

Youth-oriented mental health campaign shows evidence of success

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A community engagement campaign launched by Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health to address mental health barriers had an impressive reach with the younger audience it targeted and showed signs of changing attitudes, according to a new RAND Corporation evaluation.

The county's WhyWeRise campaign targeted people aged 14 to 24 to encourage them to engage with [mental health issues](#) and create a movement to lower barriers to mental [health](#) access.

RAND investigators found that people who were exposed to the campaign were more likely to express support toward people with mental illness. In addition, a countywide survey of youth found that people who were exposed to a campaign event in person or online were more likely to feel empowered and mobilized toward mental health activism.

"The campaign was intended to elevate mental health as a civil rights issue and leverage youth enthusiasm for activism as a way to create social change," said Rebecca L. Collins, the study's lead author and a senior behavioral scientist at RAND, a nonprofit research organization. "Our findings show that they reached an impressive proportion of the target audience and seem to have influenced people's attitudes toward mental health."

In May of this year, the Los Angeles Angeles County Department of Mental Health launched a campaign intended to promote community engagement with mental health issues and create a movement to

advocate for well-being and address barriers to quality treatment for [mental health problems](#).

The centerpiece of the campaign was the WeRise event that ran for three weeks in downtown Los Angeles where visitors could experience an immersive art gallery, rally, performances, panel discussions and workshops about mental health issues.

The effort was part of the the county's prevention and early intervention efforts supported by the Mental Health Services Act, which was passed by voters in 2004 and created a special tax on high income residents to support mental health services and education. Funds support treatment for individuals with mental illness, but a portion is set aside for prevention and early intervention.

"Most people who face mental health problems either do not seek treatment or delay seeking help," Collins said. "It's important that we address the reasons why most young people with mental health problems don't get appropriate diagnosis and treatment so that we can change that pattern."

RAND evaluated the campaign by interviewing people who took part in the event, conducting an online survey of more than 1,000 youth from throughout Los Angeles County and analyzing Twitter data from Los Angeles users on the topic of mental health before and the during the campaign.

The online survey found that as many as one in five young people in the targeted age group were aware of WeRise or WhyWeRise within just a few weeks after the campaign was launched. In addition, discussion of WeRise was frequent within a Twitter community that discussed common mental health topics.

The survey also found that youth who reported exposure to the campaign were more aware of the challenges faced by people with mental illness and more likely to know how to get help with mental health challenges.

While the RAND study suggests the campaign had early successes, researchers say the effort could do more to engage men, younger audiences and people who do not already have a connection to mental health.

Leaders of WhyWeRise also could build stronger online connections with other social justice-oriented communities that are also on social media, and sustain the campaign for a longer period of time because public attitudes tend to change slowly.

"The WhyWeRise [campaign](#) is one of many efforts that are ongoing across California to increase awareness of [mental health](#) issues and ease barriers to getting treatment," Collins said. "These efforts are most likely to make lasting changes if they are sustained over time."

More information: The report, "Evaluation of Los Angeles County's Mental Health Community Engagement Campaign," is available at www.rand.org

Provided by RAND Corporation

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