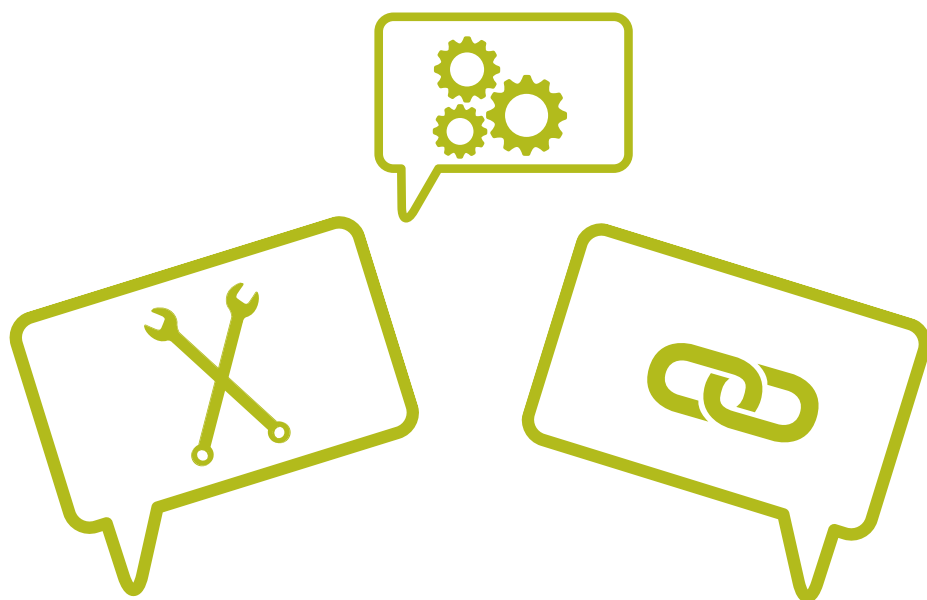


# HEALTH COMMUNICATION



VIRGINIA ABC  
EDUCATION AND PREVENTION  
TOOLKIT SERIES





Virginia Alcoholic Beverage Control Authority  
[www.abc.virginia.gov](http://www.abc.virginia.gov) • (804) 977-7440  
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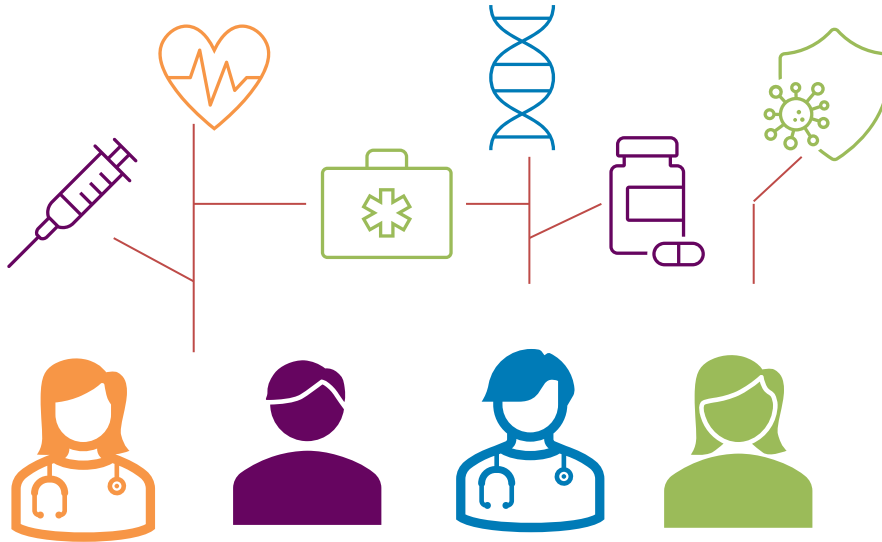
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# HEALTH COMMUNICATION

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide information to any organization, group, or individual looking to **improve their health communication skills**. It provides the basics of health communication, possible barriers to communication and strategies to improve health communication.



# WHAT IS HEALTH COMMUNICATION?



**Health communication** is the study and use of communication strategies to inform and influence individual decisions that enhance health. Health communication includes written and verbal strategies to empower and influence populations and communities to make healthier decisions.

## Why is health communication important?

- It places an emphasis on combining theory and practice in understanding communication processes and changing human behavior.
- It is directly related to public safety and health. It becomes one of the main reasons to form an effective communication strategy.
- Researchers and practitioners of diverse disciplines are brought together to develop multi-level theoretical approaches in order to identify ways to improve and save lives.

