

FOLIC
ACID

It's never too early ...

Community Action Guide



www.folicacid.ca


Spirit. Breakthrough & Hope
Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus
Association of Ontario



Dear Community Partner,

I'm pleased to share this updated **Folic Acid Community Action Guide** with you—a resource you can use to help spread the word about folic acid to women in your community.

Neural tube defects (NTDs) affect 1 in every 1,300 births in Canada and taking folic acid each day can help reduce the risk of having a baby with an NTD by as much as 70%.

Yet research shows only 42% of women in Ontario between the ages of 18 and 40 know that folic acid can help prevent this type of birth defect in children. And only 38% know that folic acid must be taken *before* getting pregnant to be effective.

The Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Association of Ontario worked with other partners in 2002 to develop a public education and awareness campaign to target women of childbearing age through advertising, posters, pamphlets, public service announcements, and a website at www.folicacid.ca. The Community Action Guide was originally developed at that time. This is an updated version that will provide you and your team with the tools and resources you need to support our efforts to enhance awareness, increase the percentage of women taking a daily multivitamin containing folic acid, and reduce the number of children born with an NTD.

Enclosed you will find guidelines to planning events, tips for dealing with media, and ideas about getting support from the community. We can also provide you with educational materials to help you deliver the folic acid message to your community.

3 % of all newborns in Canada are born with some type of birth defect, representing a personal tragedy for each child and that child's family. Some defects are treatable. Others are not. Residual health concerns can affect the quality of life, impose chronic disabilities, and carry with them social, financial and psychological burdens.

**You can make a difference. Spread the word to women in your community:
"Folic acid It's never too early..."**

Thank you in advance for your help.

Sincerely,

Joan Booth
Executive Director
Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Association of Ontario

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Forward

The Folic Acid Awareness Community Action Guide outlines various ways you can design, develop, deliver and evaluate a folic acid public awareness campaign in your community. You can take many different approaches to reach women with messages about folic acid and the benefits of taking a daily multivitamin that contains it.

The guide has been designed to be general in nature so that it can be used by many different community organizations across Ontario. In addition to the poster, pamphlet and magnet templates, there is background information about the campaign and about folic acid, and a step-by-step process for planning and implementing your own local events along with sample activities, tips and other tools.

Background Information

The lifetime implications for those born with neural tube defects (NTDs) such as spina bifida and anencephaly, and for their families, can be challenging. Not only can these defects impose chronic disabilities; they can affect quality of life. Effective, consistent folic acid education that encourages adequate consumption of this simple B vitamin can reduce the incidence of NTDs by as much as 70%.

The **Folic Acid: It's never too early ...** public awareness and education campaign has two key goals:

- to increase the number of women taking a daily multivitamin containing folic acid; and
- to ensure all health professionals are recommending adequate consumption of folic acid and are providing consistent information to all female clients and patients of childbearing age.

In addition to advertising and outreach to health professionals, the Community Action Guide was developed to reach out to members of the public to provide ideas and activities you can pull together to reinforce the folic acid message in your community.

Using the campaign materials, we hope you can develop, deliver and evaluate local activities that will increase awareness of birth defects and how folic acid can help reduce the risk of NTDs – keeping in mind that your community is unique from any other, with particular strengths, capacities and needs. The activities you decide to implement should suit the needs of the women in your area and match the resources available to you.

Community involvement is critical.

Although the vast majority of Ontario women have heard about folic acid, many of them still don't understand that folic acid is beneficial to pregnant women, that it needs to be taken before conception in order to help reduce the risk of NTDs, and that federal and provincial health authorities continue to stress that 0.4 mg of folic acid each day remains a critical step in reducing the risk of NTDs.

We hope that you will help us share the message about folic acid with women in your community, and help ensure health professionals in your area have received folic acid information from Health Canada, and from us.

You don't need to be an expert in folic acid or NTDs to help by organizing local community activities that promote awareness and consumption of folic acid. You just need to spread the word, make a difference and be a part of this campaign. Even simple activities will have a positive impact.



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You can follow the steps outlined for each activity without a lot of resources, experience or help – but you don't have to work alone. We're happy to help you get started, and if you visit a health professional in your area who hasn't received any folic acid information from Health Canada or from us, you can give them our contact information and a copy of [Information for Health Professionals](#) that is summarized below:

Information for Health Professionals

Summary of *Preconception Health: Folic Acid for the Primary Prevention of Neural Tube Defects*, Health Canada, 2002.

What are neural tube defects (NTDs)?

NTDs such as spina bifida and anencephaly are congenital anomalies that place the families of infants with these conditions under a considerable burden of care and carry significant monetary costs for society. The national birth prevalence has been decreasing: from 11.6 per 10,000 total births (live and stillbirths) in 1989 to 7.5 per 10,000 in 1997 (260 births per year). Most NTDs are multifactorial in origin, resulting from a combined effect of genetic and environmental factors. During periods of drought, famine and war the rate of NTDs strikingly increases, and during periods of prosperity it declines.

Can NTDs be prevented?

There is clear evidence that periconceptional use of supplements containing folic acid substantially reduces the risk of occurrence and recurrence of this condition by as much as 70%, and possibly of other congenital anomalies. Studies have shown that at least half the number of cases of NTDs can be prevented if women consume sufficient amounts of folic acid before conception and during early pregnancy. Although the specific effect of folic acid on the developing fetus is not clear, we do know that this micronutrient is necessary for the synthesis of nucleic acids and amino acids, and for cell division.

What advice should be given to women about folic acid?

It is recommended that daily folic acid supplementation be started at least two (2) to three (3) months before conception and continued throughout the first trimester of pregnancy. Since many pregnancies are unplanned, women who could become pregnant should also take this daily supplement. The following points need to be considered when recommending a supplement:

- Choose a multivitamin supplement that contains 0.4 mg of folic acid in a daily dose.
- The use of products labeled "for therapeutic use only" is unnecessary.
- Avoid supplements that contain herbs and other "non-medicinal ingredients."
- Try to select a product containing vitamin A as beta-carotene rather than retinol (as high doses of retinol have been found to cause several types of birth defects).
- Women should not take more than one daily dose, as indicated on the product label.

Although white flour, enriched pasta and cornmeal have been fortified with folic acid, the resulting increase in folic acid intake does not reach the levels found to be protective in intervention studies.

Does this advice apply to all women?

Women in high-risk groups may need to take a higher amount of folic acid. Those with close relatives who have an NTD are at greater risk, as are women with a previous child with this condition (3% to 5% risk for another affected pregnancy). Other risk factors include poorly controlled maternal diabetes mellitus, maternal epilepsy and obesity.



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Research has shown that among women with a previous NTD-affected pregnancy, 4.0 - 5.0 mg per day of folic acid (only available at this amount through prescription) taken in the periconceptual period reduces the risk of recurrence by 72%. For women with diabetes mellitus, the benefits of higher doses of folic acid (i.e., > 0.4 mg) are unknown; optimal glycemic control is recommended. There is evidence that women with epilepsy may benefit from a dose of 4.0 mg folic acid daily in the periconceptual period, and if they are taking carbamazepine or valproic acid as anticonvulsant medication (both considered to be related to a higher risk of NTDs). These drugs might be replaced with others.

Although low maternal vitamin B12 status is a risk factor for NTDs, this cannot be remedied with folic acid.

How safe is folic acid?

There are few safety concerns; however, folic acid may adversely affect untreated vitamin B12 deficiency. For this reason, physicians need to be on the alert for undiagnosed B12 deficiency arising from particular diets, pernicious anemia, celiac sprue and inflammatory bowel disorder. All women given high doses of folic acid (i.e., > 1.0 mg daily) need to be evaluated for possible vitamin B12 deficiency.

Folic Acid Fast Facts

Q: What is folic acid?

A: Folic acid is a B vitamin that can help reduce the risk of neural tube defects (NTDs) by more than 70% if taken three months before conception and during the first trimester.

Q: What are NTDs?

A: NTDs are serious birth defects caused when the tissues that form the brain and spinal cord fail to develop properly.

Q: When do NTDs occur?

A: NTDs occur during the first four weeks after conception – before most women even know they're pregnant.

Q: Who should take folic acid?

