

## Newsmaking and AOD

### *The Power of Media Advocacy to Advance Prevention Goals*

**A**RE YOU working with the news media to advance your prevention issues? If not, you are missing out on a powerful means to resolve alcohol and other drug (AOD) problems. Community newsmaking is a crucial element for making dramatic changes which further AOD prevention goals.

The news media, especially television, is a central means of communication in our society—and plays a significant role in shaping it. Through a properly executed media advocacy campaign, prevention advocates can utilize a powerful process to: 1) change community norms; 2) create support for new policies; and 3) support enforcement of policies.

#### What is Media Advocacy?

Media advocacy is the strategic use of the news media to advance policy or norm goals. When people talk about generating news coverage, they often think of public relations, which is primarily used to obtain exposure for a particular individual, organization or product. With media advocacy, the *issues* are the central focus, and media advocacy campaigns are strategically designed to incorporate the elements that will best move the issues forward.

A central feature of media advocacy is involving community members who bring a unique or valuable perspective to the issue. For example, if the issue is the impact of illicit drugs on emergency response services, a paramedic and a former drug user who had received emergency treatment would provide “authentic voices.”

Media advocacy is particularly valuable to AOD campaigns because:

- The news is a powerful information source that reaches a broad audience.
- The public generally accepts items covered on the news as important or credible.
- It is relatively inexpensive, relying more on staff time than expensive ads.
- Participation in media advocacy is inclusive—it takes many voices to make a campaign.



Granite Hills High School students get a sobering Valentine's Day message  
FRONT PAGE NEWS Daily Californian, Feb. 5, 1996

by Dan Tomsy & Jeffrey Tufenkian

*Mr. Tomsy is a project manager at the Institute for Health Advocacy (IHA) in San Diego, and a consultant on AOD prevention and public policy strategies. Mr. Tufenkian leads trainings in media advocacy and campaign planning, and is a media specialist at IHA.*

prevention *Tactics* 3:1 (1999)

**Tactics** (tak'tiks) *n.* 1. a plan for promoting a desired end. 2. the art of the possible.

## Yes, It Works!

### *Tobacco and DUI Attitudes*

THE EFFECTIVENESS of media advocacy is apparent when we look at the shift in norms and policies related to tobacco use and driving under the influence. Over the years, advocates have helped bring greater public understanding of tobacco and DUI problems and generated support for new policies. The media work on these two issues has also been crucial in changing community norms of behavior around these practices. It now seems absurd to imagine medical doctors promoting cigarettes or co-workers bragging about how many drinks they had Saturday night and still drove home, as was the case in past decades.

## CONCEPT IN ACTION

## TOOLS

### MEDIA ACCESS ROUTES

#### Newspapers

- Journalistic news release
- News event
- Editorial
- Op-ed
- Letter to the editor
- Feature story
- News conference
- Editorial cartoon

#### Radio

- Journalistic news release
- News event
- Story pitch
- Talk show call-in
- Talk show guest

#### Television

- Journalistic news release
- News event
- News conference
- Editorial/editorial rebuttal
- In-studio interview
- Feature story

## YOUTH MAKING HEADLINES

MEDIA ADVOCACY provides youth interested in AOD prevention with opportunities to act as “change agents” on their own behalf and in concert with the larger prevention community.

Across the nation, youth are proving themselves to be effective and compelling media advocates on AOD issues. As they are quoted, heard and seen in the news media, youth are discovering their potential as newsmakers and, consequently, as leaders among their peers and in their communities.

### Teens Speak Out Against Underage Drinking

The 1994 report of the San Diego County Policy Panel on Youth Access to Alcohol set forth policy recommendations to reduce youth access and prevent underage drinking. Media advocacy proved to be instrumental to achieving the Panel’s various policy goals.

From the beginning, youth participation was regarded as an essential element of effective media advocacy on underage drinking. In 1997, a pilot Underage Drinking Initiative project added a focused component of youth training and coordination to the Policy Panel’s ongoing advocacy efforts. San Diego area teens learned media advocacy skills by planning and actively participating in newsmaking.

