

Social Norms Approaches

Summary

Social norms approaches are strategies that seek to reduce misperceptions of norms about underage drinking, alcohol impaired driving, or binge drinking. Since most young people believe that their peers hold more permissive attitudes about drinking than they actually do, the social norms approach involves communicating actual drinking norms in order to dispel those myths. The idea is to correct misperceptions about what the majority of young people actually think and do concerning alcohol consumption, with the ultimate goal of changing drinking practices.

Please note that, due to insufficient or conflicting evidence, social norms approaches will only be approved as strategies if they are implemented as secondary activities that are part of a larger, comprehensive alcohol abuse prevention approach.

Core Components

1. Conduct careful research into the existing norms of the target audience to determine the content and tone of the social norms messages;
2. Develop specific communication goal(s) for each campaign, based on collected data, and ensure goal(s) coincide with goal(s) of primary strategy;
3. Choose channels of communication carefully and intentionally;
4. Test and re-test messages.

Outcomes

- Supports the outcome(s) of primary prevention strategy.

Contributing Factors Addressed

- Easy retail access to alcohol (this contributing factor is only addressed if a media campaign is specifically directed at this factor);
- Easy social access to alcohol (this contributing factor is only addressed if a media campaign is specifically directed at this factor);
- Social norms accepting/encouraging alcohol use;
- Low perceived risk of alcohol use.

Implementation Materials

- **A Multifaceted Social Norms Approach to Reduce High-Risk Drinking: Lessons from Hobart and William Smith Colleges:**

This publication represents one piece in a comprehensive approach to alcohol prevention at institutions of higher education. The concepts and approaches it describes should be viewed in the broader context of prevention theory and the approaches affirmed by the U.S. Department of Education and promoted by the Center in its training, technical assistance, publication, and evaluation activities. Developed by the Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention, funded by the U.S. Department of Education with supplemental funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2002.

<http://www.higheredcenter.org/files/product/hws.pdf>

- **A Guide to Marketing Social Norms for Health Promotion in Schools and Communities:**

This is a comprehensive, step-by-step manual for those who are interested in using the social norms approach to address school-age and community-wide issues. It is important that those working to implement social norms projects have the tools and knowledge to do so effectively, and with fidelity to the model. This guidebook is intended to provide both the theoretical and practical information necessary to conduct an effective project. Developed by the National Social Norms Resource Center, 2005.

<http://www.socialnormsresources.org/pdf/Guidebook.pdf>

References

- Perkins, H. W., Haines, M. P., Rice, R. Misperceiving the College Drinking Norm, *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 2005
- Perkins, H. W., Social Norms and the Prevention of Alcohol Misuse in Collegiate Contexts, *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 2002
- Wechsler, H., Nelson, T. F., Lee, J. E., Seibring, M., Lewis, C., Keeling, R. P., Perception and Reality: A National Evaluation of Social Norms Marketing Interventions to Reduce College Students' Heavy Alcohol Use, *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 2003