

# Mass media to communicate public health messages in six health topic areas: a systematic review and other reviews of the evidence

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## Plain English summary

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## Plain English summary

Mass media, including television, radio, social media, newspapers and other media, can be used to communicate health messages. This study reviewed the literature on media campaigns about alcohol, diet, illegal drugs, physical activity, sexual health and tobacco use. Reviews were carried out that were informed by a logic model (a framework for understanding how change can take place) of how mass media might improve health. The study aimed to provide evidence on how best to communicate public health messages through mass media. The approach and findings were discussed with members of the public and others interested in this topic.

Four literature reviews were carried out. One looked at reviews on the six health topics (review A). Another looked at single studies of alcohol campaigns as no previous review had been carried out (review B). A third focused on whether or not campaigns were value for money (review C). The fourth reviewed recent UK studies on the six topics (review D).

Mass media campaigns for public health messages can work, but the evidence is mixed. The largest amount of existing knowledge is for tobacco control campaigns, followed by sexual health and physical activity. Campaigns may not be able to directly change behaviour; however, they can improve knowledge and awareness. They can also contribute to people accessing services, like smoking quitlines or sexual health clinics. Targeting messages in campaigns to particular groups, such as children and young people, may be a good approach. Some evidence was found that tobacco control campaigns can be good value for money but little information on this was found for other topics. What makes a particular campaign work is unclear, but those that are run for longer or more often may work better. Gaps in existing knowledge remain, including the need for a future review bringing together the evidence on mass media campaigns to improve diet.



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