# EFFECTIVE HEALTH COMMUNICATION SKILLS

It is important for organizations working to impact health attitudes and behaviors to have good quality health communication skills when trying to disseminate information. Here are five practical steps that you can take to improve the quality of communications to ensure continued success.

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## Choose your words carefully

- The more clearly you say something, the more powerful the message is communicated. Avoid using clichés, slogans, and unnecessary buzzwords.

## Use plain language and avoid the use of medical terminology

- Plain language is not anti-intellectual, drab, or dumbing down. Plain language combined with other good communication practices can increase the understandability of information.

## Never trade clarity for inspiration

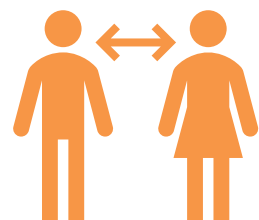
- Inducing emotions in your audience should not be a trade-off for a lack of quality or clarity of your information. Focusing on your mission, message and audience will ensure that the audience will understand and are more likely to take part.

## Analyze your target audience by determining attitudes, behaviors, interests, benefits and barriers

- Knowing your audience can help tailor specific messages that would be relevant to them. This is beneficial to your cause because it can pique their interests, helping them retain the information.
- Completing a needs assessment can help you better understand your audience's knowledge gaps, barriers and interest. This will provide more specific curriculum to focus on.

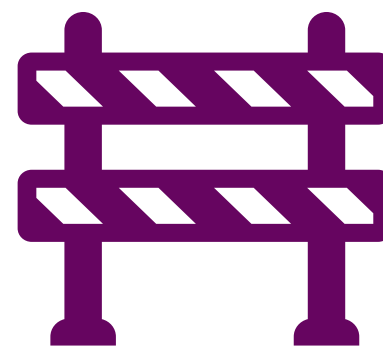
## Communicate the “why”

- There is a lot of information that is communicated in public health, and the “why” of the topic should not be lost within all the information you are disseminating. The audience may walk away missing the big idea inside all the information. It's important to address why the audience should care.





# BARRIERS TO HEALTH COMMUNICATION



## Low health literacy

- Health literacy is defined as the ability to obtain, communicate, process and understand basic health information and services.
- Research shows low health literacy is acute among individuals who are older, have limited education, lower income, chronic conditions, and those who are non-native English speakers.
- 80 million Americans are estimated to have limited or low health literacy.
- Examples of low health literacy include:
  - Having trouble understanding doctor's instructions.
  - Lacking the ability to interpret nutrition labels.
  - Having difficulty determining if a website is providing reputable health information.

## Low cultural competency

- Cultural competence is the ability to provide resources and programs to individuals with diverse values, beliefs and behaviors, including tailoring messages to meet their social, cultural, and linguistic needs.
- Examples of low cultural competency include:
  - Not understanding different histories, cultures, languages and traditions.
  - Disrespecting differences in familie's home lives.
  - Having a negative attitude towards cultural differences.

## Spreading of health misinformation

- In recent years, the rapidly changing information environment has made it easier for misinformation to spread at an unprecedented speed and scale especially on social media and online retail sites, as well as via search engines.

**80 million** Americans are estimated to have limited or low health literacy

# STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE HEALTH COMMUNICATION



Ask open-ended questions to assess if the audience or patient understands your message.

Example: What type of music do you listen to when you are working out?



Use simple language; for example, say “fats” instead of “lipids” or “harmful” instead of “adverse.”



Use graphics and pictures instead of long, written messages, instructions or memos.



Speak slowly and clearly without patronizing the audience or patients.



Provide information tailored for appropriate grade and age levels.



# HEALTH COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

It is important to use research-based strategies to convey health messages that shape communities' knowledge, attitudes and/ or behaviors. Using a variety of communication channels will allow health messages to shape public health campaigns.

## Communication Channels



**Radio**



**TV**



**Newspaper**



**Social Media**



**Flyers/Billboards**

# HEALTH COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

## Communication Channels



**Group discussions**



**Pamphlets**



**Internet**



**Brochures**

Consider your target audience when choosing communication channels. It's important to **ensure your target audience has access to the communication channels** you choose.

