



# The Association of Directors of Public Health

## Building support for action with elected members

### 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 deaths<sup>i</sup>. 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 UK<sup>ii</sup> 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 is the first of two, which outline the nine recommendations set out by FrameWorks UK during ADPH webinars held on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> September 2024 and Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> October 2024. A second document with further recommendations, as well as a summary of the nine, are available on our website. 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 knowledge and skip the vital step of explaining how commercial practices shape health<sup>iii</sup>. Assuming others have the same knowledge as us and asserting something to be true rather than explaining it, will only be effective if someone already agrees with it.
- Providing context or an explanation enables people to understand the reasoning and empowers them to decide for themselves, making them less defensive and less likely to default to unhelpful thought patterns<sup>iv</sup>.
- Not assuming knowledge is not equal to underestimating people's intelligence. A lack of understanding is usually due to not being exposed to the information. We need to explicitly state the link between the cause and effect, illustrating how commercial practices impact health.
- It is harder to be healthy but not impossible. People have agency and can make choices, but the context can make it harder.

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.
- As commercial practices aren't felt equally across the population, framing the issue around fairness across different places rather than specific populations promotes a sense of collective responsibility. This approach activates a sense of shared duty and avoids stigmatising specific groups.
- Using collective terms such as 'we' and 'us' rather than 'they', 'them' or 'residents' further supports this collective mindset.

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

- Although not applicable to all scenarios, some commercial practices are misleading us.
- We need to be careful to avoid supporting harmful health narratives, but we can take advantage of this understanding that those in power and those with greater wealth, such as large multinational corporations, control the system. We need to bring to the foreground that there are systems and contexts at play that are shaping our lives.
- Show who controls and manipulates the system and, crucially, suggest actionable steps to address these practices. Using words such as 'truth', 'honesty', 'secrecy' and 'misled' demonstrates that it isn't that people don't know better, but rather are actively misled by commercial actors.
- This framing needs to be paired with solutions to ensure we aren't being fatalistic. These frames can be flexed in different ways to suit the tone of the speaker, the organisation and the audience.

### **Recommendation four: Be clear how we can fix it**

- Health is a national resource and when we improve the health of our communities, we build a healthier, stronger nation.

- 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.
- A problem-focused narrative alone is not a communications strategy and can lead to people feeling hopeless or disengaged with the messaging, experiencing a 'crisis inflation'.
- Leverage the emerging mindset that health is a national resource, vital to thriving communities and a stronger country overall.
- Share examples of good practice to normalise action, demonstrating that solutions can be implemented locally. and demonstrate that it can be localised.
- Talk about solutions often and early in communications. Aim for a 2:1 ratio when discussing solutions versus problems to maintain an optimistic tone.

### **Recommendation five: Keep it simple**

- Avoid using the term 'the commercial determinants of health' in public communications. If it must be used, make sure the meaning is explained. The general public are unfamiliar with technical terminology.
- Avoid acronyms and be specific on the issue that's being discussed. When talking about commercial practices as a whole, try to give examples eg specify the conversation is about advertising or planning. If discussing commercial drivers, be specific about which to make it easier for people to understand eg tobacco or gambling.
- Frames are not key messages or words; they are ideas that can be used to help structure public health communication. They need to be tailored to the audience, dialling different elements up and down, while retaining a consistent overarching message.
- Using these frames to support the same 'big picture' story helps to shift the narrative about how commercial practices shape our health and creates consistent messaging across the system.

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<sup>i</sup> [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)

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/2385-commercial-determinants-health>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://frameworksuk.org/resources/a-matter-of-life-and-death/>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://frameworksuk.org/resources/how-to-talk-about-the-building-blocks-of-health/>