

CHAPTER 5

Evaluation of the National Media Campaign: *Talk. They Hear You.*

This document is excerpted from:

The September 2016 Report to Congress on the Prevention and Reduction of Underage Drinking

Background

“Talk. They Hear You.” is the Underage Drinking Prevention National Media Campaign of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA’s) Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP).

Underage drinking remains a national public health issue with serious implications, especially among adolescents. SAMHSA is responsible for leading public health efforts to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on American communities.

The “Talk. They Hear You.” earned media campaign responds to directives set forth in Section 2(d) of the STOP Act, requiring the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to fund and oversee a national adult-oriented media public service campaign and to report annually on the production, broadcasting, and evaluation of this campaign. The goal of the national media campaign is to reduce underage drinking by providing parents and caregivers of children ages 9 to 15 with information and resources to discuss the issue of alcohol with their children.

“Talk. They Hear You.” adds to the current knowledge base about underage drinking prevention. It also empowers parents to address the issue by increasing their level of comfort with the topic and encouraging open communication with their children.

During campaign development, parents, youth, and stakeholders provided feedback on all aspects of concept and message development. In 2012, SAMHSA conducted a national pilot program to test and refine the campaign’s creative materials and objectives at five sites across National Prevention Network (NPN) Regions, including:

- People Reaching Out (Western NPN Region)
- Metropolitan Drug Commission (Southeast NPN Region)
- Asian Health Coalition (Central NPN Region)
- Summit Prevention Alliance (Southwest NPN Region)
- Erie County Council (Northeast NPN Region)

Sites were asked to incorporate campaign materials in ongoing underage drinking education activities and events and to provide feedback on campaign messaging and materials. Pre- and post-exposure surveys were conducted to evaluate prelaunch effectiveness of campaign materials. In addition, a small sample provided qualitative feedback on the content, layout, and delivery of campaign messages. Feedback received during this market testing was incorporated into final campaign materials prior to launch.

Officially launched in May 2013, the “Talk. They Hear You.” campaign objectives include:

1. Increasing parents’ *awareness of the prevalence and risk* of underage drinking
2. Equipping parents with the *knowledge, skills, and confidence* to prevent underage drinking
3. Increasing parents’ *actions to prevent underage drinking*.

Target Audience

Alcohol use by those younger than the legal age of 21 remains a serious public health and safety problem, undermining the well-being of America’s youth. Approximately 10 percent of youth

ages 9 and 10 report having consumed more than a few sips of alcohol (Donovan et al., 2004), and more than 20 percent of underage drinkers begin drinking before age 13 (CDC, 2012). Nine percent of 14- to 15-year-olds used alcohol in the last month (SAMHSA, 2014b).

As noted, SAMHSA’s “Talk. They Hear You.” campaign focuses on encouraging parents to begin conversations about alcohol with children at an early age, when the likelihood of influencing children’s decisions about drinking is greatest (Office of the Surgeon General, 2007). The campaign draws from social marketing and health education behavior theories, feedback from audiences across the country, and the latest scientific research.

Parents have a significant influence on young people’s decisions about alcohol consumption. Parental attitudes toward drinking as well as parental communication have a significant impact on adolescent alcohol use, particularly among younger adolescents (Ennet et al., 2001; Wood et al., 2004). Although most adults support public policy aimed at reducing youth access to alcohol, there is significant evidence that parents are unaware of the pervasiveness and risk of underage drinking (NRC and IOM, 2004). Parents who know about underage alcohol use can take action to protect their children from many of the high-risk behaviors associated with it. Through a direct association with adolescent perceptions and cognition, parental beliefs and communication about the acceptability of underage drinking may positively impact use of alcohol in youth (Sieving, Maruyama, Williams, & Perry, 2000), suggesting that parental interaction with youth regarding underage drinking may provide a unique opportunity for early intervention and prevention.

