Social