

Opioids Overdose Crisis Brand and Message Focus Testing Executive Summary

Prepared for Health Canada

Prepared by Narrative Research
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Supplier Name: Narrative Research

March 2022

This public opinion research report presents the results of focus groups conducted by Narrative Research on behalf of Health Canada. The research entailed a total of 12 online focus groups, namely two groups in targeted communities located in each of six regions: British Columbia, Alberta/Prairies, Ontario, Quebec, Atlantic, and Northern territories/regions. In each region, one session included males in physically demanding professions, while one session included members from the general public. Male group participants had current or past employment in designated physically demanding occupations and those groups included a mix of ages (skewing 20-49 years old). General population focus groups included a mix of gender, age, employment status, occupation, education and household income. All sessions included a mix of cultural background, and only those living in market for at least two years were invited to take part. Groups in Quebec were conducted in French while all other groups were conducted in English. The research was conducted between February 2 and 7, 2022.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre :
Mise à l'essai de la marque et du message sur la crise des surdoses d'opioïdes.

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Background and Research Methodology

With the significant increase in apparent opioid toxicity deaths since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Health Canada is in the process of developing a new creative concept and visual identity as part of the Department's multi-year marketing campaign to address the growing opioid overdose crisis. In this context, Health Canada was interested in testing creative concepts developed as part of this marketing campaign, to determine which concept resonates most with the targeted audiences. More specific research objectives included:

- Determine if the content of the concepts tested is clearly understood, credible, relevant and of value to the audiences, appealing and appropriate, memorable, and able to motivate the audience(s) to take intended actions.
- Elicit suggestions for potential changes to ensure the messages and products resonate with the target audiences.
- Identify preferred sources and methods of receiving information on the subject of opioids from the Government of Canada.

To achieve these objectives, a qualitative research approach was undertaken. This entailed a total of 12 online focus groups conducted between February 2 and 7, 2022 in specific communities located across six regions: British Columbia (Vancouver, Thompson-Caribou, Fraser), Prairies (Medicine Hat, Edmonton, Calgary, various communities in Saskatchewan and Manitoba), Ontario (Thunder Bay, Sudbury, Toronto, Guelph, Ottawa), Quebec (Montreal and Québec City), Atlantic Canada (Fredericton, Moncton, Halifax), and various communities in Northern Territories or northern regions of provinces. In each region, one focus group was conducted with members from the general public, including a mix of ages, gender, household type, employment status, occupation and education level, while one group was conducted with males working in, or on leave from, physically-demanding professions (predominantly in the construction sector). All 12 sessions included a mix of cultural backgrounds.

Each session lasted approximately 90 minutes and all group discussions were held in English with the exception of those in Quebec which were conducted in French. Participants were provided an incentive of \$100 (general public) or \$125 (males in physically demanding professions). Across all groups, a total of 119 individuals were recruited and 98 participated.



All participants were recruited per the recruitment specifications for the Government of Canada. Recruitment was conducted through qualitative panels stored on Canadian servers, with follow up calls to confirm the details provided and to ensure quotas were met. This report presents the findings from the study. Caution must be exercised when interpreting the results from this study, as qualitative research is intended to be directional only. Results cannot be attributed to the overall population under study, with any degree of confidence.

Political Neutrality Certification

I hereby certify as a Representative of Narrative Research that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Directive on the Management of Communications. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed 
Margaret Brigley, CEO & Partner | Narrative Research
Date: March 2, 2022

Key Findings and Conclusions

The following summarizes the key findings and conclusions from the *Opioids Overdose Crisis Brand and Message Focus Testing* research study.

Terminology

The term “substance use” in English is most commonly seen as speaking of the consumption of substances such as alcohol, drugs and medication for recreational purposes, but in a way that affects someone’s capacity or judgement. By contrast, the term “consommation de substances” in French elicited more negative connotations associated with overconsumption of illegal substances. Nonetheless, both terms are considered adequate to speak about the use of substances such as drugs and alcohol, socially, recreationally and occasionally, for lack of a better expression.

Overall Reactions

Three concepts for a campaign were examined and discussed during the focus groups. While reactions to the three creative concepts tested varied, a number of areas elicited similar comments and should be considered when developing the final campaign concept:

- Addressing the use of opioids is considered to be important to address as a serious situation that held personal relevance to many.



- Showing only men working in physically demanding or construction industries is not credible. Female workers should be featured on images, as coworkers.
- The happy tone of many of the images is not aligned with the seriousness of the topic.
- The message lacks impact for many, as it does not show the severity of the consequences from substance use. As such, the message was felt to be somewhat weak and not memorable.
- The concepts do not effectively address the stigma associated with substance use, despite speaking of the risks.
- Outwardly focusing on the construction industry without explaining the rationale poses the risk of stigmatizing those workers as more likely to do drugs. Consideration should be given to providing a rationale for featuring this target audience.
- Featuring individual people from visible minority groups poses the risk of stigmatizing those groups as having substance abuse issues. Showing diversity in a group setting would minimize this issue.
- The invitation to step in and support coworkers is considered unrealistic in the context of some workplaces, where opening up about substance use may result in being laid off, fired or becoming undesirable to employers preventing them from securing future employment. Consideration should be given to work with employers to establish a safe workplace where employees are comfortable seeking help without fear of retribution.

The following provides specific comments about each of the three concepts reviewed.

