

Opioids Overdose Crisis Brand and Message Focus Testing (HCPOR #23-42)

Executive Summary

Prepared for Health Canada

Prepared by Narrative Research

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For more information, please contact: cpab_por-rop_dgcap@hc-sc.gc.ca

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Supplier Name: Narrative Research

March 2024

This public opinion research report presents the results of online focus groups conducted by Narrative Research on behalf of Health Canada. A total of 12 online discussion groups were conducted from February 20-26, 2024, specifically two sessions were held with males in physically demanding professions in each of six regions: British Columbia, Alberta/Prairies, Ontario, Quebec, Atlantic, and Territories/North. Groups in Quebec were conducted in French, while all other sessions were in English. In total, 10 people were recruited for each session, to ensure at least eight participated. From 120 recruited individuals, 102 took part across all sessions. Each group discussion lasted approximately 90 minutes and participants received a cash incentive of \$125 in appreciation for their time.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre :
Groupes de discussion sur l'image de marque et le message concernant la crise des surdoses d'opioïdes

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Executive Summary

Narrative Research Inc.

Call-Up No: CW2346055

POR Number: 115-23

Contract Award Date: January 18, 2024

Contract Value: \$76,591.40 (including HST)

Background and Objectives

Health Canada is committed to a multi-year marketing campaign to address the growing opioid overdose crisis, ensuring it continues to build on the recognition of its existing public education efforts, while coming up with fresh creative for its advertisement to avoid fatigue. The campaign is specifically targeted at men in physically demanding occupations, including trades, but also sectors other than construction. In this context, Health Canada was interested in testing different creative concepts developed for this marketing campaign, to determine which concept resonates most with the target audiences and thus should be further developed. This creative testing was part of the re-launch of the Ease the Burden campaign, which will focus on reducing stigma related to seeking help and providing resources for people looking for help or wanting to help others.

The study findings will be used to assist Health Canada in ensuring the campaign messaging and creative branding is on target and resonates with the target audience(s).

Specific research objectives related to the creative testing included:

- Evaluate the advertising campaign's proposed creative concepts and determine if the content is:
 - Clearly understood by the audience(s)
 - Credible, relevant and of value to the audience(s)
 - Appealing and appropriate to the audience(s)
 - Memorable in the minds of the audience(s), and
 - Able to motivate the audience(s) to take intended action(s).
- Elicit suggestions for potential changes to ensure the messages and products resonate with the target audience.
- Identify preferred sources and methods of receiving information on the subject of substance use and addiction from the Government of Canada.

Research Methodology

To achieve these objectives, a qualitative research approach was undertaken. A total of 12 online discussion groups were conducted from February 20-26, 2024, specifically two sessions were held with



males in physically demanding professions in each of six regions: British Columbia, Alberta/Prairies, Ontario, Quebec, Atlantic, and Territories/North. Groups in Quebec were conducted in French, while all other sessions were in English. In total, 10 people were recruited for each session, to ensure at least eight participated. From 120 recruited individuals, 102 took part across all sessions. Each group discussion lasted approximately 90 minutes and participants received a cash incentive of \$125 in appreciation for their time. All participants were recruited in accordance with Government of Canada specifications. 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.

During the focus group discussion, participants were shown three concepts for a public education campaign about substance use, with each concept including a video (using animated black and white sketches with voice over), one web banner, and two out-of-home advertisements. The web banner and out-of-home advertisements were presented in draft format, featuring still black and white sketches and graphic elements in colour. Participants were informed that the final material would use real footage and photography. The order of presentation of concepts was changed in each group to avoid any presentation bias, and the approach for each concept review entailed the presentation of the materials, participants completing a short individual poll about the concept shown, and a group discussion.

This report presents the findings from the study. Caution must be exercised when interpreting the results from this study, as qualitative techniques are used in marketing research as a means of developing insight and direction, rather than collecting quantitatively precise data or absolute measures. Results cannot be attributed to the overall population under study, with any degree of statistical confidence.

Key Findings and Conclusions

The following summarizes the key findings and conclusions from the focus groups on the *Opioids Overdose Crisis Brand and Messaging Focus Testing*.

General Perceptions

Many participants appreciated the focus of the campaign on men and on those working in trades, though some felt negatively singled out. Across many groups, participants were pleasantly surprised to find that the campaigns were focussing on men and on those working in heavy trades / labour specifically, given a recognition of an issue with substances in this group, and a perennial stereotype of men 'having to be tough' and not seek help, often to their detriment. Further, many noted that they were not aware of resources and help that would be directed at men, and were appreciative of the idea that this may be available. That said, some also found the approach to be slightly stigmatizing of those working in trades (potentially causing a negative reaction among those outside of the trades) and wondered why women and those working in other industries were not included.

The idea of help being available, particularly free and confidential resources, is highly appreciated. Many participants, across groups, underscored the importance of help being available for those struggling with substance use, and the importance of encouraging others to offer support. They also underscored the



importance of showing support that may be available in a variety of ways, including help from friends, partners at home, coworkers, and management at work, as well as professional help that includes being able to talk to someone directly.

Generational differences were noted in the workforce, often presenting a challenge to speaking up or seeking support. Younger men indicated that they often encounter older coworkers who are ‘old school’ and less likely to want to discuss issues or struggles, perpetuating stereotypes of ‘toughness’ among this group. As such, there were suggestions to ensure that all generations are targeted and represented with these campaigns.