Through media advocacy, youth have voiced their concerns and suggested policy solutions related to:

- Problem liquor stores and ABC licensing
- Halloween, Super Bowl, other booze promotions
- Test marketing of alco-pops
- DUI
- Public drinking and beverage service
- Tijuana bars
- Holiday and home parties.

Through action-filled TV news events, radio programs and letters to the editor, youth voices have become an invaluable complement to those of the adult community on underage drinking issues. Policy changes have been achieved, and more are to come.

# Target substance abuse problems early in life, say teens who speak out

By Patricia Dibsie  
STAFF WRITER



*Media advocacy is awesome! Really great! It got us really involved and we were able to see accomplishments right away.*

Caterra R., age 17

*"You're usually thought of as just a kid and they don't care what you have to say, but with media advocacy they want to hear what you have to say. You can really make a difference in your own community!"*

Dynasty S., age 16

## Benefits of youth participation

- Youth empowerment
- Youth leadership development
- Action, color and energy at news events
- 1<sup>st</sup> hand knowledge of AOD impacts and solutions
- Passion and genuineness brought to issue discussions

## Enticing youth to participate

Youth not interested or comfortable in being spokespersons may find interest in these contributions to successful media advocacy:

- Researching and compiling data supporting policy goals.
- Creating the visuals for news events or editorial cartoons.
- Crafting talking points, sound bites, messages for their peers.
- Writing editorial letters or news releases.
- Handling "behind the scenes" logistics of a news event.
- Video taping original footage for TV stations ("b-roll" tape).

San Diego Union-Tribune, Jul. 28, 1997



## CONCEPT IN ACTION



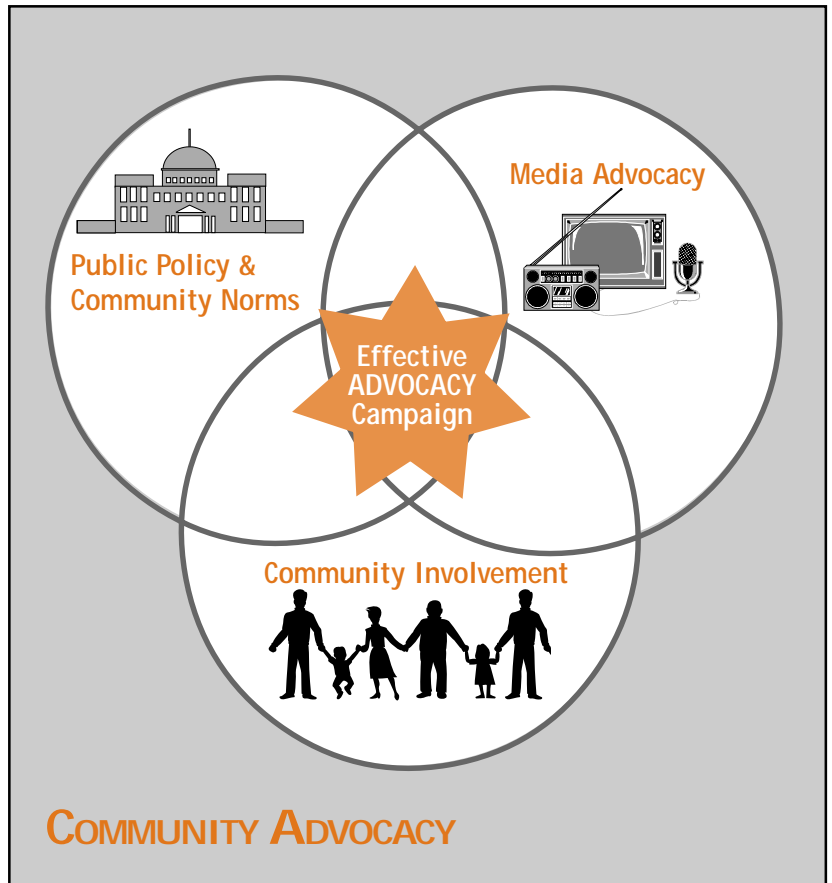
## REGIONALIZING YOUR MEDIA ADVOCACY

### KEY CONCEPT

ARE YOUR NEIGHBORING cities or counties impacted by your AOD problems? Are nearby communities addressing the same problems and advocating for similar policy solutions? As you become effective in doing media advocacy at the local level, consider the potential of regional newsmaking.