A: All women who could become pregnant should take a daily multivitamin containing a minimum of 0.4 milligrams (mg) of folic acid. Since almost half of all pregnancies in Canada are unplanned, and NTDs occur before a woman even knows she's pregnant, all women of childbearing age should take folic acid.

Q: When should a woman take folic acid?

A: It's never too early to start taking folic acid. To help significantly reduce the risk of NTDs, a woman should take a daily multivitamin containing a minimum 0.4 mg of folic acid at least three months prior to conception and throughout the first three months of pregnancy.

Q: How much folic acid should a woman take?

A: Women should take a daily multivitamin containing at least 0.4 mg of folic acid. Women with a high risk for having a baby with an NTD should take more, based on a recommendation from a health professional. (4.0-5.0 mg)

Q: Where can a woman get folic acid?

A: In addition to taking a daily multivitamin, women should eat a healthy diet that includes



foods high in folic acid like broccoli, asparagus, lentils and orange juice, and foods fortified with folic acid such as grain products, flour and cereals.

Q: Can a woman get all the folic acid she needs from food?

A: No. Even the best food choices will not supply all the folic acid needed. To reach the required intake, a woman must take a multivitamin containing at least 0.4 mg of folic acid each day.

Planning and Implementing Local Activities

This section will take you through a step-by-step process to develop and implement local folic acid awareness activities. We encourage you to read through each step and incorporate as many of the helpful ideas and suggestions as possible. Not everyone will be able to follow all of the steps, so remember: It's not essential to do everything outlined to make a difference. Any effort is better than no effort at all.

Building a Team

Community-wide activities benefit from varied insights, energy and resources, and a group that is representative of the community. Diverse collaboration and partnerships will enhance the credibility of your efforts in the eyes of the community.

Identify groups, individuals and organizations that have an interest in women or children's health. Think about people you have worked with on other projects. Be sure to include people from other areas of expertise (e.g., the media or a communications officer at your local Public Health Unit). Make a list of places where women in your community meet, work, shop or gather for recreational activities. Your list might include community health and fitness centres, childcare facilities, churches, libraries, weight loss groups and even grocery stores. Also think about non-profit organizations such as the Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Association of Ontario (SB&H), as well as local hospitals, doctors, nurses, dieticians and other health professionals, and local politicians who may be willing to proclaim a Folic Acid Week in your community.

Since this task can be overwhelming, think strategically about who should be involved and what they might be able to contribute. Try to build a team of people who can bring different perspectives, skills and resources. Contact people and organizations in person if possible or arrange for a group meeting and invite a number of organizations.

How you organize your group is not as important as getting organized period. At your first meeting, you may decide to form a planning committee to coordinate all activities while other committees actually "do" the work. Alternatively, you may find that one group that "does everything" is the answer in your community. Recognize that each agency or individual involved will have different skills, preferences and amounts of time to offer. To figure out who can do what, distribute the Activity List Worksheets (on the next page) and ask each attendee to fill it out.

At your initial meeting, review the **Folic Acid: It's never too early** campaign details at www.folicacid.ca, as well as this Community Action Guide. Be prepared to explain your reasons for wanting to launch a campaign, and have some statistics (including local ones) and case studies ready so you can easily communicate the importance of the cause and earn the respect and dedication of those gathered around the table. Before you're done, you want to be sure you obtain a commitment from potential partners to work together.



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Activity List Worksheets

STEP ONE: Building a Team – How do I get started?

Possible Activity List for Organizations

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Please check anywhere you can help in the following:

Planning Stage

- Join a folic acid program development committee.
- Assess community health issues and other resources.
- Collect data to help target women for the program.
- Identify health and other organizations and media outlets in the community.
- Identify available and appropriate folic acid communication materials.
- Help pre-test materials.

Partnering

- Recruit volunteers, organizations, and media to participate in the program and/or to provide “in-kind” contributions to printing, collating, mailing services, public service space, or media costs.
- Provide marketing data about women.
- Help raise funds.
- Contribute staff or volunteer time.
- Produce messages and materials.

Implementation

- Provide room space for meetings and activities.
- Organize or participate in attention-getting events such as health fairs and press conferences.
- Prepare news releases.
- Prepare exhibits for public places such as shopping malls, building lobbies, schools and public libraries.
- Distribute materials.
- Write letters.
- Publish articles in newsletters.
- Sponsor presentations.
- Offer individual counselling.
- Provide a recognized, credible spokesperson.
- Provide media interviews.





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Evaluations

- Provide technical assistance with program evaluation or data analysis.
- Provide computer or manual services for tracking the program.
- Identify and train other organizations interested in becoming involved.
- Follow up by telephone with participants to ensure their continued involvement.
- Serve on “thank you” committees.

Other:





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STEP TWO: Obstacles and Solutions – What are the needs in my community?

Valuable Questions	Where You Might Find Answers	Who Will Find the Answers (Name of Team Member)	Result
Do women of childbearing years know about folic acid, its role in preventing NTDs, how much to take, how to get it and when to take it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - look at the Folic Acid Questionnaire for Women (at www.folicacid.ca) - interview health professionals - conduct focus groups 		
How can you communicate with your target group in your community?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consult with local newspapers, radio stations, TV stations, etc. to identify the best media to use to communicate to your target group - talk to partners to see if they have contacts 		
What are the characteristics of women in their childbearing years in your community (e.g., occupation, ethnicity, recreational activities)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - conduct focus groups - check the City website for demographics and statistics - see if hospitals have some records of women in your community - check out Statistics Canada 		
What are local health professionals offering on folic acid education?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - conduct focus groups - survey health professionals - visit doctor's offices and pharmacies 		
What current activities or programs support or promote folic acid in your community?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - check with public health units - ask at hospitals - talk to community agencies or organizations that have contact with women 		
How many women of childbearing age take a supplement containing at least 0.4 mg of folic acid?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - conduct focus groups - ask pharmacists - look up statistics of multivitamin sales from companies - survey women 		





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STEP THREE: Making a Plan – Part One – What activities will meet those needs?

GOAL	
OBJECTIVE	
TARGET AUDIENCE(S)	
APPROACH(ES)	
ACTIVITY / ACTIVITIES	
EVALUATION	

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STEP FOUR: Making a Plan – Part Two – Tool for Setting Objectives

Today	At the End of the Campaign





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STEP FIVE: Resources – What tools do I need to implement my activity?

Activity	Partner Responsible	Start Date	Finish Date	Resources Needed





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STEP SEVEN: Evaluation – Part Two – How did I do?

Objective	Potential Indicators



Evaluations

- Provide technical assistance with program evaluation or data analysis.
- Provide computer or manual services for tracking the program.
- Identify and train other organizations interested in becoming involved.
- Follow up by telephone with participants to ensure their continued involvement.
- Serve on “thank you” committees.

Other:

Obstacles and Solutions

Before planning can begin, it is a good idea to gather some basic information about your community, the women in it, and the current situation related to folic acid and NTDs. This information will help you to determine which activities will make a difference in your area and to assess the impact of your efforts at the end of your campaign.

To understand what activities will be most successful in your community, make a list of what you know about your community, identify what you need to find out and where you can look for answers using the “What Are the Needs in My Community” worksheet on page 13. Find or gather local statistics by asking women in your area some “Key Questions” to determine what they know about folic acid and NTDs. If you want to do more intensive research, you can also look into the number of local births annually and the local rates of NTDs, and whether health professionals know about the benefits of folic acid.

Once you understand your audience – what they know, what they like, what they do – it will be much easier to figure out how to communicate with them in a successful and meaningful way. You can also refer to our “Reality Check ” document to help you pick dates to avoid and some to consider to ensure greater success.



Key Questions

Once you understand your audience – what they know, what they like, what they do – it will be much easier to figure out how to communicate with them in a successful and meaningful way.

The most important things to know about your audience...

1. What is important to them (e.g., health, family, work)?
2. Where do they spend their money and time?
3. What do they do for fun?
4. Where do they go to shop?
5. What do they listen to, watch and read?
6. Where do they get their news and information?

Of course, you should also ask them what they know about folic acid, whether they take a multivitamin, etc. To help you collect that information, see the “What Are the Needs in My Community” chart on page 13.

Reality Check

Once you gather all the information you can about women in your community, take some time for a reality check. Take the pulse of your community. The message you create may be perfect for your audience, but when you send the message can make all the difference in its success.

Here is a list of good and bad times to send out your message or plan your activity.

