

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](#) at www.folicacid.ca.

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 at www.folicacid.ca.) 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.
- 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, 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](#)" at www.folicacid.ca). Speak slowly. Avoid just reading what is on the overhead. 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 on our website.) 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 website 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.

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”](#) fact sheet at www.folicacid.ca).
- 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..

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