## EXAMPLES OF

# EFFECTIVE HEALTH COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGNS

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## Truth

- Health issue: Smoking
  - Year founded: 2000
  - Youth-focused campaign focused on anti-smoking that was produced and funded by the Truth Initiative. Truth used counter marketing to show what might have happened if the tobacco industry's Marlboro Man kept up with his smoking habit. As a result, the American Journal of Public Health found that the campaign led to 22% decline in smoking prevalence among students between 1999 and 2002.
- 

## Man Therapy

- Health issue: Substance abuse and suicide among men
  - Year founded: 2012
  - The campaign focused on providing men and their loved ones with a place to learn more about men's mental health and examine their own wellness. The campaign sought to reduce the stigma around mental health conditions among men. After the launch more than 19,000 visitors had accessed crisis information using the website and nearly 60,000 18- mental health assessments were completed.
- 

## Northeast Louisiana Regional Pre-Diabetes Prevention Project

- Health issue: Risk of developing diabetes
- Year founded: 2009
- The North Louisiana Regional alliance developed and implemented a program that offered diabetes screenings, education, and educational programming for participants throughout Northeast Louisiana. As a result, the residents who participated in their program initiatives saw a decrease in blood sugar levels.

# RESOURCES

## **American Public Health Association** ([www.apha.org](http://www.apha.org))

APHA champions the health of all people and all communities.

## **Health Communication Gateway CDC** ([www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/sciencedigest/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/sciencedigest/index.html))

The Health Communication Gateway is a one-stop shop for health communicators.

## **National Communication Association** ([www.natcom.org](http://www.natcom.org))

NCA promotes the widespread appreciation of the importance of communication in public and private life.

## **Health Communication Science Digest** ([www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/sciencedigest/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/sciencedigest/index.html))

The Health Communication Science Digest is a monthly offering of selected journals that feature emerging health communication and marketing science

## **Virginia ABC Education and Prevention Resources**

Virginia ABC Education and Prevention provides programming and resources for all age groups. Please call or visit us online for more information.

Phone: 804-977-7440

E-mail: [education@abc.virginia.gov](mailto:education@abc.virginia.gov)

Web: [www.abc.virginia.gov](http://www.abc.virginia.gov)



[@VirginiaABCEducationAndPrevention](https://www.facebook.com/VirginiaABCEducationAndPrevention)

## **Miss Virginia School Tour**

In partnership with Virginia ABC, Miss Virginia travels across Virginia to elementary schools spreading a message of health, wellness and prevention with students and teachers.

## **Being Outstanding Leaders Together (BOLT) Against Drugs and Alcohol**

BOLT provides drug and alcohol prevention knowledge to middle school students through regional community collaboration and high school peer leadership.

## **Power of Parents**

In partnership with Mothers Against Drunk Driving, Power of Parents is designed to empower parents of middle and high school students through resources and training to have ongoing, intentional conversations about the dangers and consequences of underage drinking.

### **Youth Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Project (YADAPP)**

A high school youth-led leadership conference equipping teens with a strategic plan and empowering them to keep their schools and communities alcohol and drug free.

### **Virginia Office for Substance Abuse Prevention (VOSAP)**

An organization that promotes collaboration among state and local agencies, organizations, coalitions and faith communities that address substance abuse prevention.

### **Higher Education Alcohol and Drug Strategic Unified Prevention (HEADS UP)**

Strengthening and supporting the mission of healthy and safe campus-communities through strategic initiatives, resources and capacity building.

### **Project Sticker Shock**

Supplies are provided to community groups in an effort to decrease social providing. The project includes stickers being placed on alcohol packaging reminding buyers to not provide to minors and is done in conjunction with a press event to help raise awareness.

### **Virginia Higher Education Substance Use Advisory Committee (VHESUAC)**

VHESUAC is led by an Executive Council and Workgroup that develop and update a statewide strategic plan for substance use education, prevention and intervention at Virginia's institutions of higher education.

### **Licensee Training Resources**

Courses are offered to help licensees become more responsible and to better understand Virginia laws, rules and regulations. Both courses are available online and in classroom settings, instructed by a team of Virginia ABC special agents in your region.

### **Seller/Server Training Approval Program (STAP)**

A program that approves alcohol server responsibility courses provided through external providers to licensees in Virginia.

### **Educational and Prevention Resources**

Publications, toolkits, public service announcements and online trainings are available to the general public at no cost.

### **Grant Program**

Alcohol education and prevention grants assist community partners to develop and enhance initiatives related to alcohol education and prevention. Grant cycle is July through June with applications due in the spring.







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