DO plan an activity to occur	DO NOT plan an activity to occur
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Anytime in support of our Folic Acid: It’s Never Too Early campaign ● During Family Day in February ● Tied in with International Women’s Day on March 8 ● During Nutrition Month in March ● Tied in with Mother’s Day in May ● Tied in with National Kids Day in May ● Tied in with Canada Health Day in May ● During Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Awareness Month in June ● During Safe Kids Week in June ● During World Breastfeeding Week in August ● During National Family Week in October 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● During a community crisis like the Walkerton E-coli crisis (because any other message will seem irrelevant) ● During an international crisis like the events of September 11 (again because any other message will be irrelevant) ● During an election (as community communications will be lost in the crowd) ● During a school strike (because most teachers are women and mothers and will be affected by the children’s upheaval in school)

If these events don’t occur in your community, talk to your City or Town Council and try to get them to launch and support a Nutrition Week or Women’s Week. See if they can support your efforts with supplies, printing, venues or money.



Timing!

Remember, by coordinating your activity with other events in your community, you will multiply the power of your message and increase your chances of communicating with your audience.

Making a Plan

Taking the time to develop a clear understanding of what you want to accomplish will keep you on track and clarify what kind of impact you want to have in your community. Drafting a plan also makes it easier to share your vision with others, provide a record of where you began and help you get a clear picture of the amount of effort your program will require. It should contain a clear goal, at least one objective, at least one target audience, an approach, at least one activity, and an evaluation. You can use our “Planning Chart” on the next page to help get you started, and have a look at our “Sample Plan for Folic Acid Community Awareness” on page 24.

The goal is what all of your activities and efforts should strive to achieve. Our overall goal is to reduce the number of pregnancies affected by NTDs by promoting folic acid consumption.

Objectives should help you reach that overall goal and should be SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely. Identifying the current situation in your community and thinking about what change or difference you’d like to see in four months can help you set the objectives you’ll work towards. Based on what you find out about your selected group(s) of women and your community, set one or more appropriate objectives. One of our objectives is to increase the number of women who take a multivitamin containing a minimum of 0.4 mg of folic acid.

In terms of a target audience, our overarching primary target group is women between the ages of 18 and 45. Depending on the information you gather about women in your community, you may be able to identify one or more specific target groups to concentrate on; e.g., women between the ages of 18 and 24 if they are a predominant group. Your efforts will be more successful if you can tailor your activities to the needs and interests of particular groups, so the “Key Questions” outlined above can help.

Once you’ve clearly identified your objectives and defined your target audience, it’s easy to determine an overall approach. For example, if the goal is to reduce the number of pregnancies affected by NTDs, and you know a lot of young women in your community have unplanned pregnancies, you may want to reach young, sexually active women with messages about the importance of taking a daily multivitamin containing folic acid.

You can then develop your activities to reach them where they shop, work or go to school, and you can deliver messages to them through the newspapers they read, television programs they watch and radio stations they listen to. Your activities can be as simple or complicated as you can manage and should be designed with your audience(s) and community in mind. For ideas and suggestions, see our list of “Sample Activities.” Remember, any activity you do, regardless of how big or small, is important.

Last but not least, measuring the success of your campaign will be important, not only for you and your team, but for our provincial campaign, too. Evaluations can help provide evidence of a need for additional funding, resources or activities, and can be used to improve and revise an ongoing program in the future. (More on this in the “Evaluation” section on page 41.)





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Planning Charts

Making a Plan – Part One – What activities will meet those needs?	
GOAL	
OBJECTIVE	
TARGET AUDIENCE(S)	
APPROACH(ES)	
ACTIVITY / ACTIVITIES	
EVALUATION	





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Making a Plan – Part Two – Tool for Setting Objectives

Today	At the End of the Campaign



Sample Plan for Folic Acid Community Awareness

Goal:

To reduce the number of pregnancies affected by neural tube defects in the community.

Objective:

To increase awareness of folic acid and to promote its benefits to women of childbearing age.

Secondary objectives may include:

- To increase the number of women who know which foods are high in folic acid.
- To increase the number of pharmacists who provide accurate and consistent information on folic acid.
- To increase the number of women who receive folic acid information from their physicians before pregnancy.

Some more specific objectives could be:

- To interact with 100 women in the community and share the benefits of folic acid.
- To increase the sales of multivitamins in 10 of the community's pharmacies by 1%.

Target Audience:

Women in the community between the ages of 18 and 45.

Approach:

Interacting with women face-to-face.

Activity:

Host an event with a spokesperson (maybe a parent of a child with spina bifida) and a health professional. Make a presentation and hand out information pamphlets. Have a raffle at the event for a year's supply of multivitamins. Get the event promoted in the community paper. Invite the local radio, television and newspaper to the event.

Evaluation:

Count the number of women who attended the event. Have the women fill out a survey at the end of the event to measure their understanding of folic acid and to see if they can recall what was communicated. Count the number of folic acid pamphlets handed out. Check the sale of multivitamins with local pharmacies before the event and then check to see if sales increased after the event.

Required Resources

Once you have your plan in place, you can start thinking about how to make it happen using some key tools to help you communicate successfully with your audience and pull off your events.

When you brought your team together, you assessed who could realistically do what, which means you already know your project is manageable from a people perspective. If not, make sure you can recruit enough volunteers to help with research, event execution, media outreach and more – before you get started.



Some financial resources may also be required. If you have funds set aside, great. If not, or if you don't have enough, you may be able to call on corporate partners or other community organizations for cash contributions or in-kind support such as printing. If you need to ask for help, you can use our "Sample Letter " at the end of this section, which should include your program plan and statistics to support your request.

You may also want to consider access to potential spokespeople, including health professionals or local celebrities or politicians, as well as access to technology such as computers, phones, fax machines and printers.

It's important and helpful to describe each activity in as much detail as possible, including who is responsible for it, when it should start and finish, and what resources you'll need. The chart below provides an example of the detail you should strive for in planning your activities. Try to list each activity, and break them down into smaller tasks, so that the whole team can keep track of what needs to be done and when (similar to the example below).

Activity	Partner Responsible	Start Date	Finish Date	Resources Needed
Printing invites for event	Copy Shop	February 15	February 28	One volunteer to write invite, facilitate printing and send them out
Writing Media Kit	Local College	January 2	February 25	One student copywriter
Finding out due dates and prices for all local media advertisements	Community Action Team	January 15	January 30	One volunteer

Communication resources should include the poster and pamphlet on this website. You can also have fridge magnets made and as for others in the community to help spread the word. And of course using the media to spread your message is very important, as they are a direct link to your target audience.

Develop a comprehensive list of media contacts in your community and be ready to explain to them why it's important to share your information with their audience. Communication resources you can use to help you with the media and the community at large can include the following:

- a Media Kit – a pocket folder containing a cover letter, news release, fact sheets on folic acid and your community partners, spokesperson biographies, story ideas or a short article, and other background information you can send to the editor or reporter at your local newspaper or the program director at your local radio or television station, and hand out at your events;
- a News Release that shares with the local media in a concise and comprehensive format why what you're doing is important by grabbing their interest with a compelling headline and newsworthy data and details;
- a Public Service Announcement (PSA) – a brief announcement to be aired free of charge on radio or television that can also be included in your Media Kit;
- a Advertisement that is camera-ready for reproduction in a local newspaper;
- a PowerPoint slideshow presentation; and/or
- Speaking Notes: for a public presentation.

You can also view our tip sheets on the following pages for more information, including "Working With the Media," "Writing a News Release," "Drafting a Public Service Announcement," "Creating a Presentation" and "Planning an Event."





Once you understand the resources available to you, and the best way to use them to communicate with your audience, you're ready to implement your plan.

Sample Fundraising Letter

< YOUR AGENCY >
< YOUR ADDRESS >
< YOUR PHONE AND FAX NUMBERS >
< YOUR E-MAIL ADDRESS >

< DATE HERE >

< CONTACT NAME >
< ORGANIZATION NAME >
< ADDRESS >

Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms. Contact Name:

You can play a vital role in helping to prevent serious birth defects by promoting the use of folic acid in your community.

