Imagine a large poster of a baby playing with a gun. No medium can send a message about the safe handling of firearms faster or more powerfully than a perfectly targeted poster. Since it was set up in 1948, the World Health Organization (WHO) has used posters to influence national health policies. This book celebrates the story of public health posters and their cross-cultural power. They chart decades of changing health priorities, advertising trends and government regulations, inviting the reader to reflect on how public health campaigns have evolved, and how they could be improved.

The large global sample of public health posters with translations in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish, show how the same basic messages are presented in many different ways according to specific countries, cultures and times. By publishing this book WHO hopes to spur those working on – or influenced by – public health campaigns to stop and think critically. All the posters are intended to persuade people to change their behavior, but which ones work best?

This book is designed to provide public health professionals, policy-makers, programme managers and students of public health with an important resource; one that will be equally useful to anyone with an interest in graphics, social mobilization or health. The eight chapters contain a selection of posters from all WHO regions, introduced with a brief history. These posters originate from many sources including WHO archives, Regional Offices and technical departments, as well as from the National Library of Medicine, the Wellcome Trust, the International Institute of Social History, the Johns Hopkins Media Material Clearinghouse and private collectors.