



The University of Texas at Austin
Center for Health Communication
Moody College of Communication & Dell Medical School

Evidence Based Health Communication

DESIGNING & TESTING MESSAGES TO SUPPORT PUBLIC HEALTH

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OUR MISSION

Our people have **broad and deep communication expertise** that allows our Center to lead the creation of **evidence-based health communication** scholarship, education, and practice.

Our interdisciplinary group of scholars embraces opportunities to use communication to improve the health of people around the globe.

Research.

Education.

Practice.

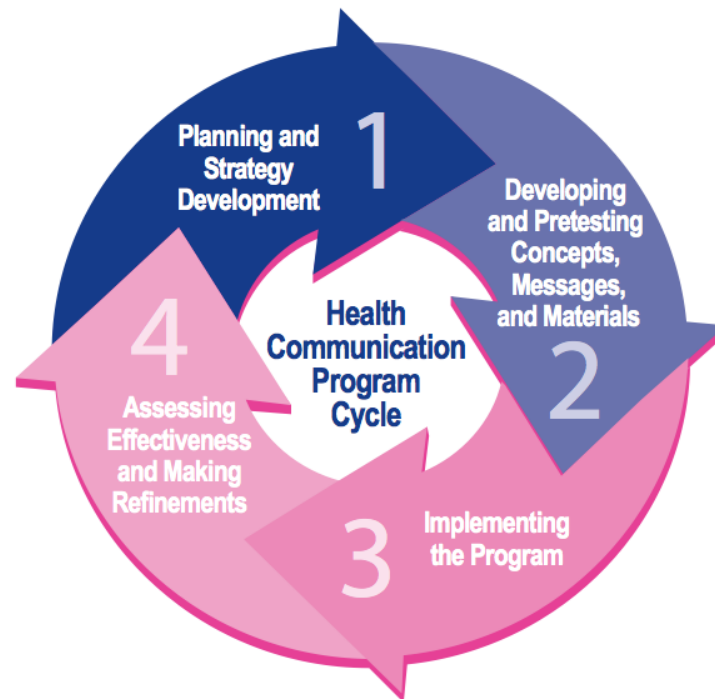
WHAT IS HEALTH COMMUNICATION?

Health communication is the **science and art** of using communication to advance the health and well-being of people and populations.



HEALTH COMMUNICATION PROCESS

- Identify intended audience(s)
 - Consumer research
 - Communication objectives and strategy
-
- Develop relevant, meaningful messages & materials
 - Pretest with audience members
-
- Program implementation & distribution
 - Process evaluation
-
- Campaign evaluation
 - Identify future changes





Case Study

TURN TO CAMPAIGN & CHECK-IN

*Funded by the Texas Health and
Human Services Commission*

TURN TO CAMPAIGN GOALS

- Promote social connection as a predictor of physical health, mental health, and substance use
- Create an interactive online check-in and customized resources aimed at supporting Texans in managing mental health and substance use challenges

apóyate
en tu familia

ApoyateEnTX.org



**Have you checked in
on someone lately?**

Your support makes a difference.
Take a 5-minute quiz to discover
resources that will help them cope.



