

**REACHING AND
RESONATING**

**WITH
COMMUNITIES ON
SOCIAL MEDIA**



**AN INTERACTIVE
TOOLKIT**



Toolkit overview

It's becoming harder to remember a time without Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, X (previously Twitter), and all of the other social media platforms that are now a key part of how we communicate with our friends, families, and professional networks, stay up to date with news, and promote necessary organizational messaging. This toolkit will take you back to the basics to better understand what social media is and how to use it for public health communications, including substance use and prevention communications. Below, you'll find lessons and corresponding activities designed to help you implement these insights and craft messaging that reaches and resonates with your communities both online and offline.

LESSON 1

WHY SOCIAL MEDIA MATTERS

LESSON 2

AN OVERVIEW OF PLATFORMS

LESSON 3

IDENTIFYING YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

ACTIVITY 1

MATCHING THE PLATFORM TO THE AUDIENCE

ACTIVITY 2

DEVELOPING A SOCIAL MEDIA PERSONA

ACTIVITY 3

ANALYZING YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA POST

Why social media matters

Communicating on social media is crucial for most organizations. Staying up to date with trends, emerging platforms, and best practices can be overwhelming, but it's an essential way to meet audiences where they are. According to [Pew Research](#), the majority of U.S. adults use some form of social media, with 83 percent reporting that they ever use YouTube, 68 percent for Facebook, and 47 percent for Instagram. Whether you work for a community-based organization, a public health department, or another entity, you'll want to use social media to reach all of these people with your health messaging.

HOW IT'S USED

Here are a few ways that social media is used in health communications:

- **Health institutions** use it to track the spread of health information and what people say about health online. They also use it to disseminate accurate information and to activate communities to raise awareness on important topics and advocate for change.
- **Health care professionals** use social media for health research, professional development, and to communicate with patients.
- **Local coalitions** use it to spread information about their activities and how to be involved, as well as key health messaging to prevent substance use and reduce risky behaviors.
- **The public** uses social media to get online support in communities like Facebook groups, to share life and health updates, and—most importantly—to seek and share health-related information with their networks.

Now, think about your daily scrolls from a public health and prevention perspective and jot down your answer to the question below.

How do health and social media overlap in your life?

An overview of platforms

Social media plays a crucial role in today's digital landscape, serving as a powerful platform for communications, marketing, and connection. With countless individuals and brands competing for viewers' attention, competition is strong. As audiences are bombarded with information, standing out and establishing a unique presence become vital for success in this dynamic environment.

So what is social media? Social media is defined as an application, website, or online community that allows users to share information, thoughts, and personal notes with their networks. Social media is interactive, allows for and mostly thrives on user-generated content, and requires user-specific profiles, which creates networks online.






4 TYPES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- **Social networks:** Foster relationships with others.
 - EXAMPLE: Facebook and X (previously Twitter)
- **Media-sharing networks:** Share images, videos, and other types of media.
 - EXAMPLE: Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, Pinterest
- **Discussion forums:** Share general advice, debate, and answer questions.
 - EXAMPLE: Reddit
- **Consumer reviews:** Share feedback for others to see and to help make decisions.
 - EXAMPLE: Tripadvisor, Yelp



The top platforms defined

The table below outlines an overview of the main players in social media with key audience information and top features.

Platform	Summary of platform	Key demographic information	Key features
Facebook 	A social media platform that allows users to connect with others online by sharing content, creating profiles, and joining groups.	Most popular network for those ages 25-34 (30%), with >20% of users 50+ years old.	Community groups and pages; personal pages for communicating with friends and family; stories** for quick sharing; efficient advertising.
Instagram 	A social media platform that allows users to share photos and videos with their followers.	Almost two-thirds are 18-34, with people 35+ the next fastest growing group.	Reels*; stories**; lives^; stickers; cross-post capability with Facebook.
YouTube 	An online video-sharing service where users upload, view, and rate digital content.	85% of teens use YouTube, with males ages 25-34 the most targeted for advertising.	All things video (short and long form), including live streaming of sports, gaming, etc.
TikTok 	A social media app that allows users to create, share, and discover short videos.	Largest age group is 10-19.	Short videos; FYP^^ with a sophisticated algorithm.
X 	A social networking site where users broadcast short posts known as tweets. Tweets can contain text, videos, photos, or links.	Largest age group is 18-29 with a large male audience.	Simple text; easy resharing and linking of external websites.