Campaign Components

“Talk. They Hear You.” messages and materials are disseminated through radio, television, and print public service announcements (PSAs), social media, the campaign website, partner networks, and direct outreach. Campaign messages:

- Emphasize the importance of parents talking to their kids about underage drinking before they reach the age range when alcohol use typically begins (before age 15).
- Offer advice to parents about preparing children to deal with peer pressure issues that may lead to alcohol abuse.
- Highlight underage drinking statistics that are likely to catch parents’ attention.
- Focus on helping parents address the issue of underage drinking in a manner that emphasizes their children’s ability to make autonomous decisions.
- Model behaviors and situations when parents can begin the conversation about the dangers of alcohol with their children.



Public Service Announcements

“Talk. They Hear You.” PSAs show parents using everyday opportunities to talk with their children about alcohol and reinforce the importance of starting these conversations at an early age. PSAs direct viewers/listeners to the campaign website (<http://www.samhsa.gov/underage-drinking>) for additional information and tools, as well as downloadable versions of video, radio, and print PSAs. A select number of these materials are currently available in both English and Spanish; Spanish-language versions of the remaining materials are being developed and will be released in the next year. A series of print PSAs directed at Native American audiences has also been distributed to markets in Alaska, Arizona, and Oklahoma. Since the campaign launched in 2013, “Talk. They Hear You.” television and print PSAs have collectively garnered more than 5.3 billion impressions. Distribution has generated an estimated \$52 million in free air time and ad space.

Partner Networks

The media campaign works with more than 40 local, state, and national partners to support outreach and dissemination of campaign materials across the United States. Partners include other government agencies as well as prevention, retail, healthcare, community, and school-based organizations. In addition to PSAs, promotional materials include infographics, web banners, buttons, and a scannable Quick Response (QR) code for promoting the campaign on partner websites. These materials were created and provided to partners for display and distribution to parents and community members, along with talking points, fact sheets, infographics, draft social media messages, and email templates to ensure consistent outreach to parents and community members.

Website

The “Talk. They Hear You.” website provides a centralized resource for all campaign information and products. Materials and information are organized by visitor category: parent/caregiver, partner, or media. Educational and informational documents provide facts and statistics on the problem and consequences of underage drinking, risk factors, warning signs, and suggestions for actions parents and educators can take to help protect children and strengthen



CADCA is an example of a partner organization that is leveraging the campaign to benefit communities across the country.

decisionmaking skills. A Spanish version of the site (<http://www.samhsa.gov/hable-ellos-escuchan>) launched in March 2016.

Parents can use an interactive “create your own” action plan to generate tips on when and how to talk to children about alcohol that are tailored to a child’s gender and age, and download a family agreement template that enables parents and children to pledge their commitment to avoid underage drinking together. Other tools include answers to children’s frequently asked questions about alcohol and five primary conversational goals for parents emphasizing the importance of:

- Indicating disapproval of underage drinking.
- Demonstrating concern for their child’s happiness and well-being.
- Establishing themselves as a trustworthy source of information.
- Showing children they are paying attention and will notice alcohol use.
- Building children’s skills and strategies for avoiding underage drinking.

Through the duration of the campaign, underage drinking prevention pages on SAMHSA.gov garnered 7,662 page views from 3,374 visits—reflecting a 63 percent increase in traffic compared with the prior month. Almost 700 of these page views of the “Talk. They Hear You.” website were tracked via SAMHSA coding. The Thunderclap campaign (see below) was an especially effective referral platform, driving 569 of these tracked page views (more than 80 percent).

The screenshot shows the SAMHSA website interface. At the top, there is a search bar and navigation links for Home, Newsroom, Site Map, and Contact Us. Below the SAMHSA logo, there is a horizontal menu with categories like Find Help, Topics, Programs & Campaigns, Grants, Data, Priorities, About Us, and Publications. The main content area is titled 'Programs & Campaigns > Talk. They Hear You.' and features a large banner with the 'talk they hear you' logo and the text 'Underage Drinking Prevention'. Below the banner, there is a section for 'Talk. They Hear You.' with a video thumbnail and a 'Check out the PSAs' button. To the right, there are sections for 'In the News', 'Featured Resources', and 'Take Action'. The 'Take Action' section includes a '5 Conversation Goals' graphic and an 'Action Plan' graphic.