TEXAS
Health and Human Services

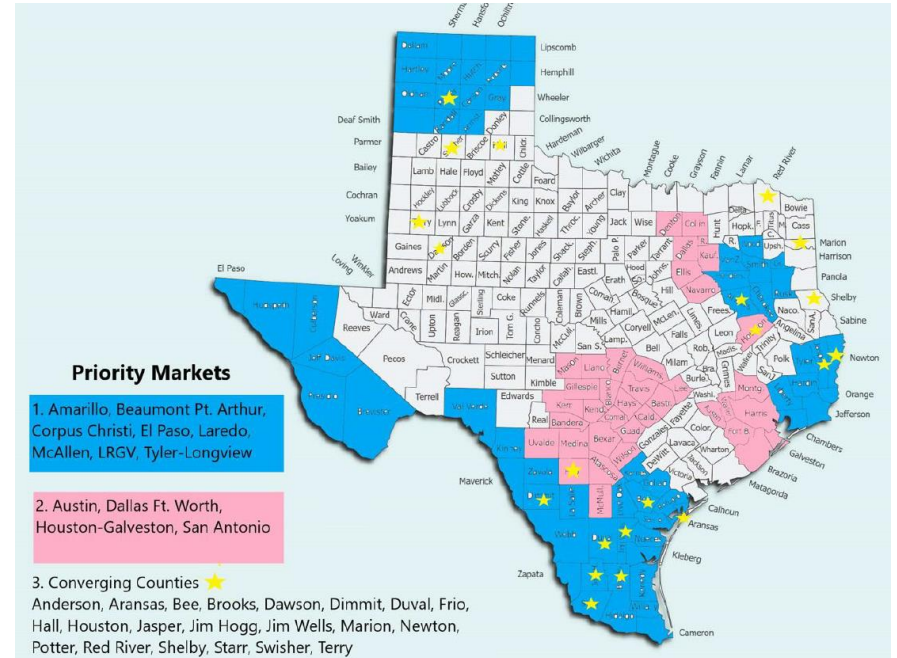
INTENDED AUDIENCES

- Populations most affected by COVID-19/populations who experience the greatest health disparities (Hispanic/Latino, non-Hispanic Black, lower SES)
- Parents of youth and young adults
- Young adults (18-25)
- Community leaders

Across all audiences:

Focus on geographic areas at highest need, as determined by mapping overlapping counties ranked lowest in:

- US News Healthiest Communities
- County Health Rankings
- Distressed Communities Index



Turn To Campaign & Check-In

CHC Project Timeline

Year 1 – 2021-2022

Formative research and creative testing to inform the Turn To campaign, check-in, and resources:

- Environmental scan
- Academic literature reviews
- Community leader interviews and focus groups
- Formative research survey
- Campaign strategy brief
- Message and creative testing

Year 2 – 2022-2023

Turn To Campaign

- Turn To campaign launch (FleishmanHillard)
- Campaign evaluation survey

Check-In

- Check-in (self and other) and resources development, design, programming, and translation
- Campaign asset creation
- Check-in launch (English and Spanish)

Year 3 – 2023-2024

- Check-in usability study and qualitative evaluation of resources
- Campaign evaluation survey
- Update check-ins and resources based on usability study and evaluation results
- Update check-in campaign assets
- Summative evaluation and final report

CHECK-INS

Two versions: Self and Someone Else
(both in English and Spanish)

Purpose: Help Texans identify mental health and substance use challenges and provide customized resources based on their responses.

Question modules:

1. Basic demographics
2. Mental health
3. Social connection
4. Substance use



RESOURCES

Conversation Guide:

How to ask for help

It can be hard to talk about your mental health or substance use struggles with someone else. But reaching out for support is an important step to take in feeling better—and it doesn't have to be difficult or uncomfortable. Even if you feel as though you don't have a support person in your life, there's always someone you can turn to—from teachers and coaches to neighbors, religious leaders, and online communities. If you're looking for professional support, help is available when you need it—from therapists and counselors to doctors and support lines.

Things to Keep in Mind

Don't wait to reach out. Most people want to do whatever it takes to make you feel better—you just have to ask them. And remember, help comes in all different forms. The support that someone gives you may not be exactly what you need, and that's okay. It just means that you should seek support from multiple sources and cope in a variety of ways. Finally, be prepared to reach out again. This might not be a one-time conversation, but one brick in a longer path of connection. Set yourself up for success by approaching your mental health as a journey.

➤ **Get comfortable with asking for help.** Leaning on the support of others is one of the best ways to cope during a hard time. Sharing your true feelings can be scary, but it's one of the first steps to feeling better. When you're honest about the hardest parts of your experience, you get the relief of no longer feeling alone. Asking for help does not make you weak. Be direct and let them know that you need their support.

"I've been feeling pretty low lately, I think I could really use your help."

"I want to cut back on my drinking, but I don't think I can do it alone."

➤ **Find time to talk. We all live busy lives.** It's a good idea to check that the person you're reaching out to is able to give you the support you deserve. Be mindful of the timing and avoid asking for help at the last minute—unless it feels like an emergency. Your listener will be more able and likely to help if they don't feel pressured or rushed. Lastly, remember that there's no such thing as a perfect time. The important thing is simply to make the conversation a priority.

"I haven't been feeling my best lately. Can we have lunch this week to talk about it?"

"I've had some things on my mind that I need to get off my chest. Is there a good time to call you today?"

➤ **Find a place where you feel comfortable.** When you're sharing your personal story, the place you choose to hold your conversation matters. Pick an environment where you will both feel comfortable so you can talk without distractions or feeling rushed. Try to find a quiet place with a relaxed atmosphere.

"Can we grab some coffee and talk?"

