

Oregon Health Authority

A youth marijuana prevention campaign by the Oregon Health Authority



BACKGROUND

The **Stay True to You** campaign was launched to influence attitudes and perceptions around marijuana use by youth as required as part of legislation allowing recreational use of marijuana in Oregon by adults over age 21.

Measure 91 went into effect July 1, 2015, expanding marijuana access beyond medical marijuana dispensaries. Oregon State Legislature approved \$3.9 million for the Oregon Health Authority Public Health Division (OHA-PHD) to create, implement, and evaluate a youth marijuana prevention campaign (RMC Research Corporation [RMC], 2017). The OHA-PHD developed the **Stay True to You** campaign and a complimentary campaign targeted to adults, called Talk With Them, in coordination with media contractor, Coates Kokes. The campaigns were piloted and evaluated by research firm RMC Research Corporation (2017) from June 30, 2016 to June 30, 2017.

In addition to legalizing marijuana for adults, Measure 91 defines the penalties for youth possession and use of the substance. The **Stay True to You** campaign includes messaging about the possible penalties for using marijuana underage, as well as the possible health and behavioral effects of it.

According to research performed by the National Academies of Science and Medicine, as referenced by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, teen use of marijuana may have permanent effects on the developing brain and cause difficulty thinking, remembering, problem solving and learning (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services [DHHS], 2021). Marijuana use may also reduce coordination and ability to maintain attention. Marijuana use is also correlated with problems in school and social life, and teens who use marijuana are more likely to drop out of school. Teens who use marijuana are more like to have mental health issues (DHHS, 2021).

There are almost twice as many marijuana retail locations in the pilot area as there are McDonalds or Starbucks locations (RMC, 2017).



TARGET AUDIENCE

The target audience for **Stay True to You** is youth and young adults who are not old enough to legal use recreational marijuana. Because youth are more likely to be exposed to marijuana and

other prohibited substances as they get older, the campaign focuses on youth ages 12-20. The campaign specifically targets youth who are undecided about whether to use marijuana, or those who may use it occasionally as these youth are more likely to change based on marketing. Youth who are already committed to not using marijuana or are already using it heavily are not targeted because they are less likely to change their behavior.

A complementary Talk With Them campaign is targeted to parents and adults who are in a position to influence the primary target audience, such as coaches and teachers. This is the secondary audience.

The pilot campaign was run in five counties, Clackamas, Jackson, Josephine, Multnomah, and Washington. These counties reflect a mixture of urban and rural communities. Three additional counties were monitored for comparison: Coos, Douglas, and Lane counties have a similar size and demographics to the pilot counties, according to 2010 and 2010-2014 combined U.S. Census data, as reported by RMC Research Corporation (2017):

Demographics	Pilot Area	Comparison Area
Total population	2,063,447	533,701
Female	50.8%	50.8%
Youth aged 13-20	9.3%	10.8%
Race: White	84.3%	90.5%
Hispanic/Latinx (any race)	12.1%	7.6%

Adapted from RMC Strategic Communications, 2017

FORMATIVE RESEARCH

The 2016 Oregon Student Wellness Study shows that key indicators of marijuana use by youth increases significantly after 6th Grade (about age 11), as reported by RMC (2017) using weighted averages for the counties in each category:

Indicator	Grade	Pilot Area	Comparison Area
Past 30-day marijuana use	6	2.5%	1.7%
	8	6.9%	10.5%
	11	20.7%	18.6%
Perceived risk of harm	6	66.8%	63.4%
	8	69%	49.9%
	11	39.9%	35.7%
Perceived ease of availability	6	6.2%	11.2%
	8	29.6%	39.2%
	11	68.0%	70.1%
Parental disapproval	6	98.7%	97.1%
	8	95.2%	91.4%
	11	87.3%	84.0%
Peer disapproval	6	96%	97.1%
	8	77.6%	69.2%
	11	50.0%	47.4%

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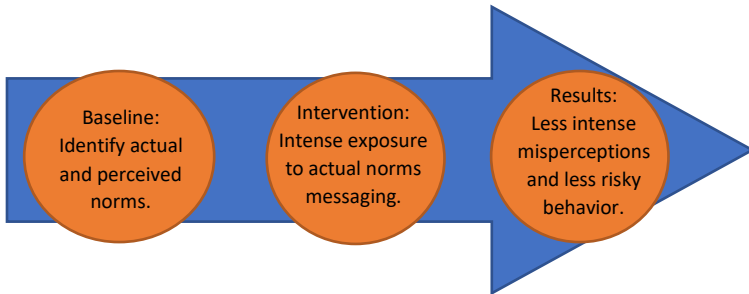
It is unclear if any additional formative research or focus groups was conducted prior to the start of the pilot study. Attempts to contact OHA-PHD for clarification were futile.

The pilot campaign included two focus groups, one at the mid-point of the campaign, and one at the conclusion of campaign. Surveys were conducted before the campaign began, as well as midway through the campaign and at the end of the campaign.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The **Stay True to You** campaign relies on the Social Normative Theory, which suggests that misperceptions of social norms have an impact on health issues and on substance abuse in particular (RMC, 2017).

