



COMMUNICATIONS PLAN
FOR
MICHIGAN'S PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM

25 January 2006

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Public Health For Michigan. For You.

Background

While public health has been part of our history for the past two centuries, enhancing sanitary conditions, protecting the environment, preventing disease, and promoting healthy lifestyles, which has resulted in an improved quality of life and increased life expectancy, it has commonly been invisible to the population at large. People cannot see disease outbreaks, injuries, and early deaths that do not occur. Public health serves entire communities by preventing these and other health problems. However, this is not top-of-mind knowledge. Michigan's public health system has little to no "brand" awareness among the general population. Even the legislature is largely uninformed and unaware of the key functions the public health system provides – and also unaware of the level of funding required to not only maintain those services but to meet future health challenges.

Goals

Without support from the legislature and the public to provide needed resources, the challenges identified by the Michigan Surgeon General's Health Status Report, *Healthy Michigan 2010*, will continue to escalate. An effective communications plan will provide a roadmap to communicate not only the challenges, but also the solutions to a robust and effective public health system. Successful execution of the plan will inform in order to raise awareness; educate to enable understanding; and involve to inspire action.

Public health leaders in Michigan are leading an initiative to better understand public attitudes toward Michigan's public health system with two very clear communication goals:

- Raise awareness among the general public of the critical functions performed by Michigan's public health system, resulting in increased support for the system.
- Gain long-term engagement and support from the legislature.

Positioning

Michigan's public health system works every day to ensure the health and safety of individuals and communities throughout Michigan. From food and water protection, disease prevention to preventive care, there is no demographic or geographic group that is exempt from the daily work of the public health system. Public health keeps entire populations healthy. When it fails, entire populations suffer. A logo and tagline will help reinforce, over repeated exposure, the core tenets of that relationship. This is a short but necessary first step in beginning to speak with a unified voice.

The logo provides several elements that work together to impart an impression of the role and function of public health. The logo is only a snapshot – a quick, good feeling about what public health organizations and partners collectively do.



- The message **For Michigan. For You.** speaks both to the far-reaching, population-based initiatives and the individual assistance that public health provides for citizens across the state.
- The image is a combination of a heart and an apple, representing the care and compassion that underpins the work of public health organizations and the prevention and protection that inform it.
- The stamp motif will act as a stamp or seal of affiliation for all of the pieces and messages that the mark will be appended to, to signify our collective work among many regions, programs and providers.
- Overall, the type and graphic treatment are lighthearted and accessible.

Strategies and Tactics

1. Engage the Michigan public health system to focus on communication efforts

- **Roll out communication plan to stakeholders for endorsement and engagement.**
The first audience is the internal audience. Share the plan with stakeholders through presentations at meetings and through e-mail and phone conferences.
- **Provide regular communication, training and support.**
Provide designated spokespersons with talking points to ensure that everyone is on the same page. Incorporate communications training into scheduled conferences.
- **Provide assessment information and tools.**
Develop templates that can be easily filled in by the Michigan Department of Community Health and local health departments to provide feedback on communication outreach efforts.
- **Celebrate and communicate success.**
Include time in monthly meetings for reports from stakeholders on communication activities and successes. Learn from each other.

2. Align messages and timing across Michigan's public health system.

- **Employ the common signature of the new mark and tagline in all communications.**
Provide logo and tagline to all organizations and partners. Encourage its use in all communication materials.
- **Identify a core set of messages that will be included in all communications.**
Messages should be simple, clear and consistent. Do not mix messages. Target the message to the audience.
- **Institute focused, regular and ongoing communication about implementation.**
Continually reinforce the importance of communications to public health system. Assume the role as communications leader.
- **Constantly frame the message in economic terms.**
"Better health and its associated savings" have been identified as a resonant message and should be included in all communications. As we struggle to redefine our healthcare funding and delivery systems, public health programs play a significant role in addressing the root problems. Reinforce this.