"I'd love for you to join me on a walk."

➤ **Show the person that you trust them.** When you tell someone why you chose to reach out to them, they become more invested in helping you feel better. It might also help them be more open about their own experiences.

"I know that you've been through this before..."

"You've always been such a good listener..."

"I really trust your insights and think that you can help me."

Substance Use

- Tobacco
- Marijuana
- Alcohol
- Opioid
- Prescription Rx

Mental Health

- Worried
- Angry
- Sad
- Grief and loss
- Lonely
- Suicide

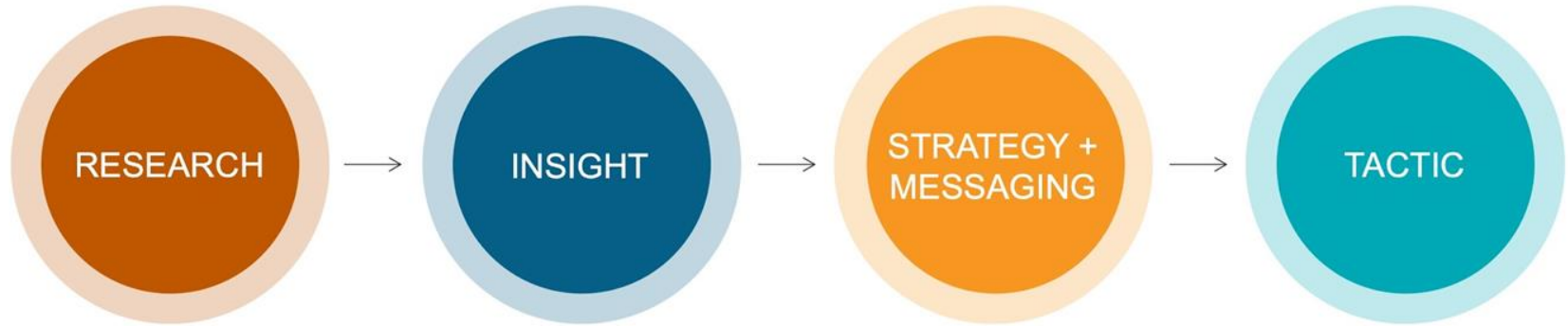
Other Stressors

- Housing insecurity
- Current events
- Culture
- Past trauma
- Financial struggles
- Health issues
- COVID-19
- Moving
- Relationships

Conversation Guides

- How to Talk to Someone You're Worried About
- How to Ask for Help
- Reconnecting with Someone You Haven't Talked to in a While

CHC MESSAGE DESIGN PROCESS



FORMATIVE RESEARCH

ACADEMIC LITERATURE REVIEW

- Risk factors for SUD & mental health
- Outreach and interventions with vulnerable populations
- Social connectedness
- Demographic/geographic variation
- Healthy coping strategies
- Family communication
- Traumatic experiences
- E-health interventions

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

- SUD & mental health
- communication campaigns
- Interactive self-screener
- Smartphone apps
- Addiction resources
- Coping skills resources

QUALITATIVE

COMMUNITY LEADER INTERVIEWS

(n=36)

- Alcohol is substance of most concern
- Increase in youth depression and suicide rates since the pandemic
- Many community members mistrust state and federal health departments
- Messages should be distributed by trusted community organizations, healthcare providers, or public health teams
- Free community events well received by community members
- Leverage social media to reach intended audiences

COMMUNITY LEADER FOCUS GROUPS

(10 focus groups, n=33)

- Confirmed interview findings
- Confirmed creative testing results
- Collected feedback on self-screener

QUANTITATIVE

CAMPAIGN FORMATIVE RESEARCH SURVEY

(n=2033)

- Top 5 things that matter most: family, happiness, physical health, religion, and mental health
- Greater social connectedness associated with lower risk perception for SUD and stress
- Majority don't hold or endorse stigmatizing beliefs toward people with SUD & mental health, with room for improvement
- Majority have used positive coping strategies; most reported strategies involving personal control vs. finding social support
- Reasons for not seeking help for mental health issues: public stigma, lack of knowledge about where to find resources, help-seeking as a sign of weakness, doubt in effectiveness of help-seeking

CHC TEXAS HEALTH COMMUNICATION SURVEY

(n=1028)

- Doctors are most trusted SUD and mental health info source
- Common reasons for drinking include: to relax, celebrate, and be social

CHC TEXAS HEALTH COMMUNICATION SURVEY

(n=1992)

