

# Communicating public health messages

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## Article history

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## Welcome to our second issue

Welcome to Issue 2 of *Public Health Research & Practice*, our new peer-reviewed open-access quarterly journal for policy makers and practitioners (formerly the *NSW Public Health Bulletin*).

Public health practitioners and researchers are often perplexed by how to best convey the value of prevention and the outcomes of their research and programs. The media seem more interested in a new 'breakthrough' in the laboratory or an issue in the provision of acute care. Issue 2 explores the challenges in communicating public health messages.

The guest editor for this issue, Professor Simon Chapman, AO, is well known to most of our readers for his work in tobacco control, gun control and wind farms, and his interests in communication in public health.

Chapman opens our communication theme with a fascinating Perspective about 'lessons learnt' during almost 40 years in public health. He provides practical advice about how to be effective in public health advocacy and, indeed, many of his comments apply to any kind of effective communication in public health. The paper demonstrates Chapman's detailed understanding of the media and interweaves considerations of ethics, interesting case studies and emerging data ([www.phrp.com.au/issues/vol2522015/reflections-on-a-38-year-career-in-public-health-advocacy-10-pieces-of-advice-to-early-career-researchers-and-advocates](http://www.phrp.com.au/issues/vol2522015/reflections-on-a-38-year-career-in-public-health-advocacy-10-pieces-of-advice-to-early-career-researchers-and-advocates)).

Leask tackles another aspect of communication about public health, namely when to use an adversarial approach. On the vexed, and often heated, topic of child vaccination, Leask argues that an adversarial approach to antivaccination activists simply draws more attention to their cause and can alienate hesitant parents. In her Perspective article Leask looks at factors that influence vaccination attitudes and uptake, and discusses some unintended negative consequences that can arise from a confrontational approach ([www.phrp.com.au/issues/vol2522015/should-we-do-battle-with-antivaccination-activists](http://www.phrp.com.au/issues/vol2522015/should-we-do-battle-with-antivaccination-activists)).

Many public health practitioners and policy makers are increasingly interested in social media as a tool for public health communication. Freeman and colleagues investigate the impact of social media in encouraging the adoption of healthy behaviours. In their analysis of nine case studies, they note the lack of outcome evaluation data but conclude that social media hold promise in recruiting participants and motivating them to take limited action

([www.phrp.com.au/issues/vol2522015/social-media-campaigns-that-make-a-difference-what-can-public-health-learn-from-the-corporate-sector-and-other-social-change-marketers](http://www.phrp.com.au/issues/vol2522015/social-media-campaigns-that-make-a-difference-what-can-public-health-learn-from-the-corporate-sector-and-other-social-change-marketers)).

Also on the subject of social media, Roberts and colleagues describe a novel model of 'pop-up' HIV testing used in Sydney to take testing to people most at risk of infection. Promoted through social media, this model used experiential techniques to actively involve participants in campaign messaging ([www.phrp.com.au/issues/vol2522015/health-promotion-on-steroids-the-value-of-an-experiential-approach-to-promote-rapid-hiv-testing-in-nsw-australia](http://www.phrp.com.au/issues/vol2522015/health-promotion-on-steroids-the-value-of-an-experiential-approach-to-promote-rapid-hiv-testing-in-nsw-australia)).

In our 'In practice' section, O'Hara and colleagues explore another aspect of communication in public health by investigating the role of proactive marketing in increasing participation in community-wide prevention and treatment programs for obesity. The proactive marketing in this program was a targeted letter to potential participants in disadvantaged areas of New South Wales. The authors conclude that proactive marketing shows some promise as a recruitment strategy for hard-to-reach populations, although further work is needed to investigate the costs and retention ([www.phrp.com.au/issues/vol2522015/piloting-proactive-marketing-to-recruit-disadvantaged-adults-to-a-community-wide-obesity-prevention-program](http://www.phrp.com.au/issues/vol2522015/piloting-proactive-marketing-to-recruit-disadvantaged-adults-to-a-community-wide-obesity-prevention-program)).

Reflecting the public health interest in communication, the Sax Institute recently convened a forum to help its members and associates address the challenges of achieving an effective public health voice in today's media landscape, with presentations from Simon Chapman, the ABC's Norman Swan and Fairfax Media's Amy Corderoy. The main messages from this forum have been collated by Kellie Bisset, the Managing Editor of *Public Health Research & Practice*, and can be found on the Sax Institute website: [www.saxinstitute.org.au/media/being-heard-working-with-media-to-get-the-word-out-on-public-health](http://www.saxinstitute.org.au/media/being-heard-working-with-media-to-get-the-word-out-on-public-health).

Other papers in this issue address a broad range of public health questions, including a thought-provoking Perspective from Elizabeth Elliott on the need for

action and education about fetal alcohol spectrum disorders ([www.phrp.com.au/issues/vol2522015/fetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorders-in-australia-the-future-is-prevention-2](http://www.phrp.com.au/issues/vol2522015/fetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorders-in-australia-the-future-is-prevention-2)). Others consider surveillance of hepatitis C in the community (Bateman-Steel and colleagues, [www.phrp.com.au/issues/vol2522015/hepatitis-c-enhanced-surveillance-results-from-a-southeastern-sydney-pilot-program](http://www.phrp.com.au/issues/vol2522015/hepatitis-c-enhanced-surveillance-results-from-a-southeastern-sydney-pilot-program)) and the use of analogue records and coding versus electronic and automated systems for both clinical and research databases (Gnjidic and colleagues [www.phrp.com.au/issues/vol2522015/manual-versus-automated-coding-of-free-text-self-reported-medication-data-in-the-45-and-up-study-a-validation-study](http://www.phrp.com.au/issues/vol2522015/manual-versus-automated-coding-of-free-text-self-reported-medication-data-in-the-45-and-up-study-a-validation-study); Masoe and colleagues [www.phrp.com.au/issues/vol2522015/reliability-study-of-clinical-electronic-records-with-paper-records-in-the-new-south-wales-public-oral-health-service](http://www.phrp.com.au/issues/vol2522015/reliability-study-of-clinical-electronic-records-with-paper-records-in-the-new-south-wales-public-oral-health-service)).

Finally, thank you to all our readers who have subscribed to our quarterly email ([www.phrp.com.au/about-us/subscribe](http://www.phrp.com.au/about-us/subscribe)), and to our hundreds of Twitter followers for your support of our new journal (@phrpjournal). We hope you find this second issue engaging, practical and useful. Please pass it on via email, Twitter or web link to any colleagues who you think might be interested in, or could benefit from, the articles in this issue.

*Public Health Research & Practice* will continue to publish articles that are relevant to policy and practice, including original research and reviews, articles that improve or illuminate methods of research, and overviews of emerging or debated issues. We will also publish examples of innovative programs or policies, new data or perspectives from the field, and brief reports of special relevance for strengthening public health practice.

We invite you to submit manuscripts via our website ([www.phrp.com.au/for-authors/submit-paper](http://www.phrp.com.au/for-authors/submit-paper)), make suggestions about themes or topics for future issues and send us your feedback ([www.phrp.com.au/about-us/contact-us](http://www.phrp.com.au/about-us/contact-us)).

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