3. Leverage larger stories (national, international) to focus on Michigan public health activities.

- **Provide framing/comment on statewide level.**
Monitor public health issues occurring on a national level (bird flu, staph infections, and disaster preparedness) and proactively provide a Michigan perspective to local/state media.

- **Feed stories to local media outlets.**
Provide talking points and stories to designated spokespersons to customize for outreach to their local media. Part of the job of public health is constant communication.

4. Identify existing research and conduct regular research to provide a communications focus.

- **Provide monthly updates for local communications use.**
Identify and share emerging national research and other activities and findings that inform public health work. Continue to glean information from the November 2005 survey for use as a new “hook” in communication outreach. Use cross tab results for local stories
- **Support regular research that is communicated and disseminated.**
Continue to use research to gain the Michigan perspective on health issues. The information learned from even one question becomes new news.

5. Provide the tools and training for designated spokespersons to be more effective.

- **Provide training to conduct reviews of communication tools and activities.**
Provide a checklist to determine which tools and activities are currently being utilized. Assess whether they should be modified, shared, or eliminated.
- **Provide training for designated spokespersons.**
Designated spokespersons should be proactive as well as reactive. Incorporate strategic and spokesperson training into meetings and conferences. Consider webinars for remote training.
- **Identify and elevate best practices – successful communication tools/efforts.**
Share best practices through meetings and e-mail communications.
- **Create one or more strategic presentations that can be customized for speakers bureau work.**
While the locations vary, the message of public health is consistent. Develop presentations that can be utilized by all, with options for local customization.

6. Identify key events for public health to take the stage to advocate for its work and programs.

- **Build on existing events and identify new events for public health participation.**
Upcoming events include National Public Health Week, April 3–9, 2006. The theme – Designing Healthy Communities, Raising Healthy KIDS – offers opportunity to gain media exposure before, during and after the actual week.

The Information Integration Conference, March 21–22, 2006, and the Public Health Conference, October 18–19, 2006, are signature events that provide opportunities for communication outreach.

Explore the potential of local, smaller public health events that could be duplicated by other locations.

- **Every event must have a media strategy for dissemination.**
Incorporate a media outreach component as part of the planning process. Assemble a team of communicators to assist with implementation during the event.

7. **Develop strategies to better align communications among partner organizations.**

- **Communicate initiatives and programs to state and local health departments for communications leverage.**
Begin all communication outreach by supplying releases, talking points, op-eds, and stories to public health system. Encourage all partners to include the information in their communication vehicles. Schedule conference calls to address any questions and to clarify messages.
- **Work to align communications surrounding common issues.**
Provide talking points on all common issues to ensure that members and partners are presenting a unified message.
- **Frame statewide work within key public health messages.**
Jobs and the economy are of utmost importance to policymakers. Messages that frame public health in terms of the cost of poor health and the cost benefits of good health will be most effective.

8. **Develop measurable goals for this effort at both local and state levels.**

- **Process measurement asks: What information is being delivered, and to whom?**
Designate someone to be responsible for collecting and recording pertinent information. Record all news releases; record to which news outlets the releases were sent; record all media briefings, editorial board appearances, TV news placements, and TV/radio talk show appearances; record requests for information from media sources. Include an update on communication activities at monthly meetings. Share stories of success.
- **Outcomes measurement asks: Did we make a difference?**
Collect and analyze media stories. Are they favorable to our cause? Consider using a clipping service if funds permit. Monitor shifts in public opinion through periodic surveys. Monitor shifts in legislative activity regarding public health initiatives.

Research

A primary purpose of research is to gather information to assist with the development of target messages – messages that incorporate specific language that will resonate in a positive way with specific audiences.

Research will also tell us who is most responsive to our message, who will be most influential in receiving our message, and which media outlets will be most effective in reaching our key influencers.

