

# Diverse spokespeople and humor: How Aussie ad campaigns could boost COVID vaccine uptake

June 16 2021, by Jessica Kaufman

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

The federal government [recently indicated](#) it will launch a new COVID-19 vaccine advertising campaign in July, targeting younger Australians under 40.

To date, federal vaccine promotion efforts have not been particularly engaging, perhaps due to an over-reliance on [consulting firms](#) over vaccine social science [researchers](#). But news of a revitalized campaign is welcome, and could offer a chance to change course.

In our recent Victorian [COVID-19 Vaccine Preparedness Study](#), we looked at the vaccine-related intentions, concerns and information needs of people prioritized in phases 1a and 1b of the rollout.

The results are yet to be published in a peer-reviewed journal. But drawing on our findings, as well as peer-reviewed research in this area, here's what we want to see in any upcoming COVID vaccination campaign.

## **1. Diverse spokespeople**

The diversity of Australia should be reflected in the spokespeople delivering messages around COVID vaccination, through both broad and tailored campaigns. Research shows we're more likely to trust people who [look like us](#), which means we need spokespeople from different ethnic backgrounds, of different ages, and with different body shapes.

While it was encouraging to see Channel 9 using its platform to promote COVID-19 vaccination, their cast was rightly criticized for being [entirely white](#). They were also all able-bodied and generally homogenous.

Our research also found members of the public wanted to hear about the COVID-19 vaccines [from real people](#)—not politicians. They wanted to hear how people like them made the decision to be vaccinated, what it was like getting the vaccine and what the side effects were afterwards.

## 2. Humor and emotion

I DON'T CARE THAT IT'S IN FRENCH PUT IT ON  
AUSTRALIAN TELEVISIONS NOW PLEASE  
<https://t.co/mmEiYkBb9U>

— Health Nerd (@GidMK) [June 11, 2021](#)

It seems like the COVID-19 vaccine advertisements that have been shared most widely in Australia are actually from other countries, like the [United Kingdom](#), [Singapore](#), [New Zealand](#) and [France](#).

This is a shame, but it's not surprising, when you compare these funny, entertaining messages with the relatively dry [Australian ads](#). The Singapore ad is colorful, musical and a little bit bonkers. But amid the silliness, it still manages to highlight key messages like "don't wait and see" and "low cases isn't no cases."

The more engaging the messaging is, the more widely it will be shared. And we need information about the vaccine rollout to reach as many people as possible.

## 3. Avoid scare tactics

Some people have been [calling](#) for fear-based campaigns to scare people into vaccinating. This kind of campaign might include, for example, footage of people with severe COVID or scary statistics about COVID-related deaths or serious illness in Australia or overseas.

However, fear-based messages to promote vaccines can actually [backfire](#), increasing fear of vaccine side effects. Fear [campaigns](#) can also stigmatize people who have concerns, questions, or simply face

challenges accessing vaccines. This makes it harder to bridge the gap with those who are hesitant.

Fear messaging can also make people angry and erode trust in the messengers. Trust in the public health system is crucial to support vaccine uptake—and we can't afford to damage this as it's very hard to build and easy to lose.

## **What else do we need?**

Barriers to vaccine uptake for any group are likely to be a mix of acceptance and access factors. So while a diverse, engaging communication campaign is clearly needed, this should be implemented alongside other evidence-based strategies to bolster vaccine acceptance and uptake.

## **Nudges**

Behavioral "nudges" are simple ways to encourage vaccination. A recent [study](#) from the United States found the most effective nudge to increase influenza vaccine uptake was a text message sent to people before a regular GP appointment, indicating a flu vaccine was reserved and waiting for them.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration has recently clarified people in Australia could also be offered [incentives](#) to vaccinate. In other countries, incentives have included anything from [a free beer](#) to a lottery ticket.

## **Community engagement**

Outreach and face-to-face engagement may be more effective than TV

or social media campaigns for many groups, particularly culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

Training community, faith and industry leaders to become vaccine champions enables communication messages to reach more people in a targeted, culturally appropriate way. People want to discuss concerns with their community leaders and communities, where there is the greatest trust.

## **Support for health-care workers**

GPs, nurses and pharmacists are at the coalface of the vaccine rollout, discussing COVID-19 vaccines with people every day. Health-care workers in [our study](#) said they wanted resources like decision aids and pictorial representations of risk and benefits to support personalized discussions with people with varying levels of health literacy.

It's also time we considered Medicare item numbers for GPs separate to vaccine administration, to support the [additional time spent addressing hesitancy](#).

## **Improved accessibility**

Improving access to COVID-19 vaccines is crucial to increase uptake. In addition to securing adequate vaccine supply and clearly communicating where and when vaccines are available, the booking systems need to be simplified and streamlined. In Victoria, the phone booking system [crashed](#) as soon as the government announced people aged 40-49 were eligible.

## **Data**

Finally, we need better [data](#) about [vaccine](#) uptake, concerns and barriers faced by different groups. This will allow us to better target communication and other strategies.

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