- >40% have used stigmatizing language to describe someone with SUD
- <40% have lower level of social connection
- Family and friends are most reported sources of emotional support

CREATIVE TESTING

CAMPAIGN MESSAGE TESTING

(6 tests, n=89)

- *Texas-centered images & messages* (n=9): All participants preferred messages and images with either a strong or moderate Texas theme vs. neutral.
- *Turn To visual styles* (n=20): Participants were evenly split in preferences for the 2 styles. Most understood the messages, associated positive feelings with both, and indicated relevance to self and community.
- *Turn To vs. On My Mind* (n=16): Participants preferred TT visual styles and OMM messages. TT effectively promoted social connection and prompted thoughts of family and friends. OMM directly addressed negative effects of reduced social connection and prompted thoughts/feelings of personal struggles.
- *Key messages* (n=6): Participants reacted positively to key messages, agreed with the content, felt they were relevant and motivating, and liked how they normalize mental health issues.
- *Happiness messaging* (n=8): Results confirmed use of the words happy/happiness when they're a good fit.
- *Supporting messages* (n=30): Respondents understood/agreed with the messages and acknowledged that mental health is important.

SELF-SCREENER TESTING

(3 tests, n=42)

- *Self-screener* (n=6): Results confirmed that the self-screener survey was easy to understand and useful for self or others.
- *Creative concepts* (n=6): 2 of 4 potential creative concepts selected based on respondent preferences.
- *Digital ads* (n=30): Participants evenly split in stated preferences for 2 sets of 3 ads. Visuals modified based on feedback.

CAMPAIGN STRATEGY BRIEF

Single Most Important Thing

Many Texans turned to substance use to cope with the isolation and stress resulting from COVID-19, but we're here to guide them toward reconnection and healthier ways to manage difficult situations and emotions.

Calls to Action

- Reach out to someone to connect - either for your own benefit or theirs
- Visit the campaign website
- Use the self-screening instrument and engage with the resulting resources
- Talk to your doctor or a mental health professional about SUD or mental health challenges
- Share the campaign and/or self-screening instrument with someone you care about



The graphic features a photograph of a man in a green shirt crouching and petting a dog in a grassy field. A large yellow arrow curves from the top left towards the bottom right, framing the text. The background is split into a green field and a dark blue area.

You deserve to be happy and healthy.

turn to
TurnToSupportsTX.org

When you're stuck in a low place, it can feel isolating.

But no matter what you're going through, there's always something or someone you can turn to for support.

For more resources and support, visit TurnToSupportsTX.org

TEXAS Health and Human Services

CAMPAIGN STRATEGY BRIEF

Selected Insights

- What matters most (top 5): family, happiness, physical health, religion/spirituality, and mental health.
- Texans want to support their families—to make them proud—yet they also need to feel supported. They want to be heard, but they also want to be seen as capable and valued by the people closest to them.
- Many fear being seen as weak, irresponsible, or not good enough. They believe in the virtue of self-reliance, so the thought of asking for help creates a sense of shame and a lack of control.
- Drugs and alcohol provide a way to relax, escape, and ease stress.
- Voice and tone: Hopeful, trustworthy, supportive, empowering

Additional Contents

- Audience motivations and challenges
- Strategic insights from quantitative and qualitative research
- Potential message territories
- Measures of success
- Opportunities for further research

MESSAGE & CREATIVE TESTING

Testing Ideas, Checking Assumptions



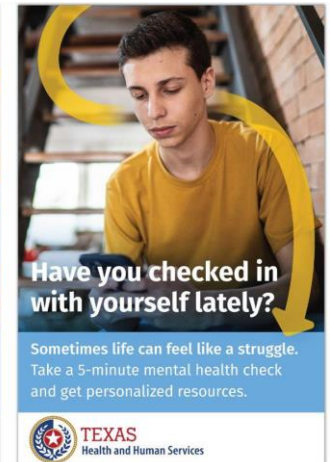
Y2 CAMPAIGN EVALUATION

Quantitative Survey (N = 1,979 respondents)

- 22% recalled seeing or hearing the Turn To ads.
- 62% reported taking some relevant action as a result of campaign exposure, from talking to someone about mental health struggles to visiting the campaign website.
- Additional campaign effects: higher awareness of resources, greater self-efficacy for stress management, greater likelihood of performing favorable social connection behaviors.
- Those living in urban areas were more likely to have seen/heard the campaign than those living in rural areas.