Ensuring scenarios shown are real in the final production will be key. Some scenes were critiqued for not being realistic (particularly the image of two people holding a jackhammer, or a male coworker with a helping hand on someone’s shoulder), and participants underscored the importance of showing real people on the job rather than actors, and realistic behaviours, in the final production, to make it credible. In addition, ensuring representation across a variety of trades/industries will be imperative (both cross country and ensuring relevance in northern communities, such as workers using ATVs).

A serious tone was felt to be important for the topic. Participants repeatedly underscored the severity of addictions in many communities and felt that the facial expressions displayed must show realism of those situations – anger and frustration was often associated with addiction (from those who had experienced struggles with addiction), along with depression. That said, the ads need to be reflective of the fact that many workers hide their negative feelings while on the job, thus not always displaying frustration or depression.

Concept A (Ease the Burden II)

This concept was felt to be realistic in its portrayal of the burden of workplace struggles, though it may be representing mental health broadly more so than addiction. Overall, this concept was felt to be straightforward and clear, and fairly realistic at representing workplace issues and pressures that may be experienced. That being said, it only modestly grabbed attention and it was not felt to be strongly memorable. As with the other two concepts, it lacked the dramatic effect that was felt to be important in grabbing attention. The concept’s use of heavy objects as a parallel for the burden of substance use was well understood.

Concept B (Portraits of Strength)

The concept was felt to be straightforward and easy to understand by many participants. It was believed to perform modestly well at grabbing attention and being memorable, in part due to the appeal and relatability of the statement “It takes strength” (“Il faut être fort”). The concept was generally seen as credible among English-speaking participants, while less so by French-speaking participants.

This concept conveyed a message to participants that it is not easy to ask for help, but that help is available to those who reach out, although the focus was felt to be on mental health more so than exclusively on substance use. It also suggested to participants that men should not be afraid of reaching



out for support – something that was generally appreciated as a novel take for those working in heavy labour.

Concept C (Tough Tasks)

This concept was felt to have a strong and compelling call-to-action, although some felt that a few scenarios lacked credibility by not representing realistic situations. The concept's highlighting of free and confidential help, which was believed to be accessible to many was a definite strong point of this idea, along with conveying a message that those struggling with addiction are not alone, and that help is available. That said, others found this concept to be more forgettable and less impactful likely due to lacking strong word references (e.g., strength, heavy load), and for not effectively representing credible work situations within the scenarios. Further, having a statement about men being more impacted, without a supporting statistic, made the statement less credible to some.

Preferred Concept

None of the three concepts stand out as being the strongest nor the weakest, as all have their own strengths and weaknesses.

Both Concept A (Ease the Burden II) and Concept C (Tough Tasks) were equally seen as easiest to understand, with Concept B (Portraits of Strength) being chosen much less often.

Mixed opinions were offered across concepts in terms of the best liked in English sessions, while both Concept A (Ease the Burden II) and Concept C (Tough Tasks) were slightly preferred by French-speaking participants.

In general, Concept A (Ease the Burden II) was preferred by some for having a direct and relatable message. Others did not choose it because they felt it was 'cheesy' or 'tacky'. Concept B (Portraits of Strength) was chosen also for its realistic and relatable scenarios, particularly the situations of putting on boots and sore back. Concept C (Tough Tasks) was chosen for highlighting confidential and free resources particularly, as well as for being most simple and relatable, and for showing examples of support (e.g. help at work, help with carrying heavy items, help at home).

Concept C (Tough Tasks) was largely viewed as best at encouraging people to seek help for substance use and addiction when needed, most notably because of the compelling nature of the tagline, 'Find free and confidential resources now'. That said, Concept A (Ease the Burden II) was chosen by a few for showing how support can be accessed through various channels (e.g., at home, through coworkers and from government).

In terms of the concept that was deemed most realistic, and representative of the everyday struggles participants or others may experience at work, Concept B (Portraits of Strength) performed better among English-speaking participants, while Concept A (Ease the Burden II) and Concept C (Tough Tasks) were equally chosen by French-speaking participants.



Concept C (Tough Tasks) was consistently chosen as being most likely to encourage participants to look for more information, primarily for the compelling call-to-action and the promise of free and confidential support.

Participants were asked to choose which of two statements was most compelling for the campaign. Overall, both statements performed well, for different reasons. The statement **'Find free and confidential resources now / 'Trouver des ressources gratuites et confidentielles'** was slightly preferred for the confidential and free messaging, with participants thinking that more people would be motivated to visit the site given that it would provide confidential and free help. Those who liked the statement **See how you can help or get help / 'Découvrez comment offrir ou obtenir de l'aide'** better felt that it was more effective for being blatant, straightforward and clear that when they visited the website, the information would be readily available. In the French sessions, some felt that the term 'découvrez' was engaging and implied an invitation to be curious about visiting the website.

Results suggest overall that any of the three concepts could be further developed without issue, depending on the desired outcome of the campaign. That said, if seeking help and looking for more information are the main goals, Concept C would likely be most effective.

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 [Policy on Communications and Federal Identity](#) and the [Directive on the Management of Communications – Appendix C](#).

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 25, 2024