Let's Build Solutions Concept

Overall reactions to the “Let’s Build Solutions” concept were modestly positive, notably for the message’s positivity and wider-reaching appeal. The concept was felt to target men working in physically demanding jobs, as well as their coworkers and supervisors. That said, the concept’s call to action was only moderate.

Positive elements included that it implies that everyone plays a role in addressing substance use, that substances to be considered include drugs, medication and alcohol, and the positive tone of the message focusing on support, solutions and collaboration. The overall message of this concept was most appreciated and consideration should be given to include it in the final campaign concept. While presenting naloxone as one of the tools to address the situation is appreciated, there lacks information on where to get it and how or when to use it.

Care should be taken, however, in ensuring that the messages or headlines of each individual campaign component do not send mixed messages. For example, the headline from one of the social media posts (“If you are going to use drugs, don’t use alone”) could be misinterpreted as implying that it is acceptable to do drugs at work, or that others should be involved in doing drugs if one person is. Consideration



should be given to reword the statement to “If you are going to use drugs, let someone else know to keep safe.”

Despite the tone and overall message being appealing, this concept lacked visual appeal, with a graphic design that is considered bland, generic, cluttered, and what is expected of a government advertisement or public education campaign.

Make Sure You Have the Right Tools

Reactions to the “Make Sure You Have the Right Tools” concept were mixed, with perceptions of an attractive design but a weaker message. Prominently featuring men in the construction industry in images and making industry-specific references in the text clearly identified them as the primary target audience. It also sends the message that substance use is an issue among this group. Showing racialized individuals on their own, rather than in a group, may also pose the risk of stigmatizing people of colour.

Positive aspects of the concept included the simplicity of the design, stressing the importance of addressing the issue of substance use, and the focus on naloxone as safety equipment. Placing responsibility on workers to carry and use naloxone is questioned, however, as information is not provided on where it can be found, when and how to use it.

While the overall message is specific to opioids, the headlines are more generically speaking of safety, and when combined with the visuals and colours, are reminiscent of a workplace safety campaign. Further, referring to a “safe space” at work was felt to be overused or not aligned with commonly-used workplace terminology. By contrast, the action-oriented term “gear up to help” held appeal, though associated by some as referring to obtaining drugs. The headers, “Talking. Listening. Supporting” and “Naloxone is safety equipment” were felt to be compelling reminders of the concept’s main message.

From a design standpoint, some liked the vibrancy of the colours that would grab their attention, spoke to the construction sites, and was reminiscent of safety messages, while others found the colours to be too jarring and making the material unattractive.

Even Tough Guys Need Support

Reactions to the concept “Even Tough Guys Need Support” were more polarized, with some finding the concept to be attention-grabbing and the message to be clear, direct and concise, while others found that the imagery and the wording lacked credibility or personal relevance.

The message was understood as men who display strong and confident behaviours are sometimes in need of assistance and should reach out for support. While some appreciated the myth busting, others felt that the message is oversimplified and over generalized thus affecting its credibility. The stereotypes were further reinforced by the use of the term “tough guys” in English with terms such as “strong men”, or “strong people” felt to be more appropriate. Some of the terminology in the French version such as



“dur à cuire”, “hommes forts”, “hommes robustes”, “créé un espace sûr”, and “personnes confrontées” were felt to be too formal to be compelling, although no alternative suggestions were made.

Despite issues with the wording, the concept was effective for some in articulating the need for those who may not appear to be struggling to reach out for help. That said, the concept’s imagery, colours and expressions clearly identified men in the construction industry as being the concept’s target audience, notably those affected by substance use.

From a graphic standpoint, colours are eye-catching, but the use of drawings rather than images elicits mixed feelings. The use of illustrations was felt to be more relatable by some, while it lacked seriousness for others. Illustrating only men wearing beards was puzzling to many. While some felt that showing a male construction worker touching another man’s shoulder illustrated caring, others felt that it lacked credibility based on their own worksite experience. Across components, the last social media post lacked clarity, especially for those who are not familiar with naloxone.

Preferred Concepts

Findings suggest that none of the three concepts examined outperforms the others on all aspects evaluated. In terms of concept preference and general strength, as well as the concept that is best at addressing the stigma associated with substance use and the concept that offers the best message, both “Let’s Build Solutions” and “Even Tough Guys Need Support” were equally selected, and more highly rated than “Make Sure You Have the Right Tools.” That said, the three concepts received only moderate appreciation scores.

In general, “Let’s Build Solutions” performed well for its positive tone, specific call to action, focus on teamwork and a more encompassing message, while “Even Tough Guys Need Support” was chosen for its simple message that addresses the stigma of the tough guy not being able to seek help.

In terms of which concept is best at letting people know about the risks associated with substance use and how to reduce those risks, male participants were divided in their choice, while members from the general public believed that “Let’s Build Solutions” and “Make Sure You Have the Right Tools” were most effective in doing so.

Opinions were mixed as to which concept performs best from a graphic presentation standpoint. “Let’s Build Solutions” was liked for its serious design, use of photography and prominent feature of naloxone in the visuals. “Make Sure You Have the Right Tools” stood out for its bright colours, familiarity with safety messaging and the images being relatable. “Even Tough Guys Need Support” presented eye-catching colours and the use of illustration that was more relatable to some people.

Communication Channels



Best ways to communicate the message to the target audiences included at worksites, in public washrooms, in public transit, or on social media. To a lesser extent, television was considered an appropriate medium, or through trades associations or union representatives, or in public places where construction workers who are homeless may go (e.g., shelters, public libraries, malls).