< YOUR AGENCY > along with < YOUR PARTNERS > would like to introduce to you < TITLE OF YOUR PROGRAM >. We're a nonprofit group dedicated to getting the word out about the benefits of folic acid, but we can't do it alone. We hope you'll seriously consider joining us to improve the health of our community's mothers and babies. The following is some background information to further acquaint you with our hopes for a folic acid awareness program.

The program's goal is to increase the number of women who know that taking folic acid daily can help reduce the incidence of some birth defects by up to 70 percent.

Across the country, 1 in every 1,300 pregnancies is affected by neural tube defects (NTDs) each year. In < YOUR COMMUNITY >, < NUMBER > babies are born with spina bifida. Women who take enough folic acid on a daily basis, before and after they become pregnant, can significantly reduce their chances of having a baby with an NTD. Even though there are several easy and inexpensive ways to get enough folic acid, the majority of women don't consume enough to prevent these serious birth defects. We would greatly appreciate any help you may be able to provide with any aspects of our campaign, including funding, in-kind services or volunteer time.

I know you have a large number of nonprofits requesting your assistance. < YOUR PROGRAM'S NAME > is one of the most important health issues for women of childbearing age today and needs the support of < ORGANIZATION > to get the message out effectively. Thank you in advance for any help you can provide.

Sincerely,

< YOUR NAME >
< YOUR TITLE >



Working With the Media

When working with the media, to get them interested in your story, look for a local angle. Some suggestions include the following:

- fundraisers and activities you are organizing to promote folic acid awareness in your community;
- a profile of an active community member or health professional discussing what they have done and why; and
- personal stories of children or families with spina bifida;

Here are some other tips:

- Telephone actively. Call the assignment editor a week before the event, the day before the event, and then again after the event has taken place.
- Develop and maintain media lists. Once you've created your initial media list, it's important to keep detailed notes; e.g., update (new) contact names, maintain RSVPs, keep a record of phone calls and of articles when published, etc.
- Check with reporters to see how they wish to receive news releases (via fax or e-mail). Be sure to get a reporter's permission the first time you send materials via e-mail.
- Assume that everything you say is "on the record" even if you say something is "off the record." Don't assume that anything you say before or after the interview won't be included in the story.
- Monitor and measure your media coverage to correct misstatements and errors, to identify people in the media who are supportive of prevention issues, and to replicate successful media strategies. You can measure the impact and success of your media coverage by tracking the amount of space or airtime the story received (e.g., a quarter page in the local paper or two minutes of radio airtime), where it was placed (e.g., the front page of the local newspaper), and whether the content was positive, negative or neutral.

Working with media can be an extremely effective way of getting your message to your audience. Keep in mind, however, that there are some things to consider in advance, as noted in the chart on the next page.



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	TELEVISION	RADIO	MAGAZINES	NEWSPAPERS
REACH	Potentially largest and widest range of audiences, but not always at times when PSAs are most likely to be broadcast.	Formats offer more potential than TV to target audiences (e.g., teens via rock stations). May reach fewer people than TV.	Can more specifically reach segments of the public (e.g., young women, people with an interest in health).	Can reach broad audiences rapidly.
CONTENT	Opportunity to include health message via news broadcasts, public affairs or interview shows, dramatic programming.	Opportunity for direct involvement via call-in shows.	Can explain more complex health issues and behaviours.	Can convey health news and breakthroughs more thoroughly than TV or radio, and faster than magazines. Feature placement possible.
PRESENTATION	Visual and audio portrayal of message makes emotional appeals possible. Easier to demonstrate a behaviour.	Audio alone may make messages less intrusive.	Print may lend itself to more factual, detailed, rational message delivery.	
SPECIAL BENEFITS	Can reach low income and other audiences not as likely to turn to health sources for help.	Can reach audiences that do not use the health system often.	Audience has chance to clip, read and contemplate material.	Easy audience access to in-depth issue coverage possible.
IMPACT	Viewers are passive and must be present when the message is aired, so full attention unlikely. Commercial "clutter" may dilute message.	Listeners are passive; exchange is possible, but the target audience must be there when aired.	May be passed on; can be read at the reader's convenience.	The short life of newspapers can limit rereading and sharing with others, though not with online editions.
DEADLINES	Deadlines are three (3) to eight (8) weeks in advance for PSAs, usually by 10 a.m. to make the 6 p.m. news and the "day before" for breaking news.	Allow several days' notice for public events – with other news, same day is adequate.	Deadlines are six (6) to eight (8) weeks before a publication goes to print.	Deadlines for daily issues are usually 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. the afternoon before the day of the issue. Weekly issues need notice three (3) to five (5) days ahead.
COSTS	PSAs can be expensive to produce and distribute. Feature placement requires contacts and may be time-consuming.	Copy is flexible and inexpensive; PSAs must fit station formats. Feature placement requires contacts and is time-consuming.	PSAs are inexpensive to produce; ad or article placement may be time-consuming.	Small papers may take PSAs; coverage demands a newsworthy item.



Writing a News Release

When writing a news release it is important to do the following things:

- Hook the media person right at the beginning. Unlike a “novel” or “story,” where the whole idea is to keep your reader in suspense until the end, a news release tells the last line of your story first.
- Grab media interest with a catchy headline.
- Tell your story in the most concise way possible, be specific with statistics – but just mention the strongest ones.
- Be sure to provide answers to who, what, why, when and where.
- Let the media know the dates and times of events and be sure they have proper contact information in case they have questions.
- Use 1.5 spaces between lines so that it is easier to read.
- If you can include a quote from a spokesperson or expert, do so. It adds credibility.
- Always finish your release by placing the symbol “– 30 –” centered below the last line of text but above the boilerplate (i.e., the standard description of your organization). This signifies that your communication is over and the recipient has received all the information.
- If you have more than one page in your news release, put a .../2 at the bottom of the first page to signify that you have another page to come. This will ensure that nothing gets mixed up at the other end of a printer or fax machine.

Quick Tips

You can write a news release in advance of an event (to encourage media coverage and public awareness), concurrent with an event (to make sure that key points are highlighted), or following an event (to inform the public of what happened).

When you send your news release, be sure to include a personal message like, “Thought your readers might be interested in this story.”

If you are hoping to set up an interview, supply a “Question & Answer” sheet to pique the interest of the editor or radio personality. This will also show them that you are offering an interview opportunity they can take part in without a lot of research.



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Sample News Release

For Immediate Release

Folic Acid Reduces Risk of Birth Defects

Women encouraged to take daily multivitamin with folic acid

Toronto, Ontario – May 12, 2011 – Women can significantly reduce their risk of having babies with birth defects by taking folic acid before getting pregnant.

Essential for the healthy development of a baby's spine, brain and skull, if taken prior to conception, folic acid can reduce the risk of having a baby with a neural tube defect (NTD) by as much as 70 per cent. To be effective, this B vitamin must be taken prior to conception because NTDs occur in the first four weeks of pregnancy – before most women even know they are pregnant. Since close to half of all pregnancies are unplanned, it is important for all women who can become pregnant to take a daily multivitamin containing a minimum of 0.4 mg of folic acid.

Recent research conducted by Ipsos-Reid on behalf of the Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Association of Ontario (SB&H) found only 42 per cent of Ontario women between the ages of 18 and 40 know that folic acid may help prevent a child from being born with spina bifida or other neural tube defect (NTD); only 38 per cent of those women know that folic acid must be taken before getting pregnant in order to prevent birth defects; and only 43 per cent are currently taking a multivitamin.

A provincial folic acid public education and awareness campaign will launch again in June as part of Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Awareness Month. Local community groups are already jumping on board to help spread the word about folic acid in their communities.

On Tuesday, May 31, 7 p.m., a free community kickoff event will take place in Mississauga at the Noel Ryan Auditorium in the Central Library at 301 Burnhamthorpe Road West. Susan Jones, a spokesperson from the community who has a child with spina bifida, will be sharing her story. Information will be distributed and there will be a raffle to win a year's supply of multivitamins.

"We are really excited about the activity at the local level," says George Smith of the Mississauga Health Centre, the group running a series of events this June in support of folic acid awareness. "The

.../2

A green square logo with the words 'FOLIC' and 'ACID' stacked vertically in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. A faint green leafy plant graphic is visible in the background behind the text.

best way to get people talking is through word of mouth in the community. Once people understand the value of folic acid in preventing neural tube defects, we have no doubt many more children and their families will be spared unnecessary suffering. Prevention is the key.”

