REPORT

National information and communication campaign to promote a healthy lifestyle: the Russian experience

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ABSTRACT

One of the leading factors behind the high incidence of noncommunicable diseases is the prevalence of preventable risk factors associated with an unhealthy lifestyle – smoking, poor nutrition, low physical activity and alcohol abuse. Promoting a healthy lifestyle with the aim of preventing and controlling noncommunicable diseases is one of the most important intersectoral area in focus in the Russian Federation.

In 2018 the Russian Federation approved the federal project “Public Health Promotion”, which involves a range of legislative, informational and awareness-raising measures aimed at tackling the main behavioural risk factors.

This present report describes the experience of the Russian Federation in developing and implementing the national information and communication campaign promoting the development of a healthy lifestyle among the population as a way of improving health literacy.

Despite the scale and widespread use of evidence-based approaches in the development of the campaign, which segmented into target audience, communication channels and key messages, the introduction of a system to evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of the measures taken in improving public knowledge about health issues is required. A pilot study to measure the health literacy of the Russian population has been planned for late 2019.

Keywords: INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN, HEALTHY LIFESTYLE, HEALTH LITERACY, RUSSIAN FEDERATION

INTRODUCTION

The four main types of noncommunicable diseases (cardiovascular disease, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes) are the leading causes of temporary incapacity for work, disability and mortality globally and have a pronounced negative impact on the socioeconomic situation of a country. According to official data, major noncommunicable diseases accounted for 68.5% of all deaths in the Russian Federation in 2016, which is extremely high even given the progress made in bringing this number down (1).

According to the population study Epidemiology of Cardiovascular Diseases in Different Regions of Russia (ESSE-RF) (2), a significant prevalence of risk factors for noncommunicable diseases is noted in the Russian population (3). For instance, 23.5% of the population are smokers (40.0% of men and 12.8% of women); 73.2% of the population drink alcohol in moderate amounts, while 3.8% drink excessively (6.3% among men and 2.2% among women). As for nutrition, 41.9% of the population consume inadequate amounts of fresh fruit and vegetables, and 49.9% consume excessive amounts of salt. A total of 38.8% of the population confirmed insufficient physical activity, with this number higher among women than men (40.8%, compared to 36.1%). The highest figures for this indicator were found among young people and the middle-aged (4).

According to the WHO, a healthy lifestyle is a lifestyle that lowers the risk of being seriously ill or dying early. Among the components that make up a healthy lifestyle, WHO highlights the absence of behavioural risk factors such as smoking, a insufficient physical activity and a poor diet, as well as excessive alcohol consumption (5).

In 2018 the Russian Federation approved its priority federal project entitled “Publich Health Promotion” [Укрепление общественного здоровья] (6), which involves a range of...
legislative, informational and communication measures aimed at tackling the main behavioural risk factors.

The information and communication campaign also included the subject of responsible attitude to reproductive health. According to WHO’s definition, reproductive health “is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes” (7). Lifestyle factors that adversely affect the reproductive health of both men and women include smoking, alcohol consumption, low physical activity, poor eating habits, stress, early sexual activity, diseases of the genitourinary system and sexually transmitted infections (8, 9).

In the Russian Federation, the proportion of women who smoke and drink alcohol during pregnancy is 12% and 11%, respectively (10). Up to 42% of women engage in sexual activity before the age of 18, and 41% of these do not use any kind of contraceptive (8). Eliminating factors that adversely affect the reproductive system can address the problem of irresponsible attitude to reproductive health. Increasing the population’s awareness and level of health literacy regarding reproductive health issues will pave the way for the sensible use of contraceptives, preventing unwanted pregnancies and infections (8, 9).

As part of the implementation of this federal project, the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation and the National Medical Research Centre for Preventive Medicine, a Federal State Institution of the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation, have jointly developed the concept of an information and communication campaign for the promotion of a healthy lifestyle, as well as materials for its implementation.

The purpose of this publication is to present the experience of the Russian Federation in developing and implementing this campaign and the approaches taken to achieve this goal. This experience may be of interest to health professionals and public health experts who are involved in the development of information and communication campaigns at the national level.

**DESCRIPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION APPROACHES OF THE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN**

The concept for the campaign focused on four target areas: reducing alcohol consumption, reducing tobacco consumption, developing responsible eating habits, and developing a responsible attitude towards reproductive health. Target groups were selected for each area of the campaign. A description of these groups is provided in Table 1.

