

# Social marketing is best option for helping consumers navigate new health care system, study says

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New research out of the University of Utah (the U) David Eccles School of Business shows social marketing tools are crucial to the success of health care providers in their efforts to help consumers navigate the new Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA.)

The research paper led and co-authored by Marketing Professor Debra Scammon titled “Transforming Consumer Health” was published in the June issue of the *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*.

The paper highlights some of the potential challenges [consumers](#) face as a result of initiatives implemented in response to the PPACA and suggests ways [health care](#) providers, [policy makers](#) and health care marketers can best prepare consumers to meet them. After examining three consumer barriers – understanding, decision-making, and maintenance of healthy behaviors – Scammon advocates that [social marketing](#) is the best way to segment health consumers and then identify the specific challenges faced by each segment.

Social marketing is a method that has been used successfully in health care. It seeks to influence social behaviors of target audiences that impact the general society, but it doesn’t immediately benefit the consumer or directly benefit the marketer. Examples of social marketing campaigns include The TRUTH anti-smoking campaign, RED awareness effort for AIDS and the Presidential Fitness nutrition and exercise

initiative.

“In order for consumers to successfully navigate the evolving health care space, providers and policy makers are going to have to provide consumer education,” says Scammon. “The success of the PPACA relies heavily on the willingness of consumers to participate in a variety of health care initiatives. In order to ensure this participation, there will need to be a series of public policies and efforts enacted that educate the public on their health care options and motivate them to engage in healthy behaviors. We believe the most effective way to achieve this is for health care marketers, providers and policy makers to initiate innovative social marketing strategies.”

In addition to her work as the Emma Eccles Jones Professor of Marketing at the University of Utah, Scammon has been a marketing research consultant for the Federal Trade Commission. She focuses on research related to consumers’ abilities to navigate the marketplace, and their perceptions of and reactions to risk. Her current work is funded by grants from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. Scammon is director of the Masters of Healthcare Administration program offered through the David Eccles School of Business.

Provided by University of Utah

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