

Sharing LGBTQ2IA+ Texans' Tobacco Prevention and Cessation Stories



Austin Public Health, Austin, Texas (<https://www.austintexas.gov/department/health>)

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Background

Austin Public Health's (APH) Breathe With Pride (BWP) program aims to reduce LGBTQ2IA+ communities' commercial tobacco use rates through tailored messaging on the risks of tobacco use, cessation benefits, and free, affirming resources. This story demonstrates the importance of collaborating with coalitions, stakeholders, and community partners when creating and disseminating public health campaigns for this community.

Challenges

Commercial tobacco use remains the leading preventable cause of death in Travis County. The Texas Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) survey (2015-2020) found that LGBT tobacco use rates were nearly 1.5 times higher than Travis County's general population. In 2021 researchers at University of Texas at Austin conducted focus groups for "LGBTQ2IA+ Community Health Needs Assessment" (CHNA), finding that 48% of participants felt that tobacco use is prevalent in LGBTQ2IA+ communities.¹ However, for community members who experience ongoing, immediate threats to their safety and wellbeing, prioritizing tobacco prevention and cessation is challenging.

The CHNA found that 52% of respondents reported stress as a trigger for tobacco use and 84% attempted to quit at least once. LGBTQ2IA+ individuals frequently experience barriers to seeking and accessing primary care, and only 8% of respondents knew of cessation resources available to them. Due to barriers and mistrust of healthcare systems and government entities among the diverse LGBTQ2IA+ community, it is important to be intentional about who is included in the creation and dissemination of campaigns and ensure that the resources being promoted are inclusive and affirming. Lastly, the constantly changing digital and social media landscapes and policies create challenges to target specific demographics for extended periods of time, requiring creative thinking to connect with the community.

Solutions to Challenges

BWP tackles tobacco prevention and cessation ambivalence in the LGBTQ2IA+ community by framing tobacco use as a social justice issue with systemic roots, leveraging relationships to feature local LGBTQ2IA+ community members in campaigns, and financially compensating participants.

In 2017 APH worked with a local media agency to film a PSA with Cynthia Lee Fontaine, an Austin-based drag performer. The PSA promotes SmokefreeTXT, a free text message-based cessation resource, and is available in English and Spanish.



Solutions to Challenges

In 2021 APH collaborated with a media agency to create two more PSAs starring community members with lived experience using and quitting tobacco products. BWP staff received feedback from their Coalition that shaped the content, setting, and tone of the PSAs.

The prevention PSA educates audiences about the predatory marketing and sponsorship tactics of the tobacco industry. The cessation PSA features Mr. Austin Pride 2022, Alexander the Great, sharing his motivations, resources, coping mechanisms, and the positive impact of quitting tobacco. Both videos direct audiences to the BWP website with more information and links to videos with English and Spanish subtitles.

Each campaign utilized different media platforms including radio, print, digital, streaming TV, and social media. In early 2023 APH partnered with local LGBTQ2IA+-serving organizations to promote the PSA on their social media. Unfortunately, due to hate-based comments, one organization had to remove their PSA post sooner than intended.

BWP used the same community-driven approach to create four posters that highlight similar topics discussed in the PSAs and effects of tobacco use on gender-affirming care, sexual health, and pleasure. So far posters have been delivered to over 300 businesses, organizations, and community spaces across Travis County and Texas universities.

Results

Since BWP is not a service provider and cannot measure the number of clients who have received services from existing tobacco prevention and cessation resources, one of the most effective ways to measure the program's reach is to look at metrics from paid and organic (unpaid) campaigns. The PSA campaign that ran from March-May 2022 had the highest budget of the three campaign runs and received a total of 1,207,588 impressions (i.e., non-unique views), through radio, print, digital, streaming TV, and social media.

[STORIES FROM THE FIELD]

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From May-December 2022, BWP shared over 20 posts on APH's Facebook page that received about 1,815 impressions. Approximately 14 of those posts were shared on APH's Instagram account, which has over 7,700 followers. Limitations in staffing capacity allowed for pulling metrics for five of those posts, which received about 3,440 impressions.

BWP has received feedback from community members and APH staff acknowledging the program's strong presence on social media. Media outlets will continue to be a cornerstone for program promotion. BWP staff has started working with APH's marketing team to track metrics on an ongoing basis. This will allow the program to adjust media plans as needed and increase the accuracy when reporting metrics for all media campaigns.

Lessons Learned

The process of creating and distributing meaningful, relevant, research-based health campaigns by and for the LGBTQ2IA+ community tends to be slow and weighted by many systemic and community factors. Risk factors inform BWP's work with LGBTQ2IA+ communities, but these campaigns aim to highlight community strengths and stories to encourage people to find tobacco prevention and cessation resources.

Staff working with LGBTQ2IA+ communities should bring experience, knowledge of community spaces and dynamics, and skills to build and maintain relationships with organizations, coalitions, and individuals to ensure campaigns align with community needs and reflect its vibrancy and diversity.

Additionally, staff should be prepared to adjust strategies to protect the people and messages featured in their campaigns and optimize use of ever-changing media platforms. For example, to mitigate the risk of campaigns receiving hate-based comments that disrupt their primary health message, BWP is shifting paid campaigns from social media to a digital platform (e.g. banner advertisements on websites). Other City and County health departments can use these strategies to replicate similar projects that resonate with LGBTQ2IA+ communities in their area. Together, we can pave the way for healthier, safer, and more joyful futures for our communities.

Link to more details: [LGBTQIA+-Live Tobacco-Free Austin \(livetobaccofreeaustin.org\)](https://livetobaccofreeaustin.org)

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