-30-

The Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Association of Ontario (SB&H) has been committed to making a positive difference in the lives of individuals with spina bifida and/or hydrocephalus for more than 37 years. Part of that commitment includes supporting research and prevention efforts designed to reduce and ultimately eliminate the risk of children being born with spina bifida. For more information, visit www.folicacid.ca and www.sbhao.on.ca.

Media Inquiries:

Jane Doe

Media Relations

416.555.5555

jane.doe@gmail.com

Drafting a Public Service Announcement

Public Service Announcements (PSAs) are either general messages or specific announcements for radio and television. PSAs can be 15, 30 or 60 seconds in length. Most often you can write the PSA yourself, without formal production in advance, and submit it to your local radio or television station and they will read it on air.

Sometimes, you can add the telephone number of your organization to a PSA and announce a community event. PSAs are more likely to be aired if the station’s program director is asked in person by someone in his or her community to play them.

When writing a PSA:

- Provide a contact name, phone number and e-mail address.
- Include word-for-word written text approximately eight (8) to 15 lines in length.
- Include a beginning date and an ending date (to identify the duration of time the PSA is to be aired). A maximum of three months is a good idea.
- Send PSAs for radio and television at least three to four weeks in advance.

When calling:

- The best time to call is Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday morning. Avoid calling on a Friday or just before or after a holiday.
- Ask to speak with the person who schedules PSAs – not the general manager, sales manager or news director. Ask for his or her help in preventing neural tube defects



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(NTDs) in their community. Tell that person who you are trying to reach and ask if the PSA can be aired when more women are likely to be listening or watching.

- In two minutes, give your name and the name of your organization and specify if it is nonprofit; describe your event in a single sentence, and sell your PSA knowing it is competing with other announcements. Emphasize your goal: to prevent birth defects in your community.
- Send a thank you note regardless of whether your PSA is accepted. If you are not successful, try again in a few weeks.

Sample FREE Radio and TV PSAs

Length: 15 seconds
 Title: "Did you know? #1"

ANNOUNCER: Did you know that neural tube defects occur before most women even know they're pregnant?

Folic acid helps reduce the risk of neural tube defects by as much as 70%.

If you're a woman, talk to your doctor about folic acid or visit www.folicacid.ca today.

-30-

Length: 30 seconds
 Title: "Did you know? #2"

ANNOUNCER: Did you know that neural tube defects occur before most women even know they're pregnant?

Folic acid, a B vitamin, helps reduce the risk of neural tube defects by as much as 70%.

As long as it is taken before conception.

And since almost half of all Canadian pregnancies are unplanned, all women should be taking a multivitamin with 0.4 milligrams of folic acid.

If you're a woman, talk to your doctor about folic acid or visit www.folicacid.ca.

Folic acid. It's never too early.

-30-

If you have funding to produce a radio or TV script, below are two samples you can work with. Consider approaching a local college and asking if its students can produce some scripts for you. If not, the local radio or television station may be interested in producing it for a nominal fee.





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Sample Radio and TV PSAs for Production

Radio PSA

Length: 30 seconds
Title: "Two friends and a vitamin"
SFX: *Kitchen morning sounds. Kettle whistling, cupboards opening and closing.*
WOMAN A: Whatcha doin'?
WOMAN B: Taking my multivitamin.
WOMAN A: I get my vitamins from what I eat.
WOMAN B: You think you do, but the truth is we can't get enough folic acid from food to reduce the risk of neural tube defects in babies.
WOMAN A: Who's having a baby?
WOMAN B: No one – yet. But both of us can, and almost half of all Canadian pregnancies are unplanned.
WOMAN A: Well, if I get pregnant, I'll take folic acid then.
WOMAN B: Too late. Neural tube defects happen before you even know you're pregnant.
WOMAN A: So what's the name of that multivitamin again?
ANNOUNCER: If you're a woman, talk to your doctor about folic acid or visit folicacid.ca today.
Brought to you by The Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Association of Ontario.

-30-

~ another Radio PSA sample on next page ~

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Radio PSA

Length: 60 seconds

Title: "My name is Susan Smith"

ANNOUNCER: My name is Susan Smith and my daughter has spina bifida, a neural tube defect that effects every day of her life. She has trouble walking and suffers from some paralysis.

Neural tube defects occur when the brain and spinal cord fail to develop properly.

Folic acid, a B vitamin, reduces the risk of neural tube defects by as much as 70%.

But it has to be taken prior to conception, because neural tube defects occur before most women even know they're pregnant.

Women should take a daily multivitamin containing at least 0.4 milligrams of folic acid.

I wish I'd known about folic acid. I wish someone had told me.

If you're a woman who could become pregnant, talk to your doctor about folic acid or visit www.folicacid.ca.

Folic acid. It's never too early.

Brought to you by The Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Association of Ontario.

-30-

~ TV PSA sample on next page ~



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TV PSA

Length: 30 seconds
Title: "My daughter has spina bifida"
VISUAL: *Black background screen. Susan Smith sitting on a stool, speaking directly to the camera.*
SUSAN: My name is Susan Smith and my daughter has a neural tube defect called spina bifida. It makes it difficult for her to walk properly and has caused some paralysis.

Folic acid, a B vitamin, can reduce the risk of neural tube defects by as much as 70%. But it has to be taken prior to conception, because neural tube defects happen before most women even know they're pregnant.

If you're a woman who could become pregnant, talk to your doctor about folic acid or visit www.folicacid.ca today.
SUPER: www.folicacid.ca
SUSAN: Folic acid. It's never too early.

-30-

Creating a Presentation

A face-to-face presentation is a great way to share information about folic acid and its importance in significantly reducing the risk of birth defects such as spina bifida. This interactive form of communication gives a specific and captive audience timely information and calls upon them to act to spread the word.

Presentation Tips:

- Know the material. You can learn more by researching, and by practicing over and over again. (To make things easy, check out a sample presentation with complete speaking notes at www.folicacid.ca that you can use.)
- If creating your own presentation, find images of babies with spina bifida and other relevant birth defects to include in your slides. Showing the impact of these birth defects will make the disabilities a powerful reality to people who see the presentation. However, be careful not to be too graphic with images.
- Get the attention of your audience and tell them what they need to know and what they need to do.
- Don't rush. Speak slowly, but not too slowly. Change your pitch and tone, as well as your volume, to emphasize certain points and keep your audience interested. Pause for effect from time to time, too.
- Make eye contact with people in your audience for a few seconds at a time, and be sure to scan the room so everyone feels you are speaking to them directly.
- Following the presentation, encourage questions. Even if you don't have all of the answers, offer to get back to people with the answers and if they want you to, be sure to follow up.
- Hand out folic acid information (e.g., brochures downloaded from www.folicacid.ca).

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Keep your presentation short and to the point. Place only the most important information on each screen and expand on each slide using speaking notes you can have with you at the podium, just in case you need them. But don't stick to the podium. Moving around the room not only helps you work out any nervous energy, it's one more way to ensure your audience keeps paying attention.

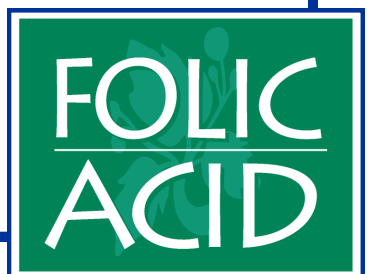
As an added bonus, on its website, Toastmasters, a world leader in public speaker training, shares "10 Tips for Public Speaking," adapted below for your use. You can also visit their site for additional tips and techniques.

1. Know your material, and know more about it than you include in your presentation. Use personal stories and conversational language so you won't easily forget what to say.
2. Practice. A lot. Rehearse out loud with all equipment you plan to use. Work to control filler words such as um, uh and like. Practice, pause and breathe. Practice with a timer and allow time for the unexpected, and for questions.
3. Know the audience. Greet some of the audience members as they arrive. It's easier to speak to a group of friends than to strangers.
4. Know the room. Arrive early, walk around the speaking area and practice using the microphone and any visual aids.
5. Relax. Begin by addressing the audience. It buys you time and calms your nerves. Pause, smile and count to three before saying anything. Transform any nervous energy into enthusiasm.
6. Visualize yourself giving your speech. Imagine yourself speaking, your voice loud, clear and confident. Visualize the audience clapping – it will boost your confidence.
7. Realize that people want you to succeed. Audiences want you to be interesting, stimulating, informative and entertaining. They're rooting for you. They're in attendance because they want to hear what you have to say.
8. Don't apologize for any nervousness – the audience probably never noticed it.
9. Concentrate on the message – not the medium. Focus your attention away from your own anxieties and concentrate on your message and your audience, and why it is so important that they leave knowing that taking a multivitamin containing folic acid is a critical step for all women of childbearing age in order to significantly reduce the risk of birth defects such as spina bifida.
10. Gain experience, if you can. Your speech should represent you — as an authority and as a person. Experience builds confidence, which is the key to effective speaking.

