

Rapid Review of the Literature

Mass media interventions

Short form

Prepared for:

Health Development Unit
Public Health Branch
Department of Health
Melbourne
Victoria 3000

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Prepared by:

The Rapid Review Team
Centre for Allied Health Evidence
University of South Australia
Adelaide
SA 5000



Mass media interventions

Statement of review questions

1. What is the evidence of effectiveness for mass media campaigns in reducing risk factors for unhealthy eating, physical inactivity and tobacco?
 - a. Key issues that need to be considered include critical success factors, impact on health inequalities/social gradient and accompanying strategies needed to maximise effectiveness.
2. What is the evidence of effectiveness for mass media campaigns targeted at disadvantaged populations?
 - a. Key issues that need to be considered include critical success factors and key features of successful interventions, accompanying strategies needed to maximise effectiveness, and level of investment.

Mass media and behaviour change

There is considerable evidence which indicates that Australia faces an increasing economic and social burden because of chronic diseases and their associated risk factors. The use of mass media campaigns as an integral tool to promote healthy behaviours and discourage unhealthy behaviours for a range of public health issues (healthy eating, being active, stopping smoking, practicing safer sex, responsible alcohol consumption, just to name a few) has been extensively reported. While considerable time, resources and finances are contributed towards mass media interventions, the effectiveness of mass media has varied greatly and is difficult to measure.

Findings

This rapid review identified the current best evidence for mass media interventions from 12 reviews within “*tier one*” and 8 reviews within “*tier two*”.

Tier one – Systematic reviews whose primary focus was mass media interventions for healthy eating, increasing physical activity and reducing smoking.

Tier two – Systematic reviews whose primary focus was generic and wide ranging, where mass media was one component among a “package of care” of interventions (e.g. social marketing approach) for healthy eating, increasing physical activity and reducing smoking.

Answers to review questions

There is now consistent evidence which indicates that mass media can be an effective tool for addressing a range of health behaviours. For mass media strategies to be effective, they must be combined with other interventions and utilise multiple media. These supporting interventions should address social, environmental, policy and cultural factors. Much of this evidence is derived from the body of evidence focused on smoking, with emerging evidence for healthy eating and physical activity.

There is, however, little clarity in the literature regarding what exactly works for whom when it comes to health behaviour-change interventions. As mass media is often used as one of many tools, the singular influencing role of mass media in achieving health behaviour change is unclear. Due to the nature of this intervention, the influence of secular trends too cannot be controlled. There is also a paucity of evidence regarding the effectiveness of mass media interventions for disadvantaged populations. Similar gaps in literature exist for cost-effectiveness data for general

and disadvantaged populations. Evidence that was identified from the literature was limited to socioeconomic status, which is merely one index of disadvantage.

The literature also highlights a range of **critical success factors**, which could be considered as part of mass media interventions. In the section below, each critical success factor is presented along with a *Recommended Implementation Plan (RIP)*.

Critical success factor one: Use of theory

The use of theory to inform and underpin mass media campaign, while supported by a growing body of evidence, continues to be overlooked (Noar et al 2007, Randolph and Viswanath 2004, Sowden 2009).

Recommended Implementation Plan

- Any mass media campaign should be underpinned by a sound theoretical framework and a careful understanding of determinants of behaviours targeted in the mass media campaign.
- Consider a range of theories of behaviour change when developing appropriate message strategies and when considering the right media products to place these messages. Currently, there is no “one size fits all” approach and the evidence supports use of many theories to inform the development and implementation of mass media campaigns.
- Theory-based mass media campaigns should also extend into ongoing and regular evaluation in order to ensure appropriate outcomes are attained.

Critical success factor two: Community involvement

Any population-based campaign should be underpinned by community involvement, engagement and partnership with key stakeholders (Marshall et al 2004, Milat et al 2005, Quigley et al 2007, Niederdeppe et al 2008, Wakefield et al 2003).