Collaborating with other communities in your county, or with neighboring counties, could significantly increase the power of your prevention efforts. As local advocacy efforts begin uniting the voices of various communities, regional and even national news outlets often take interest.

When communities link together on a given issue, they can drive news coverage upward, both in volume and quality. A sustained sequence of media outputs generated across several media markets increases the visibility, perceived importance and public understanding of common AOD issues.



### CONCEPT IN ACTION

#### San Diego communities pull together to pull Halloween booze ads

EACH YEAR since 1994 an increasing number of San Diego communities have become involved in the Center on Alcohol Advertising's "Hands off Halloween" campaign. Initially, these communities were successful in getting the Halloween marketing issue into local newspapers and occasionally on local television. Through a regional approach, these communities are now generating stronger county-wide stories that are reaching broader audiences in more comprehensive ways. Halloween booze displays were used less last fall, and larger alcohol marketing issues are becoming the main advocacy focus.



Daily Californian, Oct. 10, 1997

CONCEPT IN ACTION

## San Diego County Methamphetamine Strike Force

*Force's Media Action Team exposes issues, broadens community awareness*

FOR MANY YEARS San Diego carried the dubious title of the “meth capital of the U.S.” Local media generally covered major methamphetamine lab and drug busts, but not much else about the methamphetamine situation.

In 1996, a number of county leaders established the San Diego County Methamphetamine Strike Force. The Strike Force made a clear decision to incorporate media advocacy as a central strategy and chose the Institute for Health Advocacy to lead the first year of its Media Action Team.

The Media Action Team realized that they could not dive into the solutions without first helping the community understand the impacts of the problem, thereby providing the needed justification for change. The first year's media work (December '96 – December '97) focused on “problem identification” to help the San Diego County residents understand how they were being directly impacted by methamphetamine problems in their communities. News activities were designed to draw out various impacts of the problem, such as the decrease in public safety or the drain on community resources.

To expose these impacts, the campaign asked involved community members to serve as spokespersons

on specific aspects of the issue. For example, one news event highlighted a successful program implemented by apartment owners and managers to weed out drug dealing, drug use and related crime in their complexes. This news event featured:

- the main organizer and other members of the apartment program
- members of the San Diego County Methamphetamine Strike Force
- a youth concerned about the problem
- residents who had seen improvements due to the new policies

- a community policing officer who witnessed a dramatic drop in crime
- the mayor
- a county supervisor

In the first year, the Strike Force garnered 154 news outputs (see chart). This proactive news generation work put the issue “on the map” for journalists, who began doing their own stories on methamphetamine.

The community demonstrated a dramatic increase in understanding as a result of this media advocacy work, and specific local policies to curb the use, production and dealing of methamphetamine were advanced.

SAN DIEGO METH STRIKE FORCE Media Coverage	
<i>News Media Stories by Type</i>	
(December 1996 to December 1997)	
<b>Print</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Radio</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>TV</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>154</b>

STRATEGIES

HOW TO

*Frame your story to improve content and accessibility*

**Creative Epidemiology** Using data in captivating, understandable ways. For example, piling up shoes to represent youths who died in the last year due to youth-on-youth violence.

**Localizing** Providing a local spokesperson and angle to a national story.

**Piggybacking** Making a connection between your issue and one that is already a hot news topic.

**Engaging Media Bites** Catchy statements which convey your point within 10 seconds.

**Excellent Written and Visual Materials** Including a well-written news release, a visually interesting location, and boards with graphs and objectives.

