

Youth tobacco prevention media campaign reaches record levels of awareness

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A statewide media campaign designed to reduce and prevent teen tobacco use has reached record levels of awareness, with 80 percent of North Carolina youth indicating familiarity with the campaign ads, according to preliminary results from a 2011 evaluation by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Medicine researchers.

“A wide reaching media campaign is an essential piece of inoculating our [youth](#) against tobacco use,” said Dr. Adam Goldstein, Professor of Family Medicine and Director of the UNC Tobacco Prevention and Evaluation Program, which led the study. “Record levels of campaign awareness indicate that the campaign has reached North Carolina youth with a successful prevention message.”

Key preliminary findings of the 2011 evaluation include:

- Between 2004 and 2011, awareness of the TRU campaign ads significantly increased from 48 percent to 80 percent, and over 680,000 youths (11 to 17) in NC have now seen and are aware of the TRU campaign. This record level of awareness suggests that the campaign awareness is reaching levels observed in other state media campaigns that have successfully reduced youth smoking.
- More than 94 percent of NC youths who had seen the TRU ads reported they were attention grabbing and convincing, and more than 98 percent said the ads gave good reasons not to smoke.
- Awareness of older ads from the campaign remains high, with nearly 70 percent of youth aware of campaign ads that aired between 2004 and

2010. Newer campaign ads appear to reinforce the campaign's effective prevention message.

- Thirty-five percent of youth report awareness of a tobacco prevention group active in their school or community; among youth who did not report a group presence, 58 percent indicated interest in joining a group if one were available.

The campaign, called "Tobacco.Reality.Unfiltered." or TRU, is sponsored by the North Carolina Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF), which faces elimination as of June 30th if the current budget proposal becomes law. Researchers point to the experience of other states where tobacco prevention programs have been defunded and youth smoking rates have subsequently increased, suggesting that the gains achieved by the TRU campaign will be reversed if the campaign ads disappear from the air on July 1.

"Losing an effective media campaign like TRU campaign will be a major setback to the youth in North Carolina and our war to prevent cancer," adds Dr. Leah Ranney, Associate Director of the UNC Tobacco Prevention and Evaluation Program.

North Carolina's Teen Tobacco Use Prevention and Cessation Initiative, funded by the HWTF, has included a statewide [media campaign](#) since 2004. Previous evaluations of the TRU campaign have shown that it is an integral part of the overall initiative and has played a substantial role in achieving historically low levels of youth smoking. TRU campaign ads feature real North Carolinians sharing their stories of the negative toll tobacco has taken on their lives. The current campaign ads feature Destini, a teenage girl from Winston Salem who lost her father to lung cancer, and Justin, a young father from Raleigh who died from lung cancer in November of 2010.

Goldstein has led several previous evaluations of the TRU campaign.

The Survey Research Unit at UNC conducts telephone interviews with youth ages 11 – 17 across North Carolina. A baseline survey was conducted in March and April of 2004, with follow up surveys immediately after the fall 2004 ad campaign, immediately after the fall 2005 campaign, in 2007, four months after the major funding increase for the campaign and in January 2009, six months after the launch of a new series of ads. The latest evaluation survey began in January 2011, four months after the launch of the new campaign ads featuring Destini and Justin. The TRU ads are available online at www.realityunfiltered.com/index.aspx .

More information: www.healthwellnc.com/TRU.aspx

Provided by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Medicine

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