

Million Hearts in Municipalities: Leveraging Social Media for Tobacco Cessation Education in Bell County, Texas



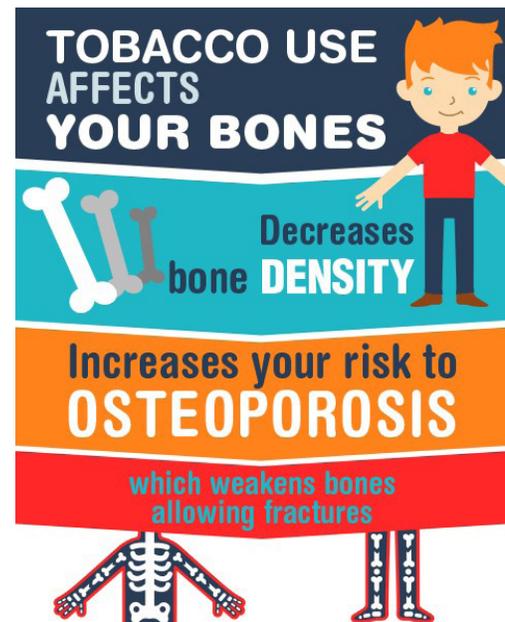
Synopsis

To help reduce the high rates of preventable chronic health conditions — including heart attacks, stroke and cancers in Bell County, Texas — the Bell County Public Health District selected to work on the Million Hearts® 2022 priority: decreasing tobacco use. Since the Health District is short-staffed, a suitable and effective public health strategy of conducting mass media campaigns seemed the perfect choice. The Health District created a robust social media marketing campaign to educate Bell County residents of the risks of smoking, and provided tobacco cessation resources.

Challenge

Bell County, TX ranks tenth in the state for the most recent five-year cancer incidence rate and ranks high for lung cancer. In addition, heart disease is one of the leading causes of death in Bell County, even considering that the population's median age is 30 years old. According to the Texas Center for Health Statistics data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, nearly 18% of Bell County residents are current smokers, a higher percentage than the state rate of 14.3% (Texas CHS, 2016).¹ To add another layer, Bell County is also home to Fort Hood, one of the largest military installations in the world. Data tells us that smoking is more common among active-duty service members than among civilians (CDC, 2018).² The existing resources for tobacco cessation in Bell County are available mostly online and through doctors' offices, but there was limited knowledge of those resources and how to access them.

Prior to this project, there had been no smoking cessation campaigns directed specifically at residents in Bell County. Some national campaigns reach the area and some local organizations have encouraged the cessation of tobacco use among members; however, a more targeted approach was necessary.



Solution

With funds from NACCHO through the 2017-2018 Million Hearts in Municipalities project, the Health District implemented a robust tobacco cessation social media campaign in January 2018. The initiative targeted the entire Bell County population, with the overall goal of reducing the incidence of tobacco use and preventing chronic health conditions, including cardiovascular disease (CVD). Through Twitter and Facebook social media channels, the Health District team provided information about the dangers of smoking, engaged members of the community, and directed tobacco users to available cessation resources. The resource heavily promoted during the campaign was the Texas Department of State Health Services' smoking cessation program website, www.yesquit.org. The website provides information about a telephone quit line, and an option to join an online program that includes a web coach and a virtual support group. In addition, the Bell County Public Health District worked with a content developer who created animations and images that were unique and, in most cases, Texas and/or Bell County-specific as a means of engaging the community more directly.

At first, the campaign focused on just “boosting” posts on Twitter, but soon we found that it was not an effective way to reach our population, since it depended on users identifying where they lived. We then decided to reach out to a local news station, KWKT, which put us in contact with HYFN, a local media marketing group that worked with us to develop a “geofence.” This is a virtual geographic boundary, defined by GPS or RFID technology, which enables software to trigger a response when a mobile device enters or leaves a particular area. Using this method, we created a digital fence around our local Walmart and HEB grocery stores, targeting anyone within those geofence locations who is seeing our content when logged into their Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Results

This social marketing campaign has been sustained beyond the funding period and has proven to be a successful catalyst to engage the community about the dangers of tobacco use. It has also provided opportunities for the health department to share more information about smoking cessation. In addition, this campaign has elicited the possibility of smoking ordinances in other municipalities, since only two municipalities in Bell County have any smoking ordinances. The Health District will continue to try to gain traction toward the development and enactment of ordinances in places that currently have none.

This campaign’s reach was quite impressive, resulting in many responses on Twitter and over 20,000 Bell County residents reached on Facebook with the advertisement that was developed in conjunction with one of our local media partners. The Twitter campaign showed over 268,000 impressions, 335 new followers to our Twitter page, and 2,464 link clicks. The geofencing campaign was very successful, considering it was targeting only the local Walmart and HEB grocery store visitors, and there have been 736,254 impressions and 1,111 clicks on www.yesquit.org since May 2018. The website was unable to provide data indicating whether there was any increased traffic during the campaign. This is the first chronic disease prevention program to be funded for the Bell County Public Health District. The Board of Health in Bell County expressed interest in assisting with this effort with the intention of continuing this and other projects to reduce the burden of chronic disease. We expect to see more significant results as we continue this long-term effort.

Lessons Learned

This project taught us some invaluable lessons about the use of social media for public health education campaigns. We learned that partnering with local media is a great way to reach more people, especially in a targeted population. We also learned that having a staff person dedicated exclusively to social media management is worthwhile, as this was more time-intensive than expected. For this project, the Health District director filled this role, in addition to her current workload. Our social media marketing campaign with advertisements developed in conjunction with local media partners could be replicated. One challenge is that it was very difficult to determine if there was an increased interest in tobacco cessation during this project. Although there were many clicks and shares, there is no measurement indicating that anyone took concrete steps toward quitting. Future work should focus on evaluating interest and uptake of tobacco cessation resources. Finally, while the geofencing strategy did seem to be the most effective, it was difficult to get data on the entirety of the campaign. The Health District was not given access to the data dashboard by HYFN and requests were not made for the complete data. In future partnerships with agencies providing these types of services, access to campaign dashboards will be a requirement.

Footnotes

¹ Texas Center for Health Statistics data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. <http://healthdata.dshs.texas.gov/HealthRisks/BRFSS>, Accessed August 27, 2018.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Burden of Tobacco Use in the U.S. <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/resources/data/cigarette-smoking-in-united-states.html> Accessed August 27, 2018.

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