***Reel:** A short, 15-90 second engaging video. Users can add music, special effects, and various editing tools to their videos, making them visually appealing and entertaining. Reels can be shared with followers on the user's feed, and, if the account is public, they can also be discovered by the wider Instagram community through the Explore page.

****Story (Facebook + Instagram):** A temporary post that allows users to share photos, videos, and other content that disappears after 24 hours. Stories are designed to encourage more spontaneous and casual sharing. They appear at the top of the user's feed in their profile bubble and can be customized with text, stickers, filters, and other interactive elements.

^Live: A social media event that allows users to broadcast in real time, engaging with their audience instantly.

^^FYP: The "for you page" is the dedicated homepage for TikTok users, created by an algorithm that suggests videos based on past viewing preferences and experiences.

Identifying your target audience

Before you can develop any messaging, you need to know who you are talking to. Are you trying to reach teens? Parents? Retirees? Each of these audiences are going to want different types of information in a different format. Knowing your audience will inform your entire messaging strategy.

For example, if you work for a local coalition that has observed high rates of binge drinking in the community, you might decide to create a campaign tailored to those who are at the **highest risk** for binge drinking: young white males. From there, you can ask yourself these questions to identify your target audience and the best way to reach them:

QUESTIONS TO ASK

Key questions to ask yourself to help define your target audience:

- How old are they?
- What is their gender(s)?
- Where do they live?
- What type of job(s) do they have or aspire to?
- What are their interests, hobbies, and passions?
- What motivates them—in general and when it comes to taking action on your organization's health topic?
- What are their favorite social media platform(s)?
- What previous actions have they taken with your community? Are they already members of your listserv?
- Do they already follow your account? Or are you trying to attract a new audience?



Engaging with your audience

Engaging with your audience on social media is crucial. It not only fosters a sense of community, but it also enhances the visibility of your content. When you interact with your followers—through comments, likes, and shares—you create a stronger connection that encourages community and motivates them to engage further. This two-way engagement also signals to social media algorithms that your content is valuable, resulting in improved reach and exposure to broader audiences with similar interests.

WAYS TO ENGAGE

Interacting with your audience and fellow partners' content is key for growing and engaging with your audience.



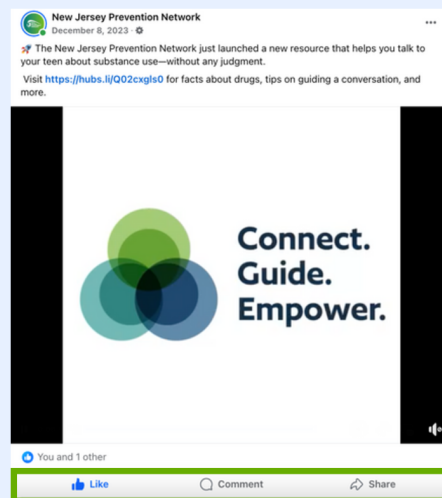
Instagram

Like: Click the heart icon to show others that you like or agree with the post.

Comment: Share what your organization does in relation to the post.

Share: Tap the arrow icon, then select “add to story” to share.

Bookmark: A bookmark on Instagram allows you to save posts for easy access later.



Facebook

Like: Click the thumbs up icon to choose an emoji reaction.

Comment: Leave a comment, start a conversation, and tell others how you help prevent substance use.

Share: Click the “share” button to share the post to your own page.



X (previously Twitter)

Like: Click the heart icon to show others that you like or agree with what was shared.

Comment: Click the comment bubble to reply to the post and start a conversation.

Share: Click the chasing arrows icon to share this post to your own profile.

Activity #1: Match the platform to the audience

The below activity builds off of your learnings about social media platforms. Based on the audience demographics and content needs, match the content to the best-fitting social media platform.

Scenario 01



Audience: Community members who are 50+.

Overview of content: You want to share static content and write captions with accurate info and easily direct people to an FAQ landing page to learn more information.

Which platform is the best fit?