Social norms marketing is intended to apply traditional marketing principals to correct misperceptions of social norms within the target population. The campaign designers adapted a model from H. Wesley Perkins, a professor of sociology at Hobart and Williams Smith Colleges (RMC, 2017):



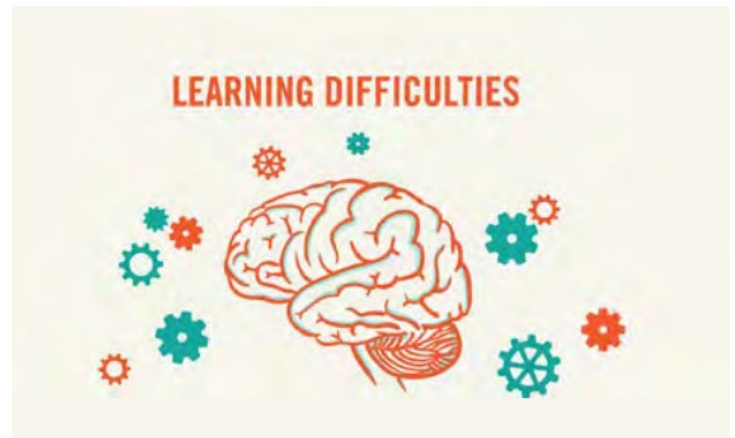
Adapted from RMC Strategic Communications, 2017



Video: Marijuana, Teens, and Driving

MESSAGES

Campaign messages focused on awareness of possible consequences of youth marijuana use, and social norms such as true statistics about how many teens use marijuana. The campaign included videos, graphics with photographs, and illustrations focusing on key campaign topics. The following examples are taken from the 12-month pilot campaign evaluation results (RMC, 2017):



Video: Weed Can Affect Teen Brain Development



EVALUATION

The campaign evaluation included data collection through surveys at the beginning, middle and end of the campaign, and by focus groups conducted at the middle and end of the campaign. This information is reported the 12-month pilot campaign evaluation results (RMC, 2017).

Youth survey participants were recruited through social media messaging targeted to 13–20-year-olds in the pilot and comparison areas. The survey marketing offered a chance to win \$25 and \$100 gift cards.

Surveys of parents and adults serving youth ages 13-20 were conducted at the same time. Participants were recruited through social media and offered a chance to win \$50 and \$100 gift cards.

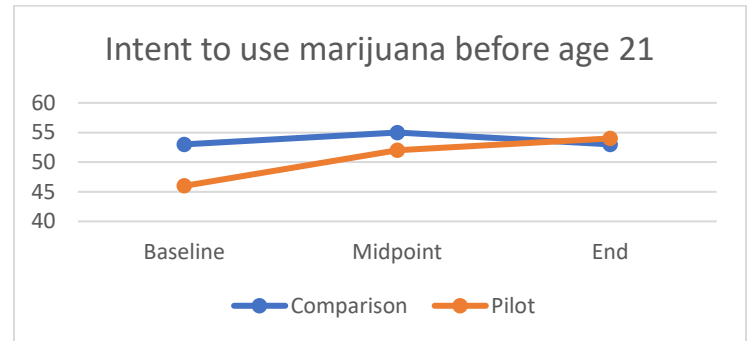
Focus groups were conducted to obtain more in-depth information. Focus groups were conducted in each of pilot areas, including two Spanish-language focus groups in the Portland metropolitan area. These participants were recruited through social media, contact with people who had previously participated, and through a Portland-area program, People-Places-Things, that teaches English to immigrants and refugees. Participants were given a \$50 gift card (RMC, 2017).

Participant responses indicated an increase in visibility of both dispensaries and public use of marijuana in both the pilot and comparison areas over the course of the campaign.

In addition, the pilot campaign was viewed more than 60 million times across different channels, including YouTube, Hulu, cable/TV, Pandora, Spotify, social media, billboards, movie theaters and in malls. In the pilot area, 83-85% of respondents recalled seeing the campaign messaging (RMC, 2017).

Youth respondents in the pilot area reported an increased perceived risk of using marijuana underage, including health and behavior impacts. The campaign data showed a significant, but unsustainable increase in knowledge of social norms.

Youth did not show any less likelihood of intent to use marijuana because of campaign messaging, with nearly identical survey responses in the pilot and comparison areas at the end of the campaign:



Adapted from RMC, 2017

THEORETICAL APPLICATION

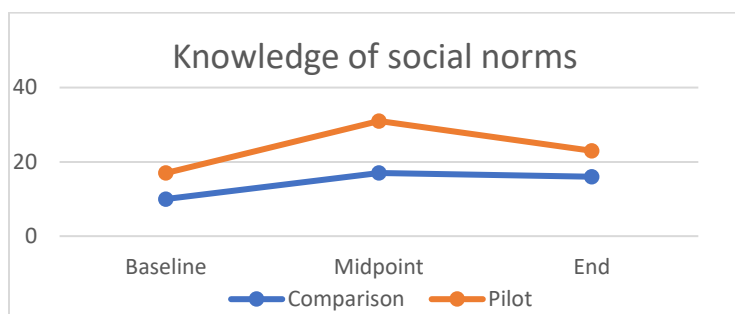
The \$3.9 million **Stay True to You** pilot campaign temporarily increased awareness of social norms but did not completely counter the growing increase intent to use marijuana by youth and underage adults.

The apparent lack of pre-campaign could have caught concerns expressed by the target audience about tone and believability that could have been addressed prior to the campaign (RMC, 2017).

While the campaign increased awareness of the social norms, this did not have an impact on intent to use marijuana. Consistent exposure to accurate social norms can change perception.

REFERENCES

- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. (2021, Sept. 8). *Marijuana and Public Health*. Center for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/marijuana/health-effects/teens.html>.
- RMC Research Corporation. (2017, June). *Oregon youth marijuana prevention pilot campaign Stay True to You 12-month pilot campaign evaluation results*. Oregon Health Authority Public Health Division. https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/PREVENTIONWELLNESS/MARIJUANA/Documents/StayTruetoYou_FinalComprehensiveReport_Approved.pdf.
- State of Oregon. (2014). *Measure 91: Control, regulation, and taxation of marijuana and industrial hemp act*. <https://www.oregon.gov/olcc/marijuana/documents/measure91.pdf>.



Adapted from RMC, 2017