Opt4Health (Obesity Prevention Texts for Health): A social marketing mHealth campaign, integrating text, web, and voice messaging, for obesity prevention efforts in Mississippi and Louisiana.

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Learning Objectives

- **Describe a social marketing public health strategy** for multi-sector obesity prevention that uses mHealth to promote good nutrition, physical activity, and healthy eating for children and families in states with high obesity rates (MS and LA).
- **Demonstrate the components of an integrated, multi-function technology mHealth campaign** (text, web, and voice messaging), and how they are integrated, to support community-wide public health campaigns.
- **Formulate a strategy** to add multi-functional mHealth to existing obesity interventions in schools, child care centers, clinics, and other socializing institutions.

Child Socializing Institutions as “Hubs” of Childhood Obesity Interventions: Improving Good Nutrition and Healthy Living Behaviors

**mHealth Coordinated Messaging**

- Schools
- Grocery/ Supermarkets/ Corner Stores
- Faith-based Organizations
- Families
- Summer Program Operators
- Other Civil Society Institutions (Libraries, etc.)
- Clinics
- After-/Wraparound- Care Program Operators
- Communities

Mississippi and New Orleans:
- 45 Elementary Schools
- 48 Early Childhood Sites

- Fun cartoon characters of organs of body
- Grade-specific, evidence-based classroom curricula
- Integrated cafeteria education
- Daily classroom-based physical activity

100+ Health Improvement Project (HIP) grants

Randomized evaluation design including anthropometric outcomes.

$1.2 Million

(June 2013 – May 2016)
Primary Messaging Modality: 
Text (smart and "dumb" phones)

Secondary Messaging Modality: 
Voice (smart phones and "dumb" phones)

Secondary Messaging Modality: 
Video (smart phones and computers/tablets)

Tracking data:
• Sign-ups by site (school/child care center)
• Clicks on videos by site
• Calls to voice system by state and sector

No rewards for participation, except healthy family fun!

Recruitment: OPT4Health Club
• Posters in elementary schools, child care centers, & Head Start Centers
• "Ads" in parent newsletters
• "Ads" on school/center menus
• Announcements during school meetings

OPT4Health Club Screenshot of Weekly Texts Received

Text "Healthyfun" to 41411

Move your muscles everyday to make them grow stronger. Here’s a message to get you dancing from the OWG: http://bit.ly/1okANKw - 228-641-4729

Don’t let bad weather stop you from exercising! A little indoor play gets our bodies moving! More tips: http://bit.ly/1Gd3PiT - 228-641-4729

OPT4Health Club
Results

• Interestingly, 40% reported they have to pay for texts (unexpected! We thought they would be included in plans).

• Overall, participants indicated during focus groups that they looked forward to the Friday texts, and found certain topics most useful, such as:
  o Tips to drink more
  o Exercise reminders
  o Short recipes

Respondents indicated changes/improvements in eating behaviors:

• “Fiber over the summer...reminded me to eat fiber while driving all summer between pools [summer job] as I worked – took grapes, apples, sandwiches with whole grain bread at Subway.” (PE Coach)

• “The texts helped me see what is in season – a reminder about that.” (Principal)

• “Not lost weight! But it makes me more aware.” (Media Center Director)

• “Fiber – made me think about whole grains, when buying bread at the store, and f/v’s”

• “Tips for different meals...pizza with whole grain crust; spinach and cheese in eggs; mango salsa; recipes were great.” (Parent Volunteer)

• “Eating smaller portions.” (Head Start Director)

• “Drinking more water instead of Coke.” (Head Start Director)

• “Added spinach to my salads.” (Head Start Director)

Respondents indicated changes/improvements in physical activity behaviors:

• “We started exercise after school, may not have otherwise.” (Media Center Director)

• “Suggestions regarding walking were good...Suggestions on how to exercise even if could not go outside were good.” (Principal)

• “Reminders to go outside were good.” (Parent Volunteer)

• “I walk more.” (Head Start Director)

• “Exercise tips were good.” (Head Start Director)

Challenges

• For those who do get free texting, they need(ed) to be told/ reminded that texts don’t cost money.

• Including a video link reduced participation due to data usage.

“They have to be told [about the free texts]. They have to know it does not use their data plan – it is no different than texting your friend. They see the video [link] and then they are concerned their data will be used. Low income people, this is an issue for them. As wifi becomes more accessible, then ok. When they don’t have it and for the clientele we serve, data will be an issue. A regular text message would be good, but with video it makes it troublesome.”
Challenges

• Despite multi-media advertising/outreach, recruitment was lower than expected.
• Many of the cell phone companies/services used by potential participants in our MS and LA communities block participation in mass/bulk texting programs (pre-paid phones would not work on the system).
• That being said, those who did participate indicated they found the program useful!

“Will this begin again in the spring? Hope so!” (Media Center Director)

Lessons Learned

• This program produced behavior change, but through the texts, not voice nor url modalities
• m-Health programming can be improved by providing the same information on Facebook and Instagram to prevent loss of users.
  Respondents said these platforms do not “disappear” when a phone is lost/changed, which seemed to happen a lot in this population.
• Facebook and Instagram are possible because this population without data plans frequently uses wifi.
• Incentives are required to engage this group (coupons, giveaways, etc.), but the funder did not allow this for our project.
  “Clients we serve are always looking for an incentive -- if they know they will win something, if at the end there was an incentive bonus for participating ‘you will be enrolled for an iPad,’ then they will sign up.”

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