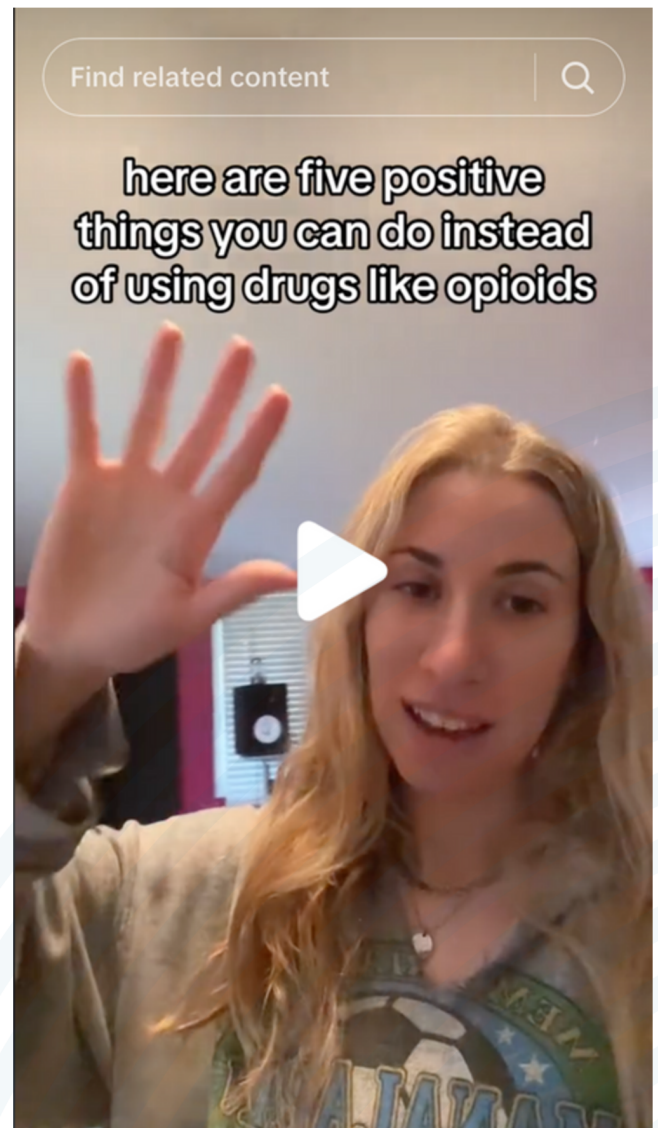
Activity #1: Match the platform to the audience

Scenario 02

Audience: People ages 13-20

Overview of content: You're hoping to create fast-paced videos that entertain while also delivering accurate health information about the risks of using substances. You have a 23-year-old staff member who is willing to make direct-to-camera videos.

Which platform is the best fit?



Activity #1: Match the platform to the audience

Scenario 03

What is naloxone?

Naloxone is a lifesaving medication commonly known by the brand name **Narcan**.

Naloxone reverses an opioid overdose by blocking the effects of opioids like fentanyl.

How do I store Narcan?

Narcan should be stored at room temperature, away from high temperatures and direct sunlight.

The Narcan I have is expired. What should I do?

The shelf life of Narcan was recently extended to 4 years. However, harm reduction experts urge people not to throw out expired Narcan since it can remain effective.

Where can I get Narcan?

You can buy Narcan over the counter at major retailers, including pharmacies, grocery stores, and gas stations.

Harm reduction programs and other local organizations often provide naloxone.

Audience: Activists ages 18-45

Overview of content: You want to share design-heavy assets that provide key messaging on harm reduction information over multiple slides. The goal is to educate the audience with the hope they share it via stories.

Which platform is the best fit?

Activity #2: Developing a social media persona

Based on your answers from the lesson on identifying your target audience, you'll now develop a persona behind your social media accounts. Think of the persona as the narrator for all of your content. While you may need to reach several target audiences with different messaging, having it come from a single persona and source gives your content a unified voice.



My persona is ___ years old

My persona is _____ (*gender*)

My persona works as a _____

My persona lives in _____ (*town/city*)

My persona's hobbies include:

My persona follows these social media accounts:

My persona goes to these news sources:

Activity #3: Analyzing your social media post

Go on your preferred social media platform and find a recent post that you believe performed below average. For example, do you usually get 100 likes on a post and a recent one only got 10? Using that piece of content, walk through the below questions to see how that piece may be able to be improved in the future. Keep your persona in mind as you think about any adjustments.



1. What do you like about this post?

2. Were you writing toward your defined target audience?

3. Why do you think this post may not have resonated with your audience?

4. How would you adapt this post to better work for your audience and your persona?
