

'Long tail' thinking can help eliminate health disparities

October 23 2014, by Neil Schoenherr

"Long tail" thinking in public health might yield greater progress in eliminating health disparities, according to a new study from the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis.

The long tail strategy is one many new businesses employ, recognizing that selling small quantities of many niche items can be more profitable than selling a few blockbuster items.

The concept was popularized in Chris Anderson's 2006 book, "The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business is Selling Less of More."

Researchers from the Brown School's Health Communication Research Laboratory (HCRL) and Social Systems Design Lab examined data from more than 500 [health agencies](#) in 47 states who used the HCRL's Make It Your Own (MIYO) system to create small media and client reminders that promoted colorectal cancer (CRC) screening.

MIYO products in the long tail were significantly more likely to target racial and ethnic minorities with higher rates of CRC and lower rates of screening, researchers found.

"Long tail thinking and advances in technology have opened a promising new path to achieve progress for vulnerable populations," said lead author, Matthew W. Kreuter, PhD, associate dean for [public health](#) at the Brown School, the Kahn Family Professor of Public Health and senior scientist in the HCRL.

"In fact, long tail thinking could help improve the public's [health](#) and eliminate disparities," said Kreuter, who also is a scholar in the university's Institute for Public Health.

The findings were published online Oct. 16 in the *American Journal of Public Health*.

More information: Matthew W. Kreuter, Peter Hovmand, Debbie J. Pfeiffer, Maggie Fairchild, Suchitra Rath, Balaji Golla, and Chris Casey. (2014). "The 'Long Tail' and *Public Health*: New Thinking for Addressing Health Disparities." *American Journal of Public Health*. e-View Ahead of Print.. [DOI: 10.2105/AJPH.2014.302039](https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2014.302039)

Provided by Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis

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