing efforts look like. In rural South Carolina, for instance, a combination of a small media campaign and one-on-one health education sessions created buzz about the local health clinic’s free cancer screening program. Combined with client- and provider-oriented interventions, these efforts helped increase cervical and breast cancer screening rates. In Nebraska, local health experts used a variety of interventions to pass a statewide smoking ban, resulting in statewide changes to reduce tobacco use. Read more on these and other stories at www.thecommunityguide.org/CG-in-Action.

Nationwide Marketing Campaign Makes Exercise Cool

Running from 2002 to 2006, CDC’s VERB™ campaign was a national, multicultural social marketing effort aimed at children ages 9 to 13. The campaign combined mass media advertising (through television, radio, and print) with school and community promotions and Internet activities to encourage children to be more physically active. Campaign messages—crafted from targeted audience research—portrayed being physically active as cool, fun, and a chance to be with friends. After one year, 74 percent of 3,000 children surveyed in targeted markets had seen the VERB campaign. Physical activity increased among certain groups, including 9-10 year-olds, girls, children whose parents have less than a high school education, children in urban areas, and children with low baseline activity levels.7 Follow-up evaluations found that increasing exposure to campaign messaging further improved awareness, attitudes, and activity levels.8 Read more on VERB at www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign.

REFERENCES

8Berkowitz JM, Huhman M, Nolin MJ. Did augmenting the VERB campaign advertising in select communities have an effect on awareness, attitudes, and physical activity? American Journal of Preventive Medicine 2008;34(6 Suppl):S257-266.
The Community Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) has released the following findings on what works in public health to promote healthy behaviors through health communication and social marketing. These findings are compiled in The Guide to Community Preventive Services (The Community Guide) and listed in the table below. Use the findings to identify strategies and interventions you could use for your community.

**Legend for Task Force Findings:**
- **Recommended**
- **Insufficient Evidence**
- **Recommended Against**

(See reverse for detailed descriptions.)

### Intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Mass Media</strong></th>
<th><strong>Task Force Finding</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health Communication Campaigns that Include Mass Media and Health-Related Product Distribution</td>
<td><strong>Recommended</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancer Prevention and Control Preventing Skin Cancer: Mass Media Campaigns</td>
<td><strong>Insufficient Evidence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Vehicle-Related Injury Prevention Reducing Alcohol-Impaired Driving: Mass Media Campaigns</td>
<td><strong>Recommended</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obesity Prevention and Control Mass Media Interventions to Reduce Screen Time</td>
<td><strong>Insufficient Evidence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting Physical Activity Campaigns and Informational Approaches: Mass Media Campaigns</td>
<td><strong>Recommended</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco Use Increasing Tobacco Use Cessation: Mass Media–Cessation Series</td>
<td><strong>Insufficient Evidence</strong></td>
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### Intervention

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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Small Media</strong></th>
<th><strong>Task Force Finding</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cancer Prevention and Control: Cancer Screening Client-Oriented Screening Interventions: Small Media</td>
<td><strong>Recommended</strong></td>
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### Intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Interpersonal Communication</strong></th>
<th><strong>Task Force Finding</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cancer Prevention and Control: Cancer Screening Client-Oriented Screening Interventions: One-on-One Education</td>
<td><strong>Recommended</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Vehicle-Related Injury Prevention Use of Child Safety Seats: Distribution and Education Programs</td>
<td><strong>Recommended</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obesity Prevention and Control Provider-Oriented Interventions: Provider Education</td>
<td><strong>Insufficient Evidence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting Physical Activity Campaigns and Informational Approaches: Classroom-Based Health Education Focused on Providing Information</td>
<td><strong>Recommended Against</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Visit the Health Communication and Social Marketing page of The Community Guide website at [www.thecommunityguide.org/healthcommunication](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/healthcommunication) to find summaries of Task Force findings and recommendations on health communication and social marketing. Click on each topic area to find results from the systematic reviews, included studies, evidence gaps, and journal publications.

*The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides administrative, research, and technical support for the Community Preventive Services Task Force.*
UNDERSTANDING THE FINDINGS

The Task Force bases its findings and recommendations on systematic reviews of the scientific literature. With oversight from the Task Force, scientists and subject matter experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conduct these reviews in collaboration with a wide range of government, academic, policy, and practice-based partners. Based on the strength of the evidence, the Task Force assigns each intervention to one of the categories below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>ICON</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recommended</td>
<td>There is strong or sufficient evidence that the intervention is effective. This finding is based on the number of studies, how well the studies were designed and carried out, and the consistency and strength of the results.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient Evidence</td>
<td>There is not enough evidence to determine whether the intervention is effective. This does not mean the intervention does not work. There is not enough research available or the results are too inconsistent to make a firm conclusion about the intervention’s effectiveness. The Task Force encourages those who use interventions with insufficient evidence to evaluate their efforts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommended Against</td>
<td>There is strong or sufficient evidence that the strategy is harmful or not effective.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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Visit the “Systematic Review Methods” page on The Community Guide website at www.thecommunityguide.org/about/methods.html for more information about the methods used to conduct the systematic reviews and the criteria the Task Force uses to make findings and recommendations.

RESOURCES

You can use the following resources to guide the implementation of evidence-based strategies and put the Task Force findings to work.

- The Community Guide in Action: Stories from the Field
  www.thecommunityguide.org/CG-in-Action

- Gateway to Health Communication and Social Marketing Practice
  Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
  www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication

- CDCynergy
  Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
  www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/cdcynergy

- Health Literacy Resources
  Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
  www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy

- HealthCommWorks
  Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
  www.cdc.gov/HealthCommWorks

- Making Health Communication Programs Work (Pink Book)
  National Cancer Institute
  www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/cancerlibrary

- Directory of Research-Tested Intervention Programs (RTIPs)
  National Cancer Institute
  rtips.cancer.gov/rtips

- Healthy People 2020 Interventions and Resources on Health Communication and Health Information Technology
  U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

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