A variety of criteria were taken into account when segmenting the population into target groups. The selected criteria reflected the main sociodemographic characteristics as determined by an expert survey in consultation with psychologists and social services. Segmenting the total sample into target groups made it possible to determine whether a given problem is relevant for the person in question, how that person feels about the problem, what its consequences are, what the person’s priorities are, what the main channel of information for the respective group should be and how the people within each group talk on a daily basis. The result was a segmentation tree of potential target groups, with a total of 320 participants for each campaign area. Key messages were formulated on the basis of the needs, and the consequences of unhealthy lifestyle, for each target group.

The first stage of the segmentation process involved assessing the target audience according to risk exposure level. Identifying risk factors allowed the relevance of the key messages to be delivered to the target audience to be taken into account, without having to explore the depth of this risk. The second stage involved splitting the target groups by gender, which made it possible to define the key messages for each target group more accurately, as men and women often have different priorities, motivations, attitudes towards their health and approaches to solving problems. The third stage of the process was age-based. The expert survey concluded that the 40-plus age group would not be a priority, as people of this age can be more rigid in their thinking, with strong beliefs and stereotypical behaviour, despite the fact that this demographic makes up 48.5% of the population. The younger demographic is a more promising target, as young people have the opportunity to significantly extend their lives, and thus their economic activity. The fourth stage of segmentation the population
into target groups allowed the audience to be further divided according to their main channels of receiving information. Identifying these communication channels makes it possible to place information precisely where the target audience will see it, and to deliver that information in a language they speak.

This tailoring of the communication channel for information delivery was used for all areas of the campaign. It is important to note that the preferred channel for delivering information to younger people is via social networks and news sites; however, due to the specifics of internet coverage in each Russian region, as well as income factors, information was delivered by means of television. Another way of delivering information to people in the 30+ age group is via radio, especially if that person has their own car.

This proposed method of segmenting the population into target groups allowed the identification of 80 such groups. A priority channel for communicating information was identified for each group and the target groups were then combined into several large groups according to their main channels of receiving information.

The key message was formulated for each target group on the basis of their health needs and consequences described above. The channel for delivering information determined the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campaign Area</th>
<th>Target Group</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reduce tobacco consumption and other forms of nicotine intake</td>
<td>People who have recently started smoking and have not yet developed a nicotine addiction (12–18 and 19–35 years old)</td>
<td>This target group sees smoking as a means of self-validation (seeming or appearing older), a way to reduce stress and relax, and a way to spend time with friends.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>People who demonstrate signs of ill health and severe nicotine addiction (19–35 and 36–50 years old)</td>
<td>People who are aware that they are addicted to nicotine or who have already felt the health consequences of their tobacco consumption. It is important to convey information to this target group on effective ways to quit smoking, and that they have nothing to lose in quitting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reducing alcohol consumption</td>
<td>12–18 years old</td>
<td>Teenagers might consume alcohol as a means of building their image among their peers and out of fear of losing their standing in their social group. The consequences of drinking alcohol (particularly at this age) can be catastrophic.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>19–35 years old</td>
<td>Special occasions are a traditional pretext for drinking alcohol, where people often feel obliged to join in. What is more, many people believe that alcohol helps them relax, which leads them to drink more frequently and, as a result, to alcoholism.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>36–50 years old</td>
<td>A reduced desire to use alcohol as a way to relax, but with a significantly stronger pretext for drinking on special occasions and to avoid boredom. This is the most problematic group, as many people who belong to this group find it almost impossible to stop drinking alcohol.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsible eating habits</td>
<td>12–35 years old</td>
<td>Young people are the biggest consumers of fast food, carbonated drinks and unhealthy snacks. This group typically suffers from skin conditions, dental problems and obesity. At the same time, this group does not equate poor nutrition with appearance.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>36 years old and above</td>
<td>Older people consume too much salt, sugar and fats. This target group, although primarily men, often experience cardiovascular disease, obesity and reproductive health problems. Moreover, this group does not always see the connection between health problems and eating habits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible attitude towards reproductive health</td>
<td>18–25 years old</td>
<td>Living by certain ethical principles such as loyalty to one partner and the desire to have a family can prevent reproductive health issues in the future.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26–40 years old</td>
<td>Many believe that having a family is an obstacle in personality development, but that it is in fact a necessity for self-realization in both men and women, with children an integral part of the family.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
wording used in these messages. The key message combined all communication channels into a single information space. Recognizable visual symbols (a modern typography and logo) and archetypal images (a smoker, an alcoholic, family and children, a person who does not care about what they eat) were used.