The Public Viewpoint

As evidenced by the recent survey commissioned by the Public Health Marketing Project, the majority of Michigan citizens believe that as a state, we are not healthy. They also *want* to be healthier and believe that local public health organizations should focus more attention on prevention. They understand that it is more costly to treat disease than to prevent it. People support public health – especially in support of children or if they are personally affected. Jobs and the economy are identified as the most important issues affecting Michigan

Primary and Secondary Audiences

While the general public is an audience as a whole, primary and secondary audiences have to be identified in order to develop a successful communications strategy. The key strategy will be to influence those who are able to influence others.

Respondents most likely to rate Michigan as not healthy included:

- Urban residents; in particular, Detroit and Lansing residents
- Younger survey respondents, particularly women
- African-Americans
- College-educated respondents, particularly women
- Those with children in the household
- Those with household incomes more than \$75,000

Different groups were also identified as being most favorable to health messages and should be considered as key influencers:

- Seniors
- Women
- Health-conscious
- Those with higher education and income

Among policymakers, those considered primary audiences include:

- Department heads
- State level policy personnel
- Legislators and legislative staff on health-related committees and subcommittees
- Legislative leadership and staff

Other primary audiences include organizations that share public health goals and can advance public health messages with their constituents.

Messaging Basics

Different audiences respond to different messages. The message of public health can and should be framed in ways that resonate with distinctive populations.

Messages Targeted to Policymakers and Businesses

Michigan is not only in a health crisis; it is in a fiscal crisis. The poor health of Michiganders contributes to the fiscal crisis in a multitude of ways. If you cannot calculate the total cost of an issue, estimate the cost of a single case, then estimate the number of cases, and let them do the math.

As written in an article by Kathie Marchlewski, *Midland Daily News*

There's a suspicion that it's not just labor costs driving businesses out of the state of Michigan; it also could be the fact that Michiganders don't eat well and don't exercise. To put it bluntly, many of them are fat. That makes them sick, and sickness is expensive to treat.

- **An unhealthy state is bad for business.**
- **We all bear the cost of an unhealthy population.**
- **Disease prevention programs save money.**

Messages Targeted to the General Public

Protecting Michiganders on a daily basis is a second overarching message. The list of essential services is long: protecting drinking water, testing air quality, ensuring public safety through restaurant inspections and food and beverage work permits, communicable disease prevention and testing, healthcare provider and hospital licensing – all vital functions and all nearly invisible to a population that has come to expect safe food, water, and air as a birthright with little thought to the constant vigilance required to ensure it.

- **Everyone benefits from the work of public health organizations.**
- **Public health organizations are vital to homeland security and serve as first responders in the event of a manmade or natural disaster.**
- **Public health organizations work daily to keep Michiganders safe.**

Building a Structure for Effective Communications

Prior to the implementation of a communications plan, an assessment and analysis of current communication resources is necessary.

- What communication tools do we currently use: brochures, newsletters, listserves, etc
- Who currently serves as our spokespersons?
- Who should serve as spokespersons for public health at the state and local levels?
- Is additional training necessary?

We also recommend an analysis of useful data to be used for presentation to media to help put stories in perspective. Graphs, charts, and facts that help “tell the story” should be collected and put in an easy-to-understand format.

Once an analysis of current communication resources is complete, prepare and assemble a “toolkit” of readily available collateral. Items in the toolkit can be used together or independently to support communication outreach. The items in this list should be available at all times.

- One-page fact sheet about organization
- Brochures that can be printed or available via Web
- Reports and studies for release as news items
- Bios of spokespeople and agency heads
- PowerPoint and other presentations
- Copies of newspaper articles
- Press kit: include all of the listed items

In addition, the **For Michigan. For You.** logo should be included on all collateral produced by governmental public health entities, and made available for use by its partner organizations.

Make Effective Communications a Priority

In order to be effective, communications has to be considered part of day-to-day activities – not a one-time effort.

- Determine who will be the point person for communication activities
- Establish a communications/media committee. Have regular meetings to review process and progress; report on activities at monthly meetings
- Distribute updated message memos and talking points on a regular basis
- Develop a media list that includes state and local reporters who cover health and policy issues
- Provide regular communications to all staff and partner organizations to ensure that the message is accurately reflected to family, friends and others