Media Approaches to Connect American Indians to Cessation Services
Introduction

Tobacco Use among People of Low Socioeconomic Status

Despite reduction in overall smoking rates, additional work is needed to engage populations disproportionately impacted by commercial tobacco use. Individuals of low socioeconomic status (SES) are a priority population that experiences tobacco-related disparities. In the US, adults with lower educational attainment and those who live below the poverty line tend to smoke at a greater rate than the general population. In Minnesota, 41.2% of all current smokers are adults who have a household income of $35,000 or less. Often these populations are also under-represented among those using commercial tobacco cessation services, including quitlines. Partnering with organizations that have established relationships with individuals in priority populations is an important strategy to reach communities and promote equity.

ClearWay MinnesotaSM Community Engagement Grant Initiative

ClearWay Minnesota created a community-based granting initiative to address the issue of disproportionate rates of smoking in low-SES adults. The primary goal was to connect adult, low-SES smokers to existing commercial tobacco cessation services, such as ClearWay Minnesota’s QUITPLAN® Services or established community cessation programs. A secondary goal was to build the grantee organizations’ capacity to continue to connect clients to tobacco cessation services after the end of grant funding.

ClearWay Minnesota recognizes and honors the sacred and ceremonial tobacco traditions of American Indians (AI) in Minnesota. Unless otherwise specified, for the remainder of this document, the use of the word tobacco refers specifically to the use of commercial tobacco products such as cigarettes, and not to the sacred and traditional use of tobacco by AI and other groups.

The American Indian Cancer Foundation (AICAF) received two one-year Community Engagement Grants in 2015 and 2016. AICAF utilized targeted media messaging to connect low income members of their community to existing tobacco cessation services.

Methods

Professional Data Analysts, Inc. (PDA) was hired by ClearWay Minnesota to conduct an independent evaluation of its Community Engagement Grants. Data sources represent activities conducted in the first one-year grant and include individual and group interviews with key informants at AICAF, as well as grantee reports submitted to ClearWay Minnesota.

* www.quitplan.com
Description of Grantee and Community Served

The tobacco use prevalence rates for AI communities are difficult to capture, particularly since surveillance instruments may confound the use of commercial tobacco with use of ceremonial tobacco. It is generally agreed upon that US smoking rates in AI populations are higher than any other racial or ethnic subgroup with 43.8% using commercial tobacco. In Minnesota specifically, research found a 59% adult cigarette smoking prevalence rate among AI adults, compared to an overall prevalence of 14.4%. Further, Minnesota’s urban Ramsey and Hennepin Counties report rates even higher in the 25-44 age group. In addition, Minnesota’s AI population is culturally and geographically diverse. In Minnesota, there are seven Anishinaabe (Chippewa, Ojibwe) reservations and four Dakota (Sioux) communities. A large AI population lives in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, though there are reservations in many corners of the state, including the northwest, northern, southwestern, and southeastern corners. Access to resources is often a concern, including access to cessation services.

Organization Overview

A key organization in addressing this disproportionately high tobacco rate is AICAF**, a national non-profit organization based in Minneapolis with a mission to eliminate the cancer burden on AI families through “education, prevention, early detection, treatment, and survivor support.” AICAF is interested in addressing smoking using comprehensive approaches and desires to build awareness of cessation resources.

Grant Strategies

There is evidence that tailoring media messages for indigenous populations is more effective than general population messaging. Further, AICAF identified social media as a potentially powerful platform to expose AI followers to anti-tobacco media as well as to connect individuals to cessation services. This grant provided AICAF with the freedom to develop a new culturally tailored approach using social media and native news media that the community could connect to and that could reach tobacco users where they are in their homes on a daily basis.

Figure 1. Map of Minnesota’s tribal reservations and communities*

* www.health.state.mn.us/divs/opi/gov/chsadmin/governance/tribal.html
** www.americanindiancancer.org
Quit Connections Facebook Page

Quit Connections was the identified solution to link AI smokers to cessation services.

Key Accomplishments

Social media is a powerful medium for AI community members to facilitate ongoing connection, wherever they may be. The development of the Quit Connections Facebook group was named as the activity leading to the most success in providing education and cessation linkages to AI populations in a culturally-tailored manner. This resource bridged the gap between AI education on tobacco cessation and resources, particularly in areas where access to these resources is scarce due to lack of transportation and distance.

After considering alternative platforms (e.g., Google, Twitter, a stand-alone website), AICAF staff decided to create a private Facebook group, given the high use of this platform among the AI population, the high number of “likes” on the AICAF Facebook page, and past demonstrated success of promoting events, such as pow-wows, via Facebook.

The overall goal of the Quit Connections Facebook group was to reach AI smokers. QUITPLAN Services was promoted on the Quit Connections Facebook page. These efforts did reach many individuals, from what AICAF staff could discern from Facebook profiles and posts. AICAF staff engaged former smokers who wanted to motivate others and themselves through their group and at community events. They also reached many other audiences, such as tribal health leaders, and even national people involved in these efforts, who were not their intended audience, but who are involved in cessation programming.