Recommended Implementation Plan

- The community must be involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of mass media campaigns.
- Mass media campaigns and programs can be informed by communities’ knowledge of “what works” in their communities.
- Active involvement of communities may be in the form of developing social approval for health-enhancing behaviours, promoting access (such as leisure activities) and developing and maintaining networks.

Critical success factor three: Targeted and tailored

There is a growing body of evidence (Friend and Levy 2002, Marshall et al 2004, Milat et al 2005, Noar et al 2007) which recommends mass media interventions should be targeted and tailored to suit the requirements of those whose behaviour it aims to influence.

Recommended Implementation Plan

- Identify key groups of people whose behaviour mass media campaign aims to influence. Once this is defined, the content and products of communication could be defined.

- With specific population groups, such as culturally and linguistically diverse groups, mass media campaigns should be tailored in culturally appropriate ways. Similarly, for low-income groups targeted, small sets of interventions may be more effective than a generic approach.

Critical success factor four: Consider all influencing factors

There is consistent evidence (Niederdeppe et al 2008, Michie et al 2009, Quigley et al 2007, Randolph and Viswanath 2004, Sowden 2009) from the literature which recommends the need to understand and consider all factors that will, or are likely to, influence the target group.

Recommended Implementation Plan

- Undertake formative research to understand target audience perspectives on media use preferences and health-related behaviour. This will ensure the target audience is particularly exposed to, and motivated by, the mass media campaign.
- As part of the influencing factors, it is important to consider the literacy needs, language preferences and other cultural values of the target audiences.
- Consideration of these issues is particularly relevant in socially disadvantaged population groups

Critical success factor five: Appropriate and supportive environment

There is good evidence (Randolph and Viswanath 2004, Sowden 2009) from the literature which recommends the need to create an appropriate and supportive environment for the target audience to be exposed to, and to make, the recommended change.

Recommended Implementation Plan

- Ensure processes are in place to identify, and target, barriers (social, environmental, policy) that prevent the target audience from making the recommended change.
- This may include the social and environmental context in which the proposed behaviour change is expected to occur. Structural (physical environment) and process (access to services) changes may need to be considered.
- An appropriate information environment¹ and maximising the exposure of campaign messages to the target audience are vitally important. Media campaigns can achieve this via paid or donated media time or space. This could be complemented with other media products and media mix such as pamphlets and other promotional materials.

Critical success factor six: Comprehensive and integrated strategy

There is consistent evidence from the literature (Marshall et al 2004, Milat et al 2005, Niederdeppe et al 2008, Noar et al 2007, Sowden 2009) which recommends mass media interventions should be supported by multiple interventions and a

¹ The aggregate of individuals, organisations, or systems that collect, process and disseminate information.

range of products. An integrated strategy which utilises a range of creative and concomitant interventions should be considered.

Recommended Implementation Plan

- Mass media campaigns should be complemented by other programs such as community mobilisations, social support, counselling, policy changes and access, just to name a few.
- Other elements (such as new and improved structures and processes) should be part of any mass media strategy in order to assist people to take the action stated by the mass media messages (such as healthy food available in canteen, availability of quit counsellors).
- This may also include opportunities via legislation and regulation to make mass media campaign effects strong and sustainable.

Critical success factor seven: Assessment and analysis

The need for rigorous assessment and ongoing analysis of any mass media campaigns, as part of process analysis and exploring opportunities for change, has been identified in the literature (Michie et al 2009, Quigley et al 2007, Randolph and Viswanath 2004).

Recommended Implementation Plan

- Assess campaign objectives and set out key indicators (process and outcomes) of success.
- Ensure there is clear justification (based on evidence) for any mass media campaign (design, development and implementation).
- Clearly set out which process and outcomes will be measured and how they will be captured.
- Ensure provisions for ongoing and regular evaluations are considered and lessons from these processes “fed back” into the campaign.
- The evaluation may focus on effectiveness (including cost-effectiveness), equity, safety, acceptability and feasibility of the mass media campaign. Many of these elements also form the core elements of health care quality.

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