Can you hear us now? Getting the message out about tobacco issues

Abbey Small
Tanya Montgomery
Jenine Harris
Stephanie Herbers
Douglas Luke
Matthew Kuhlenbeck[a]

Saint Louis University Center for Tobacco Policy Research,[a] Missouri Foundation for Health

Background

In January 2005, the Missouri Foundation for Health funded the American Lung Association of Missouri to implement a short-term education campaign, *Show Me Health: Clearing the Air About Tobacco*. The primary goal of Show Me Health was to:

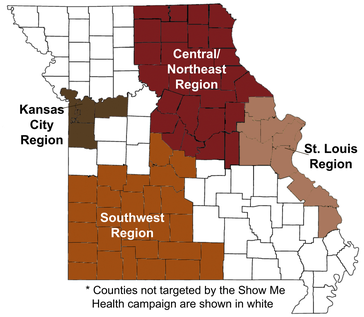
Increase knowledge of, improve attitudes towards, and build support to increase Missouri's tobacco tax.

Show Me Health organized the state into four regions for targeting their efforts. Seven statements were identified by stakeholders as the primary messages for Show Me Health (see Table 1 below). Show Me Health staff and volunteers disseminated these messages through several methods including presentations to community groups, distribution of materials at local events, and earned media coverage.

In November 2005, a petition drive to put a tobacco tax increase on the ballot was announced. From the point of their first outreach activity up to the election, Show Me Health had approximately 14 months to disseminate their messages.

On November 7, 2006, the majority of Missourians (51.4%) voted against the tobacco tax. Though the outcome of the election can not be soley attributed to Show Me Health, there was no significant difference in support for the tax when comparing the regions targeted by Show Me Health and those outside of the campaign's coverage area.

Figure 1: Show Me Health Regions



* Counties not targeted by the Show Me Health campaign are shown in white

Research Question:
How were the Show Me Health messages disseminated, framed, and perceived?

Methods

A comprehensive evaluation of the Show Me Health campaign was conducted by the Center for Tobacco Policy Research (CTPR) at Saint Louis University School of Public Health. The primary data sources and methods used were:

Newspaper Clippings

- Content analysis of 1263 tobacco-related articles, editorials, and letters to the editor printed in 187 local newspapers between September 2005 and December 2006.
- Developed 24-item codebook that included variables such as: article topic, tobacco control position, arguments regarding the tobacco tax, and the presence of Show Me Health messages.
- Used to gain a better understanding of how the messages and other tobacco topics were framed in the media.

Community Tobacco Survey

- Random digit dial phone survey of 1000 Missouri voters at three different time points.
- Included questions about exposure to Show Me Health messages, likelihood of voting for a tobacco tax, and participant demographics.
- Used to assess the reach and effect of the educational campaign.

Interviews and Focus Groups

- Qualitative data collection with 37 primary stakeholders at the conclusion of the Show Me Health campaign.
- Included questions about development, dissemination, and response to Show Me Health messages.
- Used to assess stakeholders' experience with the educational campaign after its completion.

Table 1: Show Me Health's Messages

Abbreviation	Message
Cigarette Price Increase	Every 10% increase in cigarette prices results in a 7% reduction in cigarette use by youth and 4% by adults.
26 Missourians	Every day 26 Missourians die due to tobacco use.
Missouri's Ranking	Missouri ranks 49th with its 17cent cigarette tax and 50th in tobacco prevention spending.
High School Smoking Rate	23.7% of Missouri high school students smoke whereas the U.S. high school smoking rate is 21.7%.
Costs of Smoking	In 2002, smoking cost Missouri $4.3 billion in lost productivity and direct medical costs or $760 for every man, woman, and child.
Adult Smoking Rate	Missouri's adult smoking rate of 24.1% ranks 13th highest among all states.
MSA	For the past six years, Missouri has spent $0 in state funds for a comprehensive tobacco use prevention and cessation program, ranking us last in the country, although it has received over $1 billion in Master Settlement payments.

Results

Message Content and Complexity

- The message development team lacked health communication expertise. No formative research was conducted and messages were not tested prior to dissemination to the public.
- The messages were complex, written at a high reading level, and contained a large number of statistics.
- Show Me Health staff simplified the messages during presentations to increase understanding.

Table 2: Show Me Health Messages and Their Estimated Reading Level

Message	Reading Level*
Cigarette Price Increase	11.0
26 Missourians	10.2
Missouri's Ranking	10.9
High School Smoking Rate	10.5
Costs of Smoking	12.0
Adult Smoking Rate	10.7
MSA	12.0

* Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Score- Rates text on a US school grade level.

Table 3: Recall of Messages Among Missouri Adults

Message	n*	Remembered Hearing
Cigarette Price Increase	822	11.6%
26 Missourians	848	11.8%
Missouri's Ranking	864	17.1%
High School Smoking Rate	829	12.8%
Costs of Smoking	868	13.3%
Adult Smoking Rate	854	11.1%
MSA	903	21.9%

Message Recall

- Stakeholders said the *Cigarette Price Increase* and *26 Missourians* messages resonated most with the public. However, survey participants had a difficult time recalling if they had heard these messages.
- The *MSA* message was most often recalled by survey participants.

Message Framing

- Most Show Me Health messages appeared in pro-tobacco control articles.
- However, the *MSA* message appeared more often in anti-tobacco control articles, indicating that the opposition used this message to gain support in opposing the tax.

Table 4: Frequency of Articles by Position with Specific Show Me Health Messages

Message	Anti-Tobacco Control	Neutral	Pro-Tobacco Control
Cigarette Price Increase	1.4%	34.7%	63.9%
26 Missourians	2.2%	23.1%	74.7%
Missouri's Ranking	6.0%	23.5%	70.5%
High School Smoking Rate	1.3%	23.1%	75.6%
Costs of Smoking	2.8%	29.6%	67.6%
Adult Smoking Rate	4.2%	17.5%	78.3%
MSA	22.9%	27.5%	49.5%

Results

Message Influence on Voting

- Fifty-five percent of survey participants said they were more likely to vote for a tobacco tax increase after hearing one of the Show Me Health messages.
- The *High School Smoking Rate* message was most likely to influence voters toward increasing the tobacco tax. However, this message was less often recalled by survey participants and rarely used by stakeholders during presentations.
- The *MSA* message was least likely to influence voters to support a tax increase.

Table 5: Percentage of Survey Respondents More Likely to Vote for a Tax Increase After Hearing Show Me Health Message

Message	n*	More Likely to Vote for Tobacco Tax Increase
Cigarette Price Increase	822	56.1%
26 Missourians	848	53.0%
Missouri's Ranking	864	54.7%
High School Smoking Rate	829	57.9%
Costs of Smoking	868	56.8%
Adult Smoking Rate	854	52.5%
MSA	903	45.8%

Conclusions

- Show Me Health communicated too many messages. While some of the Show Me Health messages resonated with the public more than others, no message clearly stood out as effective.
- Messages were developed at an advanced reading level making them very complex.
- The use of the *MSA* message by the tobacco industry was an effective strategy to increase public confusion and mistrust of how the potential tax revenues would be spent by the state.

Recommendations

Based on these evaluation findings, several recommendations for future public education programs were identified:

- Identify one or two primary messages to consistently use throughout the campaign.
- Include experts in the field of health communication when developing health messages.
- Conduct formative research on target audiences and messages prior to message dissemination.
  - To ensure messages will be clearly understood by the target audiences
  - To prevent the use of messages that will be used by the opposition

Center for Tobacco Policy Research

MFH Missouri Foundation for Health