



Best Practices: Communicating about Cancer Risk Reduction

Communicating about health issues can be challenging. Every individual brings his or her own unique experiences to the conversation, and interprets messages with those perspectives in mind. Many people believe there are too many recommendations about how to prevent cancer, and it is therefore difficult to know which recommendations to follow. The following best practices document offers suggestions on how to connect with your audience and communicate about cancer prevention and risk reduction.

Conversing about Cancer Risk Reduction - Method

It can be helpful to think about messaging as a three-step process: “set-up,” “core message,” and “ask”. The purpose of each step is to advance the conversation and move your audience to a decision and/or action. The column on the right details what we want to accomplish with each step, and best practices for success.

| | What we want them to know | Purpose and Best Practice |
|------------------------|--|---|
| 1. Set-up | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Our message about cancer risk reduction is relevant to the audience’s goals as an organization ▪ We share similar values about health care ▪ This is an urgent issue | <p>The set-up must lead your audience to agree with your general message frame about cancer risk reduction and be open to continued dialogue.</p> <p><i>Creating a sense of urgency is important in your set-up. Additionally, your frame for talking about cancer prevention should align with your audience’s goals – e.g., business leaders need to think about the bottom line; many policymakers believe personal responsibility is an important part of health care.</i></p> |
| 2. Core Message | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cancer risk reduction is within our power, achievable and has concrete benefits ▪ If we work together we can prevent cancer deaths | <p>The core message helps your audience to better understand cancer risk reduction issues, believe you have the right solutions to the challenge, and believe that collaborating on cancer prevention aligns with their own goals.</p> <p><i>Messages that empower people and show they can make a difference are more effective. This is also the right step for adding personal experiences. Personal stories tend to be effective particularly with policymakers because it helps them connect both rationally and emotionally. Also, ask questions! This step, in particular, is a dialogue. It is important to connect at a personal level with your audience. Get their thoughts on cancer prevention and risk reduction.</i></p> |

- 3. Ask**
- By partnering with C-Change, it will be easy for you to contribute to this important movement
 - There is a **specific** action you can take to bring about change
- We want the audience to agree to work with us, and if there is a more specific call to action, we want the audience to agree to support that specific policy or business action.
- Provide specific examples for promoting risk reduction and preventing cancer. Provide a “first step” to continue the dialogue and/or take action. Making this first step easy is important – the first conversation is not an ideal time for a large request.*

Conversing about Cancer Risk Reduction - Message

Following are suggested messages for talking about cancer risk reduction. Each section corresponds with the three-step process laid out above. We also indicate messages that are intended for a specific audience (e.g., cancer center leaders or business leaders).

Set Up

- **General Audience:** Every American deserves to live a long, healthy life. But we’re falling short of that goal.

Preventing disease is the most effective, common-sense way to improve health and reduce health care costs.

About 50% of cancer cases can be prevented by changes in tobacco use, nutrition, and physical activity, and many more lives can be saved through screening.

Your leadership is critical to prevent this from being the first generation of American kids who live shorter, sicker lives than their parents.

- **Policymakers:** Cancer risk reduction initiatives can offer your constituents more opportunities to make healthier choices, more easily.
- **Business Leaders:** Cancer risk reduction initiatives could save your company money by lowering health care costs and minimizing sick leave and productivity losses.
- **Cancer Center and Non-Profit Leaders:** Providing care is important. But so is caring about prevention – before anyone ever gets cancer. Cancer risk reduction initiatives are ways to help us achieve the overarching goal of reducing suffering from cancer.

Core Message

- **General Audience:** All Americans should have the tools and opportunities to make the best possible choices about their health. Yet, about 1 in two cancer cases can be traced back to preventable factors.

We can cut cancer cases in about half by using proven science to help individuals make healthier choices, more easily.

- **Policymakers:** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are making tremendous gains in cancer prevention through specific efforts, such as by providing prevention kits for schools and small businesses. We must continue supporting their work.

Cancer prevention is a great example of how we can shift to a new emphasis on health outcomes, rather than focusing alone on the debate over illness treatment and controlling costs.

- **Business Leaders:** Prevention will encourage employees to be responsible for their own health instead of depending on the employer, which is good for business.

You can play a leadership role in your community, create a healthier and happier workforce and improve your bottom line.

Cancer risk reduction strategies businesses can support include: science-based programs that reduce tobacco use and promote physical activity, better nutrition, cancer screening, sun safety, and vaccinations that prevent cancer.

- **Cancer Center and Non-Profit Leaders:** It is within our power to create a better prevention and early detection infrastructure, and government and policy leaders should take a leading role in activating these initiatives. We need your help in encouraging our policymakers to support these initiatives.

Ask

- **General Audience:** Let's work together to advocate for funding for programs that promote tobacco cessation, provide healthy food options, and increase access to safe, inexpensive physical activity opportunities for all Americans.
 - **Policymakers:** Can you commit to supporting cancer prevention by supporting HR# (specific bill number and title), and other legislation that preserves and grows funding for healthy choices that can reduce their risk of cancer?
 - **Business Leaders:** The benefits of cancer risk reduction strategies go beyond your bottom line – these strategies are socially responsible and beneficial to the whole community. Can we meet to further discuss how your voice can make a difference in supporting these programs in addition to proven workplace wellness strategies?
 - **Cancer Center and Non-Profit Leaders:** Can we meet to discuss how your voice can make a difference in activating cancer prevention initiative? I would like to discuss how your organization could advocate for prevention as it relates to your mission, while also preserving your priorities.
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Conversing on Cancer Risk Reduction – Tips

The following chart lays out tips for engaging in cancer risk reduction conversations. Several tips are based on suggestions in the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s paper, *A New Way to Talk about the Social Determinants of Health*, pg. 5.

Do:

- Use a statistic that will grab the audience’s attention and challenge conventional wisdom.
- Use colloquial, values-driven and emotionally compelling language. Academic language, such as “interventions” do not resonate with some audiences the way talking about family, healthy choices, and saving lives can.
- Identify the problem and potential solutions. The “ask” step of messaging responds to an audience’s desire for concrete direction – either an example of the kind of action that would address the problem, or a set of principles that can guide us to where we need to go.
- Communicate the importance of personal responsibility. This idea resonates with audiences across the political spectrum, and makes people more receptive to the idea that society has a role to play in ensuring healthy choices are universally available.
- Use language with policymakers and the public to reframe how they think about health, such as “Cancer prevention is about health care vs. sick care.”
- When referring to data, cite credible organizations such as the American Cancer Society to credential your statement.
- Gather information about whom you’ll communicate with through background research so you can tailor your messaging.

Don’t:

- Use too many statistics that can confuse the audience and lessen the impact. Focus on the single most important statistic and the audience’s ability to create change.
- Use technical terms such as “intervention” with policymakers, business leaders and the public. Good alternatives include programs, policies, initiatives, and strategies. In general, simpler language is more effective.
- Use phrases and words that take away choice and/or could make people feel powerless in their health, e.g., social determinants of health, disparities, genetics, etc.
- Use the word “prevention” with the public when possible. The general population believes you cannot “prevent” cancer. Instead, talk about “reducing the risk of cancer.”
- Lead off policy discussions by talking about taxes. Taxation as a policy option is unpopular and takes away from the empowerment frame when communicating with the general population.
- Talk about abstract groups, e.g., “healthy communities.” Particularly when speaking with business leaders or policymakers, refer to the communities in which they do business and serve.
- Over-emphasize the short-term economic benefits of prevention—in this political climate, the public health argument is stronger.