



Changing the channel: television health campaigns in Portugal

Marketing initiatives can influence and change people's lifestyles. Similarly, they can be used in innovative ways to encourage healthier lifestyles.¹ Governments can improve health by implementing collaborative initiatives with different sectors of society,² as recently exemplified in Portugal.

In Portugal, television has the largest share of advertising investment, accounting for around 46%. According to a study led by the Portuguese Regulatory Authority for the Media, 99% of all people surveyed regularly watch television.⁴ Therefore, television stations could be key partners in promoting public health. However, because of high broadcasting costs, health authorities have not generally been able to use these platforms.

In 2018, the Portuguese Ministry of Health approached all major national television stations, appealing to their social responsibility. The four major Portuguese television stations (RTP, SIC, TVI, and Porto Canal) accepted this challenge and signed a 3-year agreement with no cost to the government. These stations committed to broadcasting three non-communicable disease prevention campaigns per year, for 3 weeks each and with at least two broadcasts per day. For 2018, the campaigns addressed healthy eating, tobacco control, and physical activity.

The four stations involved represent a total of 19 television channels. Four of these are open access channels, and include the most watched channels

in Portugal, with an audience share of 57.5% in 2017. The remaining 15 channels are pay television channels, which have a strong affinity with their target audience, and increase the coverage of the campaigns.

A preliminary assessment has estimated that the agreement is worth more than €3.9 million per year (according to rate card prices), and has an average reach of 7.5 million people per campaign. This innovative joint venture has allowed the Portuguese national health service to vastly increase the number of Portuguese citizens it is reaching, and to potentially drive changes in behaviour that will improve public health.

The tobacco control campaign, which used the slogan "Quit Smoking! Choose to love more!" was broadcast according to the media agreement and had the biggest reach a public health campaign has ever had in Portugal. According to the annual ranking from *Meios de Publicidade*, the campaign was among the most striking mass media campaigns of 2018,⁵ prevailing over heavily funded campaigns from private international brands and companies. On the basis of data from the major national television stations, it is estimated that 73.1% of all Portuguese people older than 4 years of age watched this campaign an average of 5.2 times on television. This value is well above the minimum threshold of touchpoints that is required to drive behavioural change.³

Although further evidence is needed to analyse the effectiveness of television health promotion campaigns in changing lifestyles, the Portuguese example showcases the potential of partnering with

media channels. Through use of the same communication channels as multinational food and tobacco companies, governments could get the reach required to start reversing unhealthy lifestyle trends among the general population.

We declare no competing interests.

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