Planning an Event

When planning an event to raise awareness – and funds – in support of encouraging women to take a daily multivitamin containing folic acid to reduce the risk of neural tube defects, here are some things you will need to do:

- Estimate how many people will attend.
- Book a venue that will hold everyone you are expecting.
- Advertise in the local paper, on the radio and on your local cable channel – in as many places as you can think of, in fact.
- Hang posters about the event in areas frequented by your target audience (e.g., teenagers, all women of childbearing age, health professionals, etc.).



- Invite local media to attend.
- Ask organizations that interact with your target audience to spread the word.
- If your budget allows, send invitations.
- Make arrangements for refreshments, tables, chairs, linens, etc.
- Ensure you have enough takeaway materials to hand out (e.g., brochures and tip sheets that can be found on www.folicacid.ca and www.sbhao.on.ca).
- Confirm the date and time with your spokesperson and with anyone else (e.g., volunteers) helping out at the event.
- After the event, send thank you notes to volunteers, media, and any key spokespeople who attended.

In terms of deciding what type of event to host, and doing the actual logistics planning, there are a number of things you can do – from hosting informational workshops and formal galas to putting on bake sales, car washes and fashion shows – and some tried-and-true ways to do them. Start by figuring out whether you are trying to raise awareness, funds or both; how much time and energy you have to spend on the event; how much money you have access to through personal investment or sponsorship or keynote speakers, for example; and how many volunteers you can recruit to help.

Helpful planning guides for a number of events will soon be available on the Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Association of Ontario's website at www.sbhao.on.ca. In the meantime, some general rules for a bake sale – a low-cost event that requires little lead time and minimal labour – are included on the next two pages to help get you started.



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BAKE SALE TIP SHEET

Bake sales are low-cost events that do not require a lot of time to plan and are not labour intensive either – as long as you can get a group of people to help you bake. To make things even easier, you can have volunteers price their own goods, or agree ahead of time to a price for six cookies, a dozen cupcakes or a pie, for example. You can make this event as small or as large as you choose, depending on the resources available to you and what works best in your community. You can include an awareness component by having brochures available at one or all of your bake sale tables (downloaded from www.folicacid.ca), and by having a special presentation or slideshow running at the event.

Things you will need for the event ...

- someone to oversee overall organizing of the sale
- place to host the sale (e.g., church, arena, farmer's market)
- volunteers to bake and help set up and sell baked goods at the event, and clean up afterwards
- a handout for volunteers outlining the sale prices
- large tables and chairs, as well as tablecloths
- bags for packaging goods for customers
- cash box(es) and float(s)
- napkins, paper plates, forks and a sharp knife, as well as coffee, tea and beverages, if you want to have a seating area where people can buy one item with a drink to have onsite
- extension cord(s) for coffee urns and computer if running a slideshow
- liability insurance (if not included with the venue)
- municipal permit (if required)
- brochures and other support materials from www.folicacid.ca and www.sbhao.on.ca
- computer with awareness slideshow

Things you will need to do before the event ...

- secure location
- prepare list of bake sale items
- research cost of baked goods in your area
- create pricing sheet to give volunteers at the sale
- recruit volunteers to bake and help at the event, and keep an updated list with their contact information and contribution(s) handy, along with dates to follow up with reminders
- create a volunteer schedule to share before the event and follow at the event (four-hour shifts are recommended)
- secure necessary supplies (see below), and try to get them donated
- rent or borrow urns for coffee and tea (if applicable)
- create and send PSAs to media and follow up by phone (see "Drafting a Public Service Announcement" and "Working With the Media" tip sheets at www.folicacid.ca)
- arrange for delivery of baked goods for day of event
- promote bake sale by posting flyers in various spots in your community

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Things you will need to do at the event ...

- ensure baked goods are delivered to the site
- set up tables
- prepare coffee and tea (if applicable)
- have someone supervise sales and remove cash from time to time for security reasons
- check in with volunteers from time to time, including those selling individual baked goods with beverages (if applicable)

Things you will need to do after the event ...

- collect leftover items and distribution to volunteers and/or a local soup kitchen
- return any borrowed or sponsored items
- send thank you notes to volunteers, sponsors and any media providing coverage and/or in attendance
- sent follow-up release to media announcing the amount raised and thanking participants, sponsors and the community at large (see "Writing a News Release" tip sheet at www.folicacid.ca)
- finalize accounting and deposit funds raised
- send cheque for total net amount raised to the [Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Association of Ontario](http://www.folicacid.ca) and note "folic acid awareness"

Things you can do to help ensure success ...

- price your items just slightly under what your local bakeries charge, not a lot under
- be sure you have a good mix of items and extra popular items (e.g., cookies, brownies, fudge, pies and preserves)
- avoid items that can be easily damaged during transport
- make displays as attractive as possible
- ensure all items are clearly labeled

For more information or assistance ...

Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Association of Ontario (SB&H)
555 Richmond Street West, Suite 1006, Toronto, Ontario M5V 3B1
416.214.1056 or, toll-free, 800.387.1575
provincial@sbhao.on.ca
www.sbhao.on.ca or www.folicacid.ca

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Implementation

Right before you start, conduct one more review of the plan, make any necessary adjustments and ensure all partners are ready to go. A checklist can help you determine if your activity is ready to be launched. It will vary depending on the activity, but you can find a “Sample Implementation Checklist” below. Once you’ve reviewed and accounted for everything on the list, you can finally get started with the implementation.

Make sure you have a timeline that indicates when all the elements of your plan will be ready. When are you doing research? When are you communicating with the media? When are you printing invitations for your event? When are you booking your spokesperson on a local cable station? What are the due dates? Who is responsible for each task, and what are the expectations? Share the schedule with everyone on the team so they are all literally, and figuratively, on the same page.

Sample Implementation Checklist for Folic Acid Community Awareness Campaign

Sample Implementation Checklist
<input type="checkbox"/> Remind all of your partners that you are counting on them to carry out their assignments.
<input type="checkbox"/> Ensure they know when, where and how to do their activities.
<input type="checkbox"/> Develop a list of media, businesses and organizations to contact.
<input type="checkbox"/> Ensure the materials are ready in sufficient quantities.
<input type="checkbox"/> Confirm those involved in your activity have been trained in what they are expected to do.
<input type="checkbox"/> Confirm physicians or other health professionals are ready to answer questions and provide materials about folic acid to their patients and/or clients.
<input type="checkbox"/> Ensure PSAs, media kits, pamphlets and other materials are ready to be distributed and received by the media?
<input type="checkbox"/> Confirm materials are ready for volunteers and their organizations to begin their activities.
<input type="checkbox"/> Follow up with the media to remind them of important dates.
<input type="checkbox"/> Remind volunteers and volunteer organizations of important dates and commitments.
<input type="checkbox"/> Prepare to work with intermediaries who volunteer after the program has been implemented.
<input type="checkbox"/> Be ready to ensure each activity is happening as planned.
<input type="checkbox"/> Have follow-up response cards and thank you letters ready.
<input type="checkbox"/> Plan for a newsletter, meetings or other methods to keep partners updated and involved.
<input type="checkbox"/> Have a celebration for your accomplishments planned and ready.
<input type="checkbox"/> Have an evaluation system set up within the program so you can measure your success.



Evaluation

There are two main aspects of evaluation you should consider: process and outcome.

Process evaluation is a tool to help ensure everything is on track. Process evaluations alert you to any minor problems before they become too big, help identify what is working and what isn't, and help determine what, if anything, should be revised before the next event.