EXPERIENCE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF PREVIOUS RUSSIAN AND FOREIGN INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGNS

Over the past few decades, media campaigns have been used to influence population health behaviours. These campaigns have primarily been aimed at reducing tobacco use and preventing cardiovascular diseases, as well as at reducing alcohol consumption and tackling numerous other health issues (11). These campaigns typically involve the placement of messages in various media that reach a wide audience – usually through television or radio advertisements, but also in outdoor media such as billboards and posters, and in print media such as magazines and newspapers. As a rule, these messages have a passive impact, which is a side-effect of routinely using the media (11, 12).

A number of population-based studies note a decrease in the prevalence of risk factors for noncommunicable diseases when media campaigns are combined with other approaches, such as tobacco control measures, increasing excise taxes on tobacco products and banning smoking in public places (11). Based on international experience and multiple information campaigns to increase health literacy (13–17), it is possible to develop policies that target behavioural change. These campaigns are typically aimed at specific illnesses, conditions or concrete population groups (14–16), or at the environment in which people live, study and work (17).

Global experience proves the effectiveness of population-based awareness-raising campaigns as a way of changing or correcting people’s behaviour regarding their health, provided that the messages delivered by these campaigns are delivered regularly and repeatedly, aimed at the target audience and focused on changing the behaviour of a certain population (18).

WHO has developed a list of effective measures that are recommended for addressing the problem of noncommunicable diseases in accordance with the Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs 2013–2020 (19). A list of options is presented for each of the four key risk factors for noncommunicable diseases (tobacco, harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diet and physical inactivity), with evidence-based mass-media campaigns being included as a main, or an additional, measure.

For the past 10 years the Russian Federation has, under the guidance of the Ministry of Health, conducted a number of federal information campaigns to promote a healthy lifestyle and eliminate habits that are bad for human health: “Healthy Russia” [Здоровая Россия], “Let’s Change!” [Давайте меняться] and “Let’s Make a Conscious Change!” [Давайте меняться сознательно]. In conjunction with regulatory measures such as restricting the size and number of smoking areas and introducing restrictions on the sale of alcohol, as well as the work being carried out by medical professionals on the ground, these initiatives have led to a noticeable positive trend in the public perception of a healthy lifestyle and people’s attitudes towards risk factors (20).

According to the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM), since 2008, 6–13% of the population started exercising on a regular or frequent basis; the number of people who watch what they eat has increased by 3–8%; and up to 10% of respondents have quit smoking or smoke less than they did before (21). Experts at the public opinion foundation “ФОМ Media” also confirm a reduction in alcohol consumption, and the degree to which state information campaigns have penetrated public consciousness is demonstrated by the fact that “Ministry of Health warns” [Минздрав предупреждает] has now become a catchphrase in the country (22).

Key messages from previous information campaigns consistently note the importance of health in the absolute sense of the word. For example, “Being healthy means being happy/making others happy/being cool.” In order to maintain this continuity while at the same time somewhat revising the position of the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation, a similar message was formulated that included a comparative adjective: “The Ministry of Health affirms - you are stronger” [Минздрав утверждает: ты сильнее].
DESCRIPTION OF THE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN

The phrase “You are stronger” became the main slogan of the campaign. It was used to create individual sketches of situations that are familiar to every member of the target group. The main character, a successful representative of the reference group, is faced with the choice of continuing with a dangerous habit, making an impulse decision, or taking conscious action to improve his or her own health moving forward. The accessibility of the slogan made it possible to launch viral campaigns on social networks with the hashtag #тысильнее (meaning “you are stronger”).

The slogan, which focuses on more specific goals, is adaptive and can be used for a significantly longer period of time than any previously developed versions. What is more, it is applicable to all the main areas of work: tobacco, harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diet and physical inactivity. The slogan fits neatly into the modern informational context, attracting the attention of all target audiences and all target groups. We should stress here that, despite its use of an informal Russian second person pronoun, the slogan is also aimed at older generations – people aged between 40 and 55 who live in the Russian Federation’s major cities and are actively involved in sports, taking part not only in traditional forms of exercise, but also in fitness, yoga, Pilates, etc.