“Talk. They Hear You.” materials available on SAMHSA website.

Mobile Application

Newly available to parents in 2015 is a mobile application (“Talk. They Hear You.”) available through Google Play™, the Windows® Store, and the App Store®. The app features an interactive simulation using avatars to help parents practice bringing up the topic of alcohol, asking relevant questions, and keeping the conversation going in a role-play environment. The app has been downloaded 3,895 times as of February 2016.

After the “Talk. They Hear You.” mobile app was launched in March 2015, the application was promoted through paid advertising on Google Search, Google mobile display,⁴⁶ and Facebook. Ads drove target audiences to the underage drinking prevention website and to platforms from which the app could be downloaded. Paid ads generated 272,299 clicks and 5,940,224 impressions.



“Talk. They Hear You.” mobile app.

In late 2015, the “Talk. They Hear You.” campaign launched the #WeTalked campaign on Thunderclap, a platform that helps amplify social cause messages in social media. The campaign encouraged parents, caregivers, and organizations to pledge to talk to children about underage drinking and to encourage others to do the same. The campaign reached more than 2.3 million social media users across the country.

Campaign Evaluation Strategy

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the “Talk. They Hear You.” media campaign relies on the establishment of a correlation between parent/caregiver exposure to campaign materials and a change in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior to affect the prevention of underage drinking.

SAMHSA is planning to conduct a large-scale national survey of parents/caregivers of children ages 9 to 15—in addition to conducting a series of forced-exposure case studies—to investigate whether such a correlation exists. To determine the feasibility of a large-scale national survey, SAMHSA recently conducted a pilot survey and is in the process of conducting a series of focus groups. The pilot survey and focus group findings will help to:

- Determine whether campaign materials are being seen, retained, and applied by sufficient numbers of the target population to make a national survey sampling practical.
- Determine, within the limited frame of the pilot study, whether the questions elicit differences in responses between parents and caregivers who have and have not been exposed to the campaign.
- Refine data collection procedures and survey questions.
- Identify an appropriate timeframe for administration of a national survey.

At the completion of this round of research, SAMSHA will repeat the pilot survey and focus groups with Spanish-speaking parents/caregivers of children ages 9 to 15. SAMHSA will use the results of both pilot surveys and focus groups to finalize the national survey, which it will then administer in both English and Spanish.

⁴⁶ Google mobile display allows placement of ads in relevant mobile apps based on targeting parameters. In addition to targeting users by age, gender, and placements (specific apps), mobile display also allows the campaign to show ads in apps within relevant categories, such as parenting and health. This functionality enabled the campaign to reach a more qualified audience.

Pilot Study

Questions included in the pilot survey were designed to (1) quantify parent and caregiver awareness of the campaign and retention of campaign messages and (2) determine whether parents and caregivers have used the campaign materials in talking to their children. SAMHSA administered the 28-item pilot survey online through the Qualtrics[®] Survey Suite to a panel of parents and caregivers of children ages 9 to 15 living in the six geographic locations targeted for intensive campaign outreach: Atlanta, GA; Los Angeles, CA; Manhasset, NY; Oklahoma City, OK; Phoenix, AZ; and Washington, DC.

Because the survey was intended to provide both preliminary information about campaign reach and retention as well as information addressing the quality of the survey itself, the panel purchased from Qualtrics[®] included a requirement that approximately one third of respondents had been exposed to campaign materials. A total of 227 people responded to the online survey in order to obtain 48 qualified respondents (approximately 23 percent) who had been exposed to the campaign in the six geographic regions. Of those 227 respondents, 16 were disqualified because they were not parents of children currently ages 9 to 15, and 58 were eliminated because they did not fulfill the quota regarding exposure to the campaign. Complete responses were provided from a total of 153 parents and caregivers with children ages 9 to 15.

The pilot survey provided important findings about the feasibility of conducting a national survey. For example, the pilot survey provided information on campaign exposure—approximately 23 percent of parents and caregivers of children ages 9 to 15 in the six geographic regions who were part of the panel had heard of the campaign. This finding suggests it will be possible to develop a nationally representative sample of enough respondents who have heard of the campaign to measure any possible correlations between exposure to the campaign and knowledge, skills, or behaviors regarding talking to children about underage drinking.

