National Behavioral Health Network
for Tobacco & Cancer Control
from NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

Campaign Resources

to Counter Tobacco Marketing to Individuals with Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders

BACKGROUND – A HISTORY OF TOBACCO INDUSTRY MARKETING

The tobacco industry has strategically and aggressively targeted individuals with mental health and/or substance use disorders (MH/SUD) for decades with manipulative marketing tactics, from medical recommendations to leveraging celebrity endorsements (CDC Tobacco Free, 2023). As the truth about smoking's cancer-causing effects emerged through breakthrough studies, and the first U.S. Surgeon General's report in 1964 examining the health consequences of tobacco use, the tobacco industry worked quickly to respond by financially supporting research that disproved these findings and falsely linked smoking with mental health benefits (Hirshbein, 2012). These efforts also included disseminating free cigarettes to psychiatric facilities, targeted advertising and discounting product prices to take advantage of an already alarming rate of tobacco use among individuals with MH/SUD.

The impact of these predatorial practices, particularly around marketing and advertising, is so powerful that even non-smoking individuals are influenced by cigarette advertisements that make misleading promises of relaxation and stress reduction. A staggering 58 to 73% of non-smoking individuals associate smoking with mental health benefits (Influence of Tobacco Marketing on Smoking Behavior, 2020). Individuals with MH/SUD challenges are further misled to believe that tobacco use can lessen or help them manage their depression and anxiety and that cessation could negatively increase their anxiety symptoms.

Countering the tobacco industry's marketing efforts can seem overwhelming, they have big budgets and aggressive strategies; however, leveraging the power of social marketing and MH/SUD specific campaigns supported by public health partners can help mitigate the harmful effects of the tobacco industry's marketing. Tobacco products, from combustible cigarettes to vaping devices, can make stress feel worse. For example, 93% of individuals who vape report that vaping made them more stressed, depressed or anxious (Truth Initiative, 2021).

Big Tobacco's History of Predatorial Marketing

– A Brief Timeline[1,2,3]

1940s

Doctors and dentists were hired to publicly announce that cigarettes are okay for your health.

1990s

Kid-friendly characters, such as Joe Camel, were included in campaigns for youth appeal.

1950s/60s

Celebrities were employed to be in ad campaigns, deceptively portraying tobacco use as a desirable norm.

1990s/2000s

Tobacco companies sponsored big public sporting events for mass outreach.

2012

Research was published as a strong attempt to call out the tobacco industry for falsely claiming that tobacco has a positive impact on individuals with MH/SUD challenges.

2021

The popular E-Cigarette company, JUUL, sponsored an entire special issue of the American Journal of Health Behavior to showcase their tobacco-industry funded research.

2017

Phillip Morris International launched a "Smoke-Free Future" campaign making bold misleading claims that they are public health advocates.

> "Both the idea that smoking/nicotine does something positive for the mentally ill and the conclusion that it is the result of nicotine dependence have the potential to support corporate agendas (tobacco or pharmaceutical)."
>
> *– Laura Hirshbein, 2012*

[1] Tobacco Stops with Me, 2022

[2] WHO: stop tobacco industry interference, 2012

[3] Shiffman, S. & Augustson, E.M., 2021

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for Individuals with Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders

6.

FEEDBACK TO REFINE PROGRAM

1.

PLANNING AND STRATEGY

5.

ASSESSING EFFECTIVENESS

SOCIAL MARKETING WHEEL

Social marketing, defined as health system advertisements targeted at influencing consumer social behaviors (Evans & McCormack, 2008), can aid public health and MH/SU treatment professionals in addressing predatorial tobacco marketing. To employ social marketing and counter the widespread tobacco industry media content, tobacco control programs (TCPs) should establish a large media presence. TCPs can leverage the social marketing wheel from the National Cancer Institute (2002) to encourage positive behavior change:

2.

SELECTING CHANNELS AND MATERIALS

4.

IMPLEMENTATION

3.

DEVELOPING MATERIALS AND PRETESTING

Public health departments can collaborate with MH/SUD providers to survey their client populations and determine what language and images resonate positively and encourage cessation and recovery. Successful examples of person-centered and MH/SUD-related communication campaigns include:

"Continue the Good" Ad Campaign

- Developed by Maryland's TCP, the "Continue the Good" campaign was developed to educate MH/SUD providers about the benefits of tobacco cessation treatment while also creating local awareness of the issue of MH/SUD and tobacco use.

"I-COVID Quit" Campaign

- Developed by the Smoking Cessation Leadership Center (SCLC) at the University of California San Francisco, the "I-COVID Quit" campaign is a national social media marketing campaign launched in March 2021 to promote smoking cessation among individuals with MH/SUD challenges.

"Breath of Stress Air" Campaign

- Developed by the Truth Initiative, the "Breath of Stress Air" campaign is a social marketing campaign that dispels myths that nicotine can subdue stress and offers better, nonsmoking alternative solutions to stress management.

"Tips From Former Smokers"® Campaign

- Developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the "Tips" campaign uses approaches to address health disparities in pursuit of health equity by increasing the reach, representation, receptivity and accessibility of smoking cessation messages. It also increases awareness of free quit-smoking resources among adults – no matter who they are, where they live or how much money they make.

Social Marketing Resource Guides

Tobacco Industry Tactics

- This guide, from the World Health Organization, explains how the tobacco industry uses manipulative tactics to influence consumers to buy tobacco products through research, laws, and public relations.

Influence of Tobacco Marketing on Smoking Behavior

- This chapter from the book, "The Role of the Media," provides a deep dive into how the media impacts smoking behavior, specifically in adolescents.

Tobacco Disparities Framing Project Training

- This training, from ChangeLab Solutions, is designed to help stakeholders use evidence-based framing to effectively communicate about tobacco-product disparities.

Health Equity in Tobacco Prevention and Control: Best Practices User Guide

- This user guide, from the CDC's Office on Smoking and Health, assists staff in translating best treatment practices into practical guidance that promotes health equity in tobacco prevention and control.

Language Matters When Discussing Substance Use

- This resource guide, developed by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, outlines non-stigmatizing, first-person language that should be used when discussing substance use.

Getting Candid: Framing the Conversation Around Youth Substance Use Prevention

- This message guide for providers, developed by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, gives stakeholders the tools to address predatorial marketing with best practices for framing around youth substance use prevention.

Changing the Narrative Together: Three Effective Strategies for Talking about Youth Mental Health

- This narrative change guide, developed by the FrameWorks Institute, covers the underlying cultural mindsets that foster unproductive thinking about youth mental health, along with strategies to avoid and advance when talking about this issue.

PROJECT TEAM & AUTHORS:

Coyle Shropshire,
Project Coordinator

Tamanna Patel, MPH, CDP,
Project Director

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