



The Association of Directors of Public Health

Summary: Framing communications on the commercial determinants of health

Recommendations from FrameWorks UK

Background

ADPH has received funding from The Health Foundation to undertake a three-year, four nations collaboration project focused on the commercial determinants of health (CDOH). The project aims to increase awareness and understanding of CDOH and its impact across health organisations, politicians and the public. Additionally, the project seeks to build consensus across different organisations with an interest in CDOH, ensuring a wider context which cuts across single issues such as tobacco, gambling, obesity and alcohol. Resources and guidance for Directors of Public Health (DsPH) will be developed as part of the project to enable them to work with local businesses and communities to maximise their health impact while addressing CDOH.

Context

The CDOH are the commercial sector activities that influence people's health, both positively and negatively. Globally, four industry sectors (tobacco, ultra-processed food, alcohol and fossil fuels) cause at least one third of deathsⁱ. The impact that CDOH have on non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as cardiovascular disease and cancers, is widely reported. NCDs are the leading cause of death and disability in the UKⁱⁱ and are often the result of our social and physical environments, including CDOH. They are also a major contributor to the social gradient in health outcomes, driving health inequalities.

This document summarises the nine recommendations set out by FrameWorks UK during ADPH webinars held on Friday 29th September 2024 and Tuesday 29th October 2024. A more detailed explanation of the recommendations from part one and part two of the series is available. The webinars brought together ADPH members and professionals working on CDOH to build understanding of the power of framing and provide practical recommendations on how to communicate about CDOH to build support for action.

Framing refers to the choices we make about what we say and how we say it. It's what we emphasise, how we explain an issue and what we leave unsaid. This is an important aspect of public health as mindsets guide our thinking. Our task as public health professionals is to strengthen the mindsets that are helpful in achieving social change and avoid those that are unhelpful to us.

[FrameWorks UK](#) is a not-for-profit communications research organisation. They work with charities, public sector bodies and other mission-driven organisations to identify the best ways to build understanding and support for social progress and issues like health inequalities and CDOH. The following recommendations from FrameWorks UK are designed to help professionals effectively reach the public, community and policymaker audiences by tapping into language and ideas that expand the public's mental model of how CDOH impacts health and spark a sense of collective responsibility for combating the negative impacts of CDOH.

Recommendations

Recommendation one: Explain how commercial practices shape health

- We cannot make assumptions about people's knowledge of how commercial practices shape health. Asserting something to be true rather than explaining it, will only be effective if someone already agrees with itⁱⁱⁱ ^{iv}.

Find out more [here](#).

Recommendation two: Bring more of us into the conversation

- Highlight a range of harms, not only the most extreme, to help build a broader movement and bring more people into the conversation. Expand the conversation to include a range of health impacts, referencing both the severe and more immediate health impacts, to make it more relevant to a larger audience.

Recommendation three: Show that we are not being told the truth

- Whilst being careful to avoid supporting harmful health narratives, bring to the foreground that there are systems and contexts at play that shape our health, and some commercial practices are misleading us.

Recommendation four: Be clear how we can fix it

- Be clear that we can make a difference, that the problem of misleading or nefarious commercial practices can be fixed and highlight specific public health solutions that can improve people's health. Solutions are the difference between changing the system and simply pointing out what is wrong with it.

Recommendation five: Keep it simple

- Avoid technical terminology or speaking too generally about the issue. Try to give examples when discussing commercial practices and tailor communications to the audience whilst retaining a consistent overarching message.

Recommendation six: Tap into the value of moral leadership

- Remind people of our social responsibility to protect and support those who may be struggling. Talking about our interdependence and the idea that a prosperous, flourishing society depends on everyone is key.

Recommendation seven: Explain how local businesses shape health

- Explanation enables people to be brought into the conversation and understand how their surroundings shape their health.

Recommendation eight: Use data wisely

- Presented alone, people can misinterpret data to align with their existing beliefs, so it is essential to present it alongside a story. Statistics need to be contextualised: why does this data matter? What is it about? What does it represent? And what can we do about it?

Recommendation nine: Be results orientated

- Talk about the specific, concrete actions that can be taken and explain the positive impacts these actions will have.

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- ⁱ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(23\)00013-2/abstract](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(23)00013-2/abstract)
- ⁱⁱ <https://www.nih.ac.uk/2385-commercial-determinants-health>
- ⁱⁱⁱ <https://frameworksuk.org/resources/a-matter-of-life-and-death/>
- ^{iv} <https://frameworksuk.org/resources/how-to-talk-about-the-building-blocks-of-health/>