In addition to the feasibility of developing a nationally representative sample, the pilot survey also provided information about the potential of the survey to detect differences in responses between parents and caregivers who had been exposed to the campaign and those who had not. For example, of those parents who had heard of the campaign, 69 percent said they were “somewhat” or “very much” concerned about their child/children drinking alcohol, compared with 44 percent who had not heard of the campaign ($p < 0.05$).^{47 48} Because the pilot survey was distributed to a small, targeted sample that was not selected to be representative of the general population, this finding is not generalizable to the overall population and should not be interpreted as an evaluation of the campaign as a whole.

Together with the focus group discussion findings, the pilot survey results will be used to further refine the survey instrument and the data collection procedures for the national survey.

⁴⁷ This bivariate relationship was tested using a standard Pearson’s Chi-Square test of significance.

⁴⁸ It should be noted that selective exposure may have been a factor in this finding as parents who are concerned about their children drinking alcohol may have been more likely to pay attention to the campaign materials than parents who are not concerned about their children drinking alcohol.

National Survey and Forced-Exposure Case Studies

To establish a correlation between parent/caregiver exposure to campaign materials and a change in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior to affect the prevention of underage drinking, the national survey will:

- Examine campaign reach and exposure to determine whether a sufficient number of adults with children in the targeted age range have been exposed to campaign messaging and materials.
- Evaluate whether parents exposed to campaign messaging and materials report increased knowledge and skills and/or changes in behavior regarding talking to their children about alcohol after seeing the materials.

As with the pilot survey, SAMHSA will administer the nationally representative survey online in both English and Spanish using the Qualtrics[®] Survey Suite. The questions will be refined—based on pilot survey and focus group findings—to determine whether parents/caregivers have seen and remembered campaign materials (whether the campaign marketing strategy has been effective), and whether parents/caregivers exposed to campaign materials reported changes in awareness, attitudes, and behaviors surrounding the problem of underage drinking.

SAMHSA will also conduct forced-exposure case studies in selected school sites in areas that have currently had limited campaign outreach to supplement findings from the national survey. Case studies will include baseline surveys of parents and children ages 9 to 15, followed by intensive exposure to campaign materials, and postexposure surveys of parents and children. SAMHSA will also conduct focus groups and interviews with parents to identify details on specific campaign content and its usefulness for discussing underage drinking with children. Where national survey data will provide an evaluation of overall campaign information exposure and retention across the United States, case studies will explore details of how exposure to the “Talk. They Hear You.” campaign affects parent and student attitudes and behaviors at the target sites. Inclusion of student pre- and postexposure surveys will also allow SAMHSA to identify trends in correlations between changes in parent behavior and changes in youth behavior. Together, these sources of information will allow an estimation of overall campaign impact.

Conclusions

To determine whether a relationship exists between parent/caregiver exposure to “Talk. They Hear You.” campaign materials and a change in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior regarding the prevention of underage drinking, SAMHSA will conduct a large-scale national survey of parents and caregivers of children ages 9 to 15 and a series of forced-exposure case studies. Meaningful assessment of the effect of exposure to campaign messages and materials on parents requires sufficient time for the media campaign to reach a significant number of parents with children in the targeted age range across the United States. Currently, SAMHSA is completing preliminary evaluation of both the reach and effectiveness of campaign materials through use of both English- and Spanish-language versions of the pilot survey and focus groups. Findings from the English-language pilot survey suggest that campaign reach is sufficient to make deployment of the national survey feasible in 2017. Results from the Spanish-language pilot survey will provide additional information on campaign reach, and together these data will inform the sampling plan for the national survey.

Combined results from both the English- and Spanish-language versions of the pilot survey and focus groups will also be used to develop a more robust national survey of parents and caregivers and to refine data collection procedures and data collection instruments used in the forced-exposure case studies. Together, national survey data and the forced-exposure case study data will be used to estimate overall campaign impact.