

Social Media Basics

Introduction:

Social media can be an effective and efficient mode of communicating facts and raising awareness and knowledge about a topic. This Primer was developed for behavioral health promotion and substance abuse prevention practitioners as they consider various ways social media can be utilized to prevent/reduce substance use/abuse and promote healthy behavior.

This Primer was developed from and informed by a 2015 search of the literature by the CAPT on the use and effectiveness of social media and similar technology-based solutions on behavior change, including reduced substance use/abuse. This Primer defines social media, reviews its effectiveness as a communication tool, highlights ways it can be used to reach and engage communities for behavior change, and illustrates opportunities to include social media in a comprehensive prevention strategy to raise awareness and change attitudes around substance abuse-related issues in the community.

Below is an overview of the various social media strategies and factors to be considered when using social media as part of a comprehensive prevention plan.

Q. What is social media?

A. Social media is a collective term for the web-based platforms that allow individuals to create their own personal profiles and build a network of connections with other users.ⁱ These platforms allow users to share and exchange information in a variety of formats.

Q. How has social media been used to reach and engage others in health promoting behaviors?

A. It has been used to:ⁱⁱ

- Access health information
- Observe adolescent and young adult behavior
- Recruit research participants
- Engage adolescent and young adult communities
- Provide health information, including the following topics: substance use and abuse; mental health issues; medical conditions; and internet safety



Image Source: www.teachersandsocialmedia.co.nz.

Q. Can I really reach youth and young adults through social media?ⁱⁱⁱ

A. Research shows that many teenagers and adults regularly use social media:

- Most teens go online daily and most use more than one social network site.
- Facebook is the most popular and frequently used social media platform among teens aged 13 to 17; and about half of teens use Instagram and Snapchat.
- Middle and upper-income teens lean toward Instagram and Snapchat.
- Girls use social media more than boys; but boys use Facebook more than girls.
- Half (49%) of smartphone owners ages 18 to 29 use messaging applications (apps).

Q. Is social media an effective communication tool in producing health behavior change?

A. An analysis of 31 evaluation studies of internet interventions (to decrease alcohol consumption and for smoking cessation), and mobile phone text messaging interventions (for smoking cessation) found that those interventions using a web-based social norms approach showed success in reducing alcohol consumption among university students.^{iv} The most effective engagement strategies based on a study of Facebook and Twitter users included:^v

- Engaging individually with users
- Encouraging interaction and conversation by posing questions
- Uploading multi-media material
- Highlighting celebrity involvement

Q. How does social media fit into a comprehensive prevention strategy?

A. Social media is a specific type of health communication channel that can play an important role in prevention and health promotion.^{vi, vii}

- Social media can be used across a continuum of prevention activities from increasing awareness to changing behaviors.
 - Social networking sites can be used to promote the work of community prevention coalitions and publicize events.
 - Social networking can also be used to deliver messages to promote community involvement in [reducing access to prescription drugs](#), for example.
- Social media is most effective when it is part of a comprehensive prevention plan that employs multiple strategies in multiple domains.
 - Social media can complement school-based education curriculum or environmental change strategies such as compliance check and social host laws.

Examples of Use of Social Media in Prevention of Substance Abuse and Health Promotion

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The examples below illustrate how social media can be an effective means to disseminate and share information on substance abuse prevention and health promotion. Please note the different categories in which social media has been used to connect audiences through the dialogue and discussion.

General Health Promotion:

[WeRNative](#) - Uses Twitter, texting, blogging to connect to others of similar heritage

US Centers for Disease Control [Instagram](#) page

Underage Drinking Prevention:

[Text a Tip](#)

[Not Before 21](#) - #NotBefore21 uses [Twitter](#), blogs and [Scoopnest.com](#).

Prescription Drug Misuse Prevention:

[Search and Rescue](#) – uses [YouTube](#), case studies, and redirects.

[End Medicine Abuse](#) – uses Twitter, YouTube, immediate feedback through quiz, helpline, and pledges.

Prevention of Youth Marijuana Use:

[Smart Approaches to Marijuana \(SAM\) Preventing Another Big Tobacco](#) - uses blogging, [Facebook](#), Twitter, RSS feed, and YouTube.

[North Coastal Prevention Coalition \(NCPC\) Marijuana Prevention](#) - uses Facebook, Twitter, [Google+](#), [Reddit](#), [Pinterest](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

ⁱ Laranjo, L., et al. (2014). The influence of social marketing sites on health behavior change: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of American Medical Informatics Association*, 0, 1-10.

ⁱⁱ Yonker, L. M., et al. (2015). "Friending" teens: Systematic review of social media in adolescent and young adult health care. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 17(1), 1.

ⁱⁱⁱ Lenhart, A. (2015). Teens, Social Media & Technology, Overview 2015. Pew Research Center. See http://www.pewinternet.org/files/2015/04/PI_TeensandTech_Update2015_0409151.pdf

^{iv} Huag, S., et al. (2012). Internet and mobile phone interventions to decrease alcohol consumption and to support smoking cessation in adolescents: A review. *Gesundheitswesen*, 74(3), 160-177

^v Veale, H. J., et al. (2015). The use of social networking platforms for sexual health promotion: Identifying key strategies for successful user engagement. *BMC Public Health*, 15(1), 1-11.

^{vi} Schiavo, R. (2014) *Health Communication: From Theory to Practice*. 2nd ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

^{vii} National Cancer Institute. Making Health Communications Work <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/cancerlibrary/pinkbook>