In order to communicate the message effectively, it is necessary to show people where they are succeeding to give them motivation to keep going. It is important to focus on the positive changes that have already taken place and that may take place in the future, to stress that leading a healthy lifestyle is the personal success of every individual and to give it even greater value. It is important to go beyond talk about giving up bad habits and show what is to be gained from making the choice to lead a healthy lifestyle. Part of implementing the priority project in target areas of the information and communication campaign “You are stronger” involved the creation of advertising and information materials: 34 radio segments; 20 television segments; 12 internet videos; 16 design layouts for outdoor media; 14 design layouts for advertisements on public transport; 84 web banners; 15 layouts for contextual advertising; and 40 design layouts for promotional merchandise. The campaign also included the development of 27 original TV programmes and interviews with leading experts from the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation on various aspects of leading a healthy lifestyle, totalling 297 minutes and to be broadcast a total of 80 times across seven federal television channels. Some 25 dynamic advertisements were also developed and placed on these federal television channels, appearing a total of 4174 times. A total of 48 special projects (original stories, broadcasts and live programmes etc.) devoted to a healthy lifestyle were aired on five radio stations. Each segment was under two minutes in length, and there were 256 airings in total. In addition, radio podcast totalling 140 minutes in length were broadcast on six stations. The campaign also extended to print media, with 32 informational items on all aspects of the information and communication campaign appearing in six of the Russian Federation’s top ten most-read newspapers. Furthermore, informational materials promoting a healthy lifestyle were placed on advertising structures (335 banners in total) and on the sides of 80 public transport vehicles (buses, trolleybuses and trams).

The campaign was held all over the country from September to December 2018. It is also continuing in 2019 and will be covered by the framework of the federal project “Public Health Promotion” until 2024. All the materials related to the campaign are available to the public on the healthy lifestyle internet portal: www.takzdorovo.ru.

STRATEGY FOR GETTING CELEBRITIES INVOLVED IN THE CAMPAIGN

An important aspect of the campaign “You are stronger” was the involvement of media personalities through their personal communication channels (their social media pages), as well as through public engagements (public events, interviews, social advertising). The strategy for getting media personalities involved consisted of three stages: a brief analysis of the most popular media personalities; an assessment of how committed they are to leading a healthy lifestyle; and the prospects of cooperation with them. The target audience for this part of the campaign was teenagers and young adults (the 12–25 age range). Many celebrities see a healthy lifestyle as an important part of their image and talk about topics such as proper nutrition and exercises on their social media pages, sharing their own weight loss experiences after switching to a healthier diet and giving examples of how they managed to give up bad habits. It was therefore important to ensure that any celebrities included in the campaign had accurate and reliable information on healthy living.

Stars from the stage, screen and television, as well as bloggers, musicians and famous athletes all took part in the campaign. The following considerations were used to determine the most
promising media personalities and opinion leaders in terms of promoting the priorities of a healthy lifestyle:

1) The person’s general popularity and their core audience – how large is their reach and does their audience match the campaign’s target audience?

2) The person’s attitude to a healthy lifestyle – does the celebrity actively advocate a healthy lifestyle? Are they against leading a healthy lifestyle? Or do they not care one way or another?

3) The person’s reputation and the potential risks of working with them – how likely is it that they will be involved in highly publicized scandals or that references to them in connection with a healthy lifestyle will be given a negative connotation?

Accordingly, only media personalities that met all three parameters were chosen. Tables 2–4 show the features and types of activity used to promote a healthy lifestyle among the younger generation through celebrities.

