Key Facts

- Mass media campaigns are an essential part of a comprehensive tobacco control programme.
- Mass media campaigns to reduce tobacco consumption are cost effective compared to other healthcare interventions.
- Campaigns should make clear why smokers should quit and be supported by information on how they can quit.
- Hard-hitting campaigns can compel tobacco users to quit, increase knowledge of the health risks of tobacco use, and promote behavior change in both smokers and non-smokers.
- The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), Article 12 states that parties must strengthen public awareness of tobacco control issues using all available communication.
Key elements of effective mass media campaigns

Comprehensiveness

Campaigns are most effective when part of a comprehensive tobacco control programme. Smoking cessation messages are most effective in an environment which aims to make smoking less socially acceptable. Since mass media smoking cessation campaigns are conducted in a crowded media environment, it is important that each campaign is comprehensive. Multiple audiences, communications methods, messages and tactics should be used to reach smokers. Campaigns use television, radio, print, billboards, online and outdoor advertising to reach very large groups of people.

Targeting

Tobacco control campaign managers have found that targeting very specifically (e.g. smokers ready to quit) does not always work. Some campaigns have been more successful when they targeted smokers more broadly or in ways that make the messages unavoidable. For example, the Australian campaign ‘Every cigarette is doing you damage’ was designed to increase a smoker’s sense of urgency in quitting. This approach was effective in several countries. Campaigns like this may appeal to smokers and non-smokers, to young people and adults.

Messages

Why quit?

Effects on the smoker’s health: Messages that present the health risks or negative emotional consequences of smoking in a new way have a high impact. Messages evoking negative emotions, such as fear, disgust and loss, are more likely to prompt smokers to attempt quitting immediately than messages eliciting positive emotions.

Effects of second-hand smoke: Most smokers respond well to messages about the health effects of second-hand smoke on their loved ones. Although they may not be willing to quit for themselves, they may be willing to attempt quitting or smoke less to protect their friends and family. The tone of campaign messages should be sensitive, non-judgmental and respectful.

How to quit?

Providing information on how to quit gives smokers an opportunity to quit once they are motivated to do so. It also provides an avenue for support for those already attempting to quit. A telephone quit-line allows the smoker to access information and resources to help them quit.

Delivery of messages

Mass media campaigns should deliver a strong message to quit through a variety of different channels. Research shows that graphic TV ads are effective in countries of all income levels. The messages should be frequent enough to build awareness, and change beliefs, attitudes and behaviour among smokers. The range of media used, the number of times the messages are aired or placed, and the length of a campaign are crucial to their success. Sustained stop smoking campaigns continually remind people to quit smoking, not to start smoking, or to remain a non-smoker.

Other marketing interventions

Other non-mass marketing interventions can be used to support mass media campaigns to improve smoking cessation. These include ‘earned’ media or news coverage (not paid for), public relations, communication with health professionals, posters, brochures and other interventions including social media. Well managed publically supporting media campaigns can have a large impact on the number of people aware of and responding to a campaign.

FCTC requirements

Under Article 12 of the WHO FCTC parties must promote and strengthen public awareness of tobacco control issues, using all available communication tools, as appropriate.

Best practice

The WHO’s MPOWER package outlined the following key steps for mass media campaigns:

- Explain the economic impact on families of tobacco use, including, for example, the early death of a parent.
- Highlight the successes of tobacco cessation, while aiming to prevent smoking initiation among young people.
- Ensure advertising is professionally produced, and subjected to screening among focus groups.

Funding for mass media campaigns is often cited as a barrier, yet mass media is a cost-efficient way to reduce smoking, because it reaches large segments of the population. Countries can save time and resources by adapting campaigns that have performed well in other jurisdictions for use in their own, subject to appropriate local pre-testing. Of the 23 countries reporting at least one best-practice campaign, 16 were low- or middle-income, suggesting that mass media need not be a tool of only high-income countries. Toward this end, The Union and the World Lung Foundation created a Mass Media Campaign Resource Center, making proven adverts available for adaptation. These are available at www.worldlungfoundation.org.

For full references and additional resources go to the publications page of www.tobaccofreeunion.org or email tobaccofreeunion@theunion.org to request a PDF copy
References