Qualitative Interviews (N = 46 respondents)

- Overall, respondents understood that the campaign is about mental health. However, many were unclear about what service is being provided and, for some ads, what they are being asked to do.



Y3 EVALUATION PLAN

Check-In Usability & Resources Testing

- Qualitative, video-based individual interviews evaluating the the check-ins and resources

Campaign Evaluation Survey #2

- Quantitative study evaluating the recall and behavioral effects of the Turn To campaign, along with an evaluation of the check-ins and resources

Summative Turn To and Check-In Campaign Evaluation

- Quantitative study evaluating the recall and behavioral effects of the Turn To and Check-In campaigns



TEXANS CHECKING IN

Self

	May - Oct 2023
Check-ins started	27,531
Check-ins finished	19,459
Completion rate	71%

Someone Else

	May - Oct 2023
Check-ins started	1,901
Check-ins finished	1,336
Completion rate	70%

MEDIA BUDGET & PERFORMANCE

Check-In Campaign

May - Dec 2023

\$3.5 million

56% spent as of Aug 2023 →

Jan - Jul 2024

\$1.5 million

May - Aug 2023 Performance

Media	Impressions	Clicks
Digital display	75,968,692	385,482
Traditional OOH	48,937,475	N/A
Social media	23,736,508	377,070
Digital native	20,725,827	63,895
Digital OOH	17,668,699	2,609
Digital video	5,650,779	N/A
Email	1,200,000	31,664
Print	560,069	N/A
SEM	120,076	8,276
Total	194,624,134	869,356

Have you checked in with yourself today?

Even if your struggle is temporary, it's real—and you deserve support.

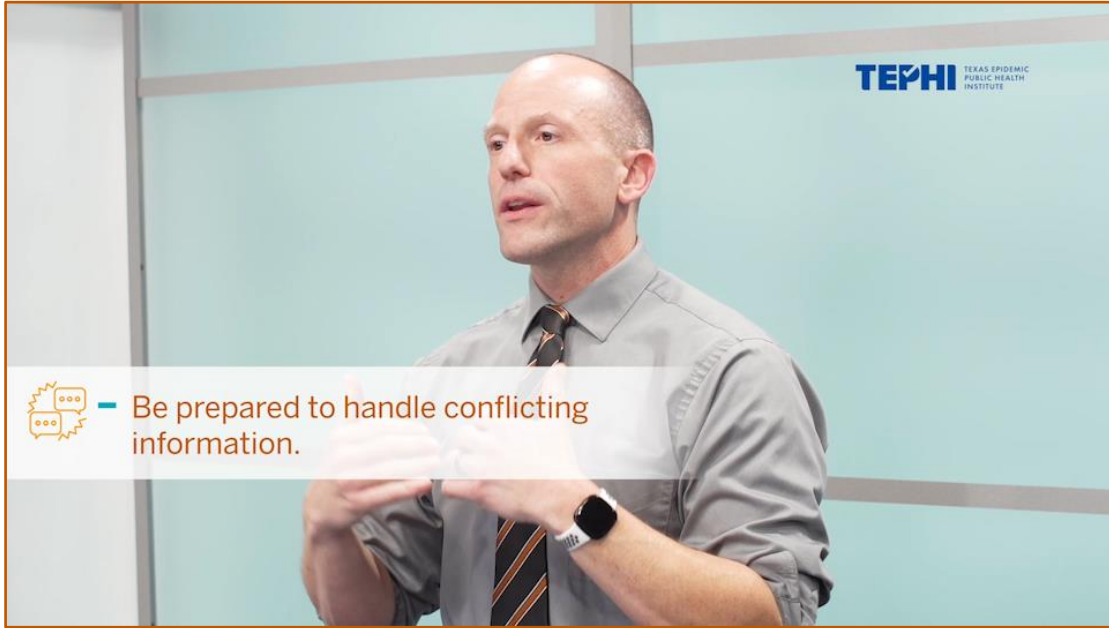
Take a 5-minute check-in and find resources to help you cope.



TEXAS
Health and Human Services

Get started today at
hhs.texas.gov/services/health/prevention/turn-to/turn-to-check-in

TurnToSupportsTx.org



— Be prepared to handle conflicting information.

PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS COMMUNICATION

Free, 60-minute course about plans to put in place before a pandemic, best practices for communication during a pandemic, and synthesizing lessons learned after a pandemic.

First 200 to complete it get another course for free!



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