AICAF staff used a variety of methods to recruit members to the group, including: posting messages about the group on the main AICAF Facebook page and Twitter account, posting on a Minnesota American Indian email listserv that’s popular within the community, and asking members to reach out and invite their friends and family. They also developed quit cards, “Q Cards,” which are postcards that AICAF staff handed out at community events for people to give to smokers.

On left: Example of AICAF post in Quit Connections Facebook group.
Quit Connections Facebook Page

Facilitators

A key facilitator was the power of social media in AI communities to act as a bridge to accessing information about cessation services and resources. Secondarily, social media also served as a way for AI tobacco users to connect to a broader community of support, which is particularly important for those who do not readily have access to available cessation services (e.g. transportation; distance; time) and who are often low SES smokers. In AI communities, it is important to be connected, and utilizing social media is one way to connect with their community no matter where they may be.

Quit Connections underlined the importance of increasing the accessibility of culturally tailored resources to support quitting commercial tobacco. This was particularly important given that such resources can be difficult to access, particularly on reservations due to distance and lack of transportation. Therefore, with Quit Connections as a web-based social media group, it provided the convenience and easy accessibility for group members to find online resources and support for motivation to quit commercial tobacco.

Barriers

Challenges with the Facebook group were maintaining engagement and determining a good messaging strategy. AICAF program staff characterized engagement with messaging within the group as “hit or miss.” They experimented with different types of messaging to try to determine what resonates with group members, trying to find different approaches to get people to respond. It was challenging to figure out what to post, but they decided to use a motivational, supportive, and educational approach to their messages. They edited messages based on their observations about what was working. AICAF staff stated that it’s hard to maintain engagement within the group, but they can see how many people are seeing their posts via the analytics provided by Facebook. Even if people didn’t like or comment on them, people may see a post and still get a positive push toward quitting.

A key, ongoing consideration is that culturally tailored educational materials for AI communities are limited. American Indians view and use tobacco in different ways than the general population, so it is important to develop materials to reflect tobacco in a culturally specific way in order to effectively reach the AI community.
AICAF staff also utilized the #iQuit hashtag as a social media campaign developed in conjunction with the Great American Smokeout. It was promoted within Quit Connections to encourage a 24-hour quit attempt. It was also promoted by AICAF generally. Individuals using the hashtag were encouraged to change their profile pictures and to join the Quit Connections group. It is a small, but important example of a culturally-tailored approach to implementing a social media campaign.

The AICAF team plans to build on the existing Facebook group in an effort to increase reach and engagement. An activity following this first year of funding was to set up a tab on the AICAF website that has Quit Connections materials and resources. Efforts are made on the Quit Connections group page to promote the AICAF page and events.

Finally, AICAF designed their Quit Connections infographic. They worked with a designer to make it appealing to their audience and provide information on options and ways to quit smoking – medications, counseling, and the like. This infographic is used within clinic and pharmacy settings. It is also used as an educational resource as it depicts various options to quit tobacco using plain language, instead of medical jargon.

Above: Quit Connections infographic designed by AICAF.
Partnership with Native Health News Alliance

Key Accomplishments

Through the grant, AICAF developed a close partnership with the Native Health News Alliance (NHNA)*, an organization like the Associated Press for AI news. AICAF developed culturally tailored messaging and captured motivational stories to bring attention to the high use of commercial tobacco across American Indian communities. NHNA disseminated these stories as an effective strategy to reach broadly across Minnesota and Indian Country.

AICAF worked with the NHNA to produce two stories related to cessation. The first story, released in November 2015, was about cessation options, and included several infographics. NHNA staff interviewed several American Indians who had recently quit and discussed what had worked for them. The second story, created in March 2016, was about motivations to quit. The NHNA created a story, video, and audio slide show. AICAF staff worked with several reporters to find people for the story and guide the NHNA about the context and messages for these media products. Both stories were shared by NHNA and published by several tribal news outlets. Each story was estimated to reach over 10,000 people.

Facilitators

The AICAF team felt that reach to their audience of interest exceeded expectations. The project was a new effort to try different messages and to learn what worked. The NHNA is a fast-paced organization and AICAF staff found them easy to work with. NHNA also developed several new materials with designs that appeal to AI audiences. AICAF was pleased with the exposure gained by working with NHNA – both within Minnesota and further.

Barriers

Program staff indicated they did not encounter any challenges working with NHNA.

* www.nativehealthnews.com

Above: Screen clip from the NHNA Motivations to Quit video
Lessons Learned

- Have a plan for what kind of group/approach is desired (i.e. motivational), both for social media efforts and for an overall media approach.

- Keep Facebook messages positive and uplifting; people don’t want negative messaging on Facebook.

- Have materials specific to your population and their issues.

- Use incentives to keep people motivated (e.g., QUITPLAN Services’ Quit Cash Challenge was promoted on posts in the Quit Connections Facebook group).

- Stay abreast of issues impacting your target population in order to improve the relevance of media messages. Sensitivity and understanding of these issues helps in shaping media messages that are relevant and culturally sensitive.

- Be aware of historical trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which are particularly relevant for American Indian communities. This is important as part of a broader effort to create media messages that are culturally relevant to the targeted communities.

Acknowledgements

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References


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