**TABLE 2. FEATURES OF THE YOUTH AUDIENCE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The target audience does not generally think about the long-term consequences of their lifestyle and is more interested in having fun &quot;right here, right now.&quot;</td>
<td>Messages should focus on the “immediate” benefits of a healthy lifestyle (quit drinking and you will feel great; quit smoking and you will not smell like tobacco).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Many people see bad habits in a positive light, as evidence of a person’s “maturity,” “coolness” and decisiveness.</td>
<td>The essence of the slogan “You are stronger” is that you are mature and cool not when you succumb to alcohol and tobacco, but when you find the strength and courage to not drink or smoke.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased attention to the opposite sex and interpersonal relationships is, in this regard, a heightened attitude towards one’s own physical attractiveness.</td>
<td>Going deeper into the topic of reproductive health and a healthy diet (which equals a healthy weight, an attractive physique and healthy skin) in the context of relations with the opposite sex.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 3. PROMOTION OF A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES THROUGH CELEBRITIES WHO ARE WELL-KNOWN ADVOCATES OF LEADING A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of channels</th>
<th>Name of channel</th>
<th>Types of activities to promote a healthy lifestyle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Personal channels | Facebook, Vkontakte* | - Two to three posts per week about how the celebrity follows a healthy lifestyle (physical exercise, healthy diet instead of fast food, etc.).  
- Once a month (or every two months) – direct contact with subscribers on the issue of a healthy lifestyle, for example in a question and answers session.  
- Once per quarter – an online healthy lifestyle party. The celebrity hosts a live stream where they perform an exercise routine along with subscribers, who post photos of themselves taking part. The celebrity “likes” these pictures and posts comments on them. |
| Instagram | | - Two to four photos per week on topics related to a healthy lifestyle.  
- Once or twice a month – a competition/giveaway for subscribers, with the prize being an autograph or some kind of accessory for exercising. |
| Own website | | - A special “My Lifestyle” section on the website where the celebrity shares his or her principles on how to lead a healthy lifestyle and, if relevant, their experience giving up a bad habit. |
| External channels | Public events | - If the event has a exhibition area dedicated to the topic of leading a healthy lifestyle – a live broadcast of the celebrity’s “story” on social media, photos with the campaign’s hashtags  
- If the event does not have an exhibition area dedicated to the topic of leading a healthy lifestyle – a photo with a non-alcoholic drink and relevant hashtags |
| | Interviews | - Reminders that the celebrity is committed to leading a healthy lifestyle. Active work with publications and websites that write about issues related to a healthy lifestyle. |
| | Participation in advertisements | - Refusing to advertise brands that do not reflect the values of healthy living (tobacco, carbonated drinks, etc.). |

*Russian speaking social media platform, equivalent to Facebook.
CONCLUSION

In 2018 the Russian Federation launched a federal information and communication campaign to promote a healthy lifestyle in the population segmented by target audience, communication channel and key message.

The campaign was implemented under the federal project “Public Health Promotion” which is a part of the national framework “Demographics”, that was approved at a meeting of the Presidium of the Presidential Council on Strategic Development and National Projects on 24 December 2018. The main goals of the national project are: to increase the healthy life expectancy, increase of the total fertility rate, and increase the proportion of citizens leading a healthy lifestyle and citizens who are exercising systematically. The main goals of the federal project “Public Health Promotion” are: strengthening legislation to reduce the consumption of alcohol, tobacco and electronic cigarettes; raise awareness regarding healthy lifestyle; and strengthen social advertising aimed at its promotion.

Additionally, in 2018, the national project entitled “Healthcare” was approved. It included two federal projects “Fighting Cardiovascular Diseases” and “Fighting Oncological Diseases”; the activities of the two projects included the information and communication components similar to those of the “Promoting Public Health” federal project.

The implementation of all national projects started in January 2019 and will be carried out until December 2024.

The campaign was developed on the basis of modern scientific and practical knowledge, the data available and an analysis of Russian and foreign experience in preventing and tackling noncommunicable diseases.

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The information and communication campaign was a large-scale and all-encompassing initiative that took place in 15 target regions of the Russian Federation from September to December 2018. The concept for the campaign focused on four target areas (tobacco, harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diet and irresponsible attitude to reproductive health) and covered all communication channels.

However, as we all know, an awareness of the risk factors and a willingness to lead a healthy lifestyle does not always lead to real action in this regard. It is therefore important to reinforce initiatives to improve people’s knowledge of health issues with legislative measures. The real effectiveness of the information and awareness-raising campaign cannot be gauged by the number of likes or the amount of reposts, but rather by tangible improvements in people’s knowledge of health matters – that is, exactly how and where people get information about health issues, how they understand this information, apply it to themselves and their loved ones and ultimately how they use it. The first population-based study to measure the health literacy of the Russian population will take place in late 2019.

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