

THE REAL COST: RESEARCH + EVALUATION

“The Real Cost” campaign is grounded in scientific research and uses evidence-based practices proven to reduce youth tobacco use.

FDA’s youth tobacco prevention campaign, “The Real Cost,” is based on a robust body of evidence that supports the use of mass media campaigns to prevent and reduce youth tobacco use. Some of this evidence is derived from state and national youth tobacco prevention campaigns as well as youth-focused health campaigns on topics other than tobacco. Campaign efforts are informed by recognized best practices for mass media campaigns, lessons learned from previous efforts to educate the public about tobacco, and FDA’s own research.

Formative Research

FDA conducted extensive research to develop effective outreach strategies and messaging to reach “The Real Cost” target audiences. These efforts included:

- Comprehensive literature reviews and target audience analyses to identify and refine our target audiences;
- Consultation with experts in tobacco public health education, marketing, and campaign development;
- Focus groups with members of each target audience to identify promising messages, and assess their perceptions of draft advertising concepts; and
- Testing of near-final TV advertisements with members of each target audience to measure perceived effectiveness, levels of engagement, and message comprehension, and to check for any unintended consequences.

Campaign Evaluation

FDA’s goal is to reduce the number of youth ages 12–17 who use cigarettes and smokeless tobacco.

FDA hired an independent research firm, RTI, to conduct large, multi-year outcome evaluation studies to measure the campaign’s success in changing tobacco-related attitudes, beliefs and behaviors among youth. The first outcome evaluation study found that 89% of youth were aware of at least one campaign ad 7 months from launch, and “The Real Cost” positively influenced tobacco-related risk perceptions and beliefs specific to campaign messages after 15 months.^{1,2} Most notably, final results from the first study indicate that exposure to “The Real Cost” from 2014–2016 was associated with a 30% decrease in the risk for smoking initiation, preventing an estimated 350,000 U.S. youth ages 11–18 from smoking.² A separate outcome evaluation study specific to smokeless tobacco use is underway.

AD COPY TESTING

Research results indicated the near-final TV advertisements provided understandable and engaging messages about the harms of tobacco use without potential unintended adverse or counterproductive message effects.

Testing indicated all the ads would likely lead to increased negative feelings about tobacco use, decreased intention to initiate, and increased intention to quit using tobacco products.

EVALUATION RESEARCH

Evaluation results will be used to assess changes in tobacco-related knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, intentions, and behaviors over time. The studies will focus on behavior change associated with cigarette use and behavioral intentions around the use of smokeless tobacco among youth ages 12–17.

Last Updated March 2017
RC-11-R1



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www.fda.gov/therealcost

Sources:

¹ Duke J, Alexander T, Zhao X, et al. Youth’s awareness of and reactions to The Real Cost national tobacco public education campaign. *PLoS ONE*. 2015;10(12):e0144827.

² Farrelly MC, Duke JC, Nonnemaker J, et al. Association Between The Real Cost Media Campaign and Smoking Initiation Among Youths — United States, 2014–2016. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)* 2017;66:47–50. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6602a2>.