**Available, Interesting Spokespeople** Parents, children, medical professionals, etc.



Poway News Chieftan, Apr. 23, 1998

*Off the Beaten Path*

While network TV and the big regional newspaper may reach the largest audience they aren't the only means for being heard. At times, they may not even be the most strategic.

Consider your message, goals, timing and whom you are targeting. For early issue discussion and support building you may want to reach narrower audiences. Your issue may only be relevant to a neighborhood or other particular population.

Utilize neighborhood, college, lesbian & gay, ethnic and faith community newspapers. Work with community access cable TV stations and non-English language radio and as appropriate.



SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

**Qualities Reporters Look for in Stories**

Take a moment to consider these questions about your news story:

- Is the information timely?
- Does your story have proximity?
- Is there human interest? Built-in conflict?
- Is it unusual or off-the-beaten path?
- Is the source credible?
- Do you have the needed statistics?
- Do you have spokespeople who are impacted directly?
- Is it new or unique?
- Is this of concern for the report's audiences? How?

## MEDIA ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN STEPS

BEFORE YOU go out to get headlines, understand that excellent news work operates in the context of sound policy goal development, community organizing and data collection. In order to be effective with newsmaking, you must first develop the newsmaking content and infrastructure. Be sure to:

### 1. Develop Skills

Become knowledgeable in newsmaking through training, reading, obtaining technical assistance and practice.

### 2. Identify Partners

Ask yourself: who else cares about your issue? Who else is impacted by it? The answers to these questions will lead you to many individuals, organizations, public officials and agencies that share your views on an issue.

### 3. Identify Your Target Audience

At appropriate stages in the campaign, consider who can make the needed decision or behavior change and who has influence with them.

### 4. Gather Information on Your Issue

Data and other succinct, relevant facts and figures are needed for effective newsmaking. Statistics can make stories come alive and add considerable legitimacy to your issue.

### 5. Develop a Plan

Start with your issue and policy goals, establish a timeframe and objectives for your campaign, then develop an effective newsmaking plan to deliver needed messages to key targets over a period of time. This plan should include proactive media components as well as preparations for rapid response to news opportunities.

### 6. Train Participants

Provide training and technical assistance for staff, coalition members and other participants in your media advocacy process. Develop a group of spokespeople who can respond quickly.

### 7. Monitor Your Results

Track news output and get copies of print and TV coverage. Share results with key people for further impact.

### 8. Learn from Your Results

Consistently debrief as a group after every major news output to address what worked well and what could be improved.

## NEXT STEPS

*Prepare for success!*

For media advocacy workshops, trainings, and personalized consultation, contact:

RESOURCES

The EMT Group Inc. 916.983.6680  
www.emt.org

Institute for Health Advocacy 619.474.8844  
www.healthadvocacy.org

Berkeley Media Studies Group 510.642.1723  
bmsg@bmsg.org

Western CAPT 888.734.7476 www.unr.edu/westcapt/  
Dan Tomsky 619.474.8844 x15 dtomsky@iha-news.org  
Jeffrey Tufenkian 619.584.6462 jeffreyt@cts.com



LET'S HEAR FROM YOU!

We welcome readers' comments on topics presented. Call us at 916.983.6680, fax us at 916.983-6693, or send an email to erica@emt.org



*Media advocacy tells the story from the advocate's perspective. It focuses the spotlight of media attention on public health policy issues. Its concern with social justice, participation, and empowerment sets it apart from other media strategies.*

Lawrence Wallack, Ph.D.

prevention Tactics

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Editor Erica Fogle  
Writers Dan Tomsky and Jeffrey Tufenkian  
Copy Editor/Graphic Designer Jacqueline Kramm



Evaluation, Management and Training  
771 Oak Avenue Parkway, Suite 2  
Folsom, CA 95630-6802



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