For each indicator or measure you want to use, identify what information you need and how you'll collect it. You can ask specific people to take responsibility for evaluating activities. Confirm they know what they're expected to measure and the specific information they're required to collect. To help you determine how well the process is working, considering using our "Sample Evaluation Checklist and Chart" on the next page.

Outcome evaluations measure the effectiveness of your activities based on your objectives to let you know if your efforts actually made a difference. You can use our "Sample Outcomes Chart" on page 43 as your model, and you may want to consider giving a post-presentation survey to event participants to help you determine what they've learned about folic acid as a result of your efforts.

It's important to plan your evaluation before you implement your activities and base your evaluation on your goals and objectives. But remember ...

**If you can help reduce the risk of one baby being born with a neural tube defect,
you've made a difference.**



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Sample Evaluation Checklist and Chart for Folic Acid Community Awareness Campaign

Sample Evaluation Checklist	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are activities on schedule?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Do we have enough staff and/or volunteers?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Do we have sufficient resources?
<input type="checkbox"/>	How many times was the activity implemented?
<input type="checkbox"/>	How many pamphlets or posters were distributed and through what mechanisms?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Approximately how many people in the target audience were reached?
<input type="checkbox"/>	How many presentations were made? How many people attended?
<input type="checkbox"/>	How many health professionals are distributing the resources?
<input type="checkbox"/>	How many women are asking health professionals about folic acid?
<input type="checkbox"/>	How many media interviews were completed?
<input type="checkbox"/>	How many exhibits and displays were held?
<input type="checkbox"/>	How many people attended?
<input type="checkbox"/>	How many resources were distributed at each?

Here is a sample chart that will ensure you have the means in place to collect the necessary information to effectively evaluate your efforts.

Indicator	Information Needed	How to Collect It	Who Will Collect It
Are activities on schedule?	When was each activity started? When did each activity end?	Record the date and time each activity began and ended.	
How many times was each activity implemented?	How many presentations were made? How many exhibits were provided? How many advertisements were placed?	Record the number of times each activity took place.	
Are women asking health professionals for folic acid information?	Numbers from health professionals.	Talk to health professionals.	
How many people in the target audience were reached?	Number of women who know about folic acid.	Number of pamphlets handed out; talk to doctors; look at vitamin sales.	



Sample Outcomes Chart for Folic Acid Community Awareness Campaign

SAMPLE	
Objective	Potential Indicators
To increase the number of women who receive folic acid information from health professionals before pregnancy.	Pamphlets given to 30 health professionals in the community who are committed to passing the information on to women before pregnancy.
To increase the number of women who know about the benefits of folic acid.	Five events took place and 107 women attended in total. They all listened to the presentation and left with information pamphlets.
To increase the number of women who take a multivitamin.	The sales of multivitamins in five local pharmacies have increased by 1%.
Other?	Other?

TIP: *You may want to consider giving a post-presentation survey to attendees so that you can assess what they have learned about folic acid.*

Sample Activities for Folic Acid Community Awareness Campaign

There are a variety of activities you can implement in your community with minimal effort to target different audiences, locations and complexities. They may include the following:

- public service announcements (PSAs),
- advertising,
- community presentations,
- exhibits and displays,
- health professional education efforts,
- community awareness campaigns, and
- radio and television interviews.

Feel free to stray from this list to implement a creative activity that matches the needs of your community, interests and resources.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS (PSAs)

Objective:

To increase community awareness about the importance of taking folic acid prior to conception.



Materials & Resources:

A script for radio or for television. If you have a spokesperson, it may send a stronger message if you write the script for that person and ask them to read it. Ask for PSA guidelines from all the local radio and television stations you plan to send your script to so you can ensure it meets their requirements. You may also want to approach a local college to see if its broadcasting students can produce a PSA as part of the curriculum.

Helpful Hints:

- PSAs are usually placed on radio or television stations.
- Find out which stations will announce them for free.
- Be sure your script is clear and easy to read.
- Include contact information, including phone numbers, email addresses and website details.
- Work with your media contacts and partners to choose time slots when you feel your audience will most likely be listening or watching (e.g., driving to and from work for the radio).

Evaluation:

Track the number of PSAs aired. You can survey women after the campaign and find out how many remember hearing or seeing the PSA. Check with the local pharmacists to see if multivitamin sales increased during the campaign. Have health professionals ask if their patients or clients came to talk to them as a result of hearing a PSA. Track the number of visits to your website during the campaign.

Tips for Success:

Reinforce clear, positive messages and avoid fear-based messages or negative images. Follow the PSA guidelines from each media contact. Find out which radio and television stations women in their childbearing years are tuning into and watching. Include strong facts in your script to increase impact and relevancy. If you are phoning a station to try and get your PSA aired, be sure to ask for the person who books PSAs, not the general manager. Time your PSAs to coincide with any other media activity you are doing in your community, or to coincide with other provincial media coverage on the topic. Ensure your PSA fits into a 10-second, 15-second, 30-second or 60-second time allotment. For more details, have a look at the sample PSAs starting on page 32.

ADVERTISING

Objective:

To increase awareness of the importance of taking folic acid prior to conception.

Materials & Resources:

Someone to write and design the ad (check with the Media or Communications Officer at your local public health unit or your local advertising agency partner). Investigate the advertising rates, sizes and booking dates at community papers and magazines. (You can use the “Campaign Advertisement” sample on page 49.) Investigate editorial calendars for magazines and community papers that show the topics that will be covered over the next few months. You may have an opportunity for placing a story about your topic in a related issue.

Helpful Hints:

- Ask if a media copywriting student and graphic design student at the local college could create the ad for you as part of a course credit.
- Keep the ad simple – do not try to say too much.
- Use your strongest statistics.



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- If it is timely to use the ad to advertise an upcoming event, do so.
- Be clear about two things – why the reader should be interested and what action they are supposed to take.
- Provide a call to action: get them to call us or visit our website, visit their doctor or go to their pharmacy, for example.

Evaluation:

Track the number of ads placed and the number of people who remember seeing them. Track the number of multivitamin sales during the campaign. Ask health professionals if their patients or clients came to talk to them as a result of seeing an ad. Ask us to track the number of people who called for more information or visited the website compared to previous weeks or months.

Tips for Success:

Keep it simple. Be sure to place the ad in a newspaper or magazine that a high percentage of your audience reads. Consider placing your ad in the editorial section. Most editorial sections have high readership and a lot of text, so a colourful ad will stand out. To make your ad as easy to read as possible, avoid using all capital letters. Use a simple font like Arial or Times to ensure that you will not lose the message in the font style. Reverse type (e.g., white words on a black background) is often more difficult to read. Double check that your contact information is correct on the ad.

COMMUNITY PRESENTATIONS

Objective:

To increase community understanding of how folic acid prevents certain birth defects.

Materials & Resources:

Overheads, PowerPoint slideshows, videos, DVDs, handouts, pamphlets, speaking notes, advertising, evaluation forms, event posters in local venues, invitations, access to printing, photocopying, faxing, email, a website address, a venue, volunteers to help with handouts and evaluations, ballots for a raffle.

Helpful Hints:

- Approach existing groups such as a local women’s organization or drop-in programs and ask if they would be interested in receiving a presentation.
- Host your own presentation and advertise to the general public.
- Talk to hospitals to see if there are prenatal or postnatal tours or meetings where you can be added to the agenda.
- Promote the presentation on your website and our community events calendar.
- See if you can get the doctors in your community to ask their patients to sign up.
- Provide handouts such as pamphlets or fact sheets.
- Find out about your audience and be clear about what you would like them to do as a result of your presentation.
- Estimate your attendance and ensure you have booked a venue that will accommodate everyone comfortably.
- Provide directions to the event on all advertising so that people know where to go.
- Be sure to inform security staff at the facility about the event and ask if they can direct attendees to the right room, or have a volunteer greet guests at the door and direct them.



Evaluation:

Track the total number of presentations and the number of people who attended in each presentation. Provide evaluation forms for event attendees and ask them to fill out the forms before leaving. You may also want to conduct pre- and post-presentation surveys to measure the effectiveness of the presentation (e.g., if the attendees did not know they needed to take a daily multivitamin containing 0.4 mg of folic acid before the presentation, but now they do now, your presentation was a success). Talk to doctors or pharmacists in the area after the presentation to see if they have more patients or clients asking about folic acid. Monitor website traffic after the presentation.

Tips for Success:

Be clear and to the point. Use visual aids such as a short video or PowerPoint presentation (see “Creating a Presentation” on page 35). Speak slowly. Avoid just reading what is on the slide. Ask for input from the audience – ask them to guess statistics before you supply them to increase the impact of what you tell them. Try and show a slide of a child with spina bifida to make the topic more relevant. Invite a spokesperson who has a child with spina bifida to share their story. If you have visuals or samples of food high in folic acid, show them. (There are charts at www.folicacid.ca.) Think about refreshments – at least some orange juice (a good source of folic acid). Try and get the refreshments supplied by a sponsor. Have a volunteer take attendance and help with any follow-up surveys so that you have time to meet one-on-one with the attendees. Ask questions. Find out what people already know or myths they may believe. To draw women to the event, advertise a raffle to win a year’s supply of multivitamins with folic acid. Be sure to remind them of the cash value of the prize to give it context. Try and get a local pharmacy to sponsor this and give them free advertising.

EXHIBITS & DISPLAYS

Objective:

To increase community awareness of the importance of folic acid.

Materials & Resources:

Host a display made up of pictures and key messages, samples of food high in folic acid, empty bottles of vitamins with folic acid, handouts such as pamphlets or fact sheets, and eye-catching banners.

Helpful Hints:

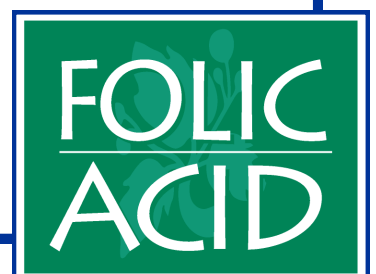
- Look for opportunities to put up a display in areas where members of your audience naturally gather. Local events, fairs and special days are good choices.
- Try and coincide with an event like Nutrition Week or Mother’s Day to coordinate with other women’s issues.
- Watch for events that reach women in their childbearing years such as health fairs, bridal shows and home shows, as well as Welcome Wagon.
- Consider local venues like libraries, fitness centres, bookstores, shopping malls and churches.

Evaluation:

You may want to track the number of displays hosted, the number of people who visited each display, the number of pamphlets distributed, comments or questions from people visiting the display, and increased visits to your website or ours.

Tips for Success:

Be sure that your display is visually appealing. Attract people with a strong headline on a banner. Use language that speaks to your audience (e.g., “If you’re a woman, you need to know about folic acid.”) Be colourful. Use props. Make it easy for people to take information home with them. Try to ensure that the display is set up in high-traffic areas. Staff the display to interact with your



audience, answer questions and replenish handouts. Tell people where they can go to get more information, including www.folicacid.ca and www.sbhao.on.ca. Use your display to advertise a community event and contact us at either web-site for banner and poster samples, as well as brochures and fact sheets.

HEALTH PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION EFFORTS

Objective:

To increase the number of health professionals who provide accurate and consistent information about folic acid to women of childbearing age.

Materials & Resources:

Fact sheets, pamphlets, tear-off sheets, magnets, posters, desk references, and information about the various provincial campaigns being run by the Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Association of Ontario (SB&H) along with our campaign collateral.

Helpful Hints:

- Find out if your local health professionals have received the latest folic acid background from Health Canada and as posted on www.folicacid.ca. If not, give them a copy of the materials found on the site or ask them to visit it directly.
- Talk to health professionals such as doctors, nurses and dieticians when they meet for grand rounds or training events.
 - ◆ Be sure they have folic acid posters, pamphlets and/or desk references.
 - ◆ Ask them to remind women of childbearing age to take folic acid.
 - ◆ Ask them to put posters and pamphlets in their waiting rooms.
 - ◆ Ask them if there is anything else you could do that would be helpful.
- Let health professionals know how important their role is and be clear about what you would like them to do.
- Share the survey results found on www.folicacid.ca and www.sbhao.on.ca that show how little women, and health professionals, know and share about the importance of folic acid in reducing the risk of neural tube defects.
- Ask health professionals to commit to helping your cause.
- Ask editors of local medical newsletters, journals or bulletins to write about the importance of folic acid and about your local activities.

Evaluation:

Track the number of physicians using the resources, the number of resources used, comments from physicians, and comments from your target audience.

Tips for Success:

Find health professionals to champion the issue among their peers. Refrain from making health professionals feel they are not doing their job. Remind them that a lot of information about the benefits of folic acid has come out in recent years. Mention some of the survey results noted above and the reason for your visit. Share some of the survey results about the percentages of women who do not yet know the benefits of folic acid, who do not yet take a multivitamin and who do not yet know they should take folic acid before conception. Try to get health professionals some multivitamin samples so their patients will know what to look for when buying a multivitamin.



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COMMUNITY AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

Objective:

To increase awareness in the community of the role of folic acid in the prevention of birth defects.

Materials & Resources:

Posters, pamphlets, fact sheets, tear-off sheets, magnets, banners, stickers, pins and other promotional items. You can develop your own or use the materials provided online at www.folicacid.ca.

Helpful Hints:

- Place information pieces in locations frequented by women in the community: grocery stores, florists, hair salons, fitness centres, libraries, daycare centres, women's clothing stores, book stores, community centres, restaurants, shopping malls and on community bulletin boards.
- Choose a month for the campaign and promote that special month.
- Hang a colourful banner that grabs people's attention.
- Be sure information pieces have a clear message and correct contact information.
- Let community partners know about the campaign and encourage them to participate.

Evaluation:

Track the number of resources distributed, the number of distribution sites, and the number of people recalling seeing the resources, as well as increases in questions at doctor's offices or pharmacist's counters, an increase in website hits and/or an increase in calls for more information. You can also survey women at prenatal or postnatal meetings.

Tips for Success:

Use many different mediums to get the message out, but keep your message consistent. Use the same image or look for each piece to create a campaign identity. The more times a message is seen, the higher the chance it will be recalled and retained. Ask your community partners if they have any other display opportunities. Many women are teachers, so ask if you can display information in school staff rooms.

RADIO & TELEVISION INTERVIEWS

Objective:

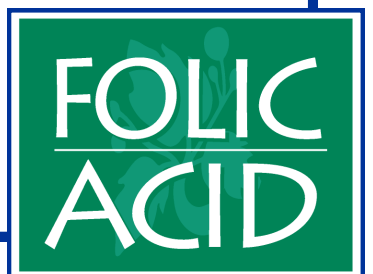
To increase community understanding of how folic acid reduces the risk of neural tube defects.

Materials & Resources:

Spokesperson who is a health professional or the parent of a child who has a neural birth defect, questions for the interviewer, fact sheets.

Helpful Hints:

- Choose a reputable health professional or parent to be interviewed.
- Contact the media and encourage an interest in the topic.
- Ensure everyone has the background information they need.
- Supply the interviewer with a list of suitable questions (such as those found in the "Working With the Media" section on page 27).
- Talk to your spokesperson about the key messages you hope he or she gets to share in the interview, and practice with him or her as needed.



- Tell your spokesperson to be specific with statistics, and encourage the telling of “life stories” that create empathy. (Samples of personal stories can be found at www.folicacid.ca and www.sbhao.on.ca.)

Evaluation:

Track the number of interviews, the number of people who recall hearing the interviews, comments from the people interviewed, the number of multivitamin sales, the increase in visits to your website or ours, and the number of post-interview calls for information.

Tips for Success:

Choose media that women are interested in. Choose a time of day when women often listen to the radio or watch television. Make sure your key messages are stressed. Make sure the contact information – phone number, email address and website address – is stated during the interview. Advise your spokesperson to keep it short and to the point.

Campaign Brochure

A copy of our campaign brochure can be downloaded from www.folicacid.ca. Copies are also available upon request by calling the Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Association of Ontario (SB&H) at 416.214.1056 or, toll-free, at 800.387.1575. You can also email your request to provincial@sbhao.on.ca.

Brochures are updated from time to time, so please be sure to check the website each time you’re ready to launch a new awareness project. We want you to have the most current materials available to help ensure your success.

Campaign Poster

Campaign posters are also available upon request by calling or emailing SB&H. They, too, are updated from time to time.

Campaign Advertisement

Below is a sample campaign advertisement you may want to consider using. You can also check the website at www.folicacid.ca as you prepare to launch an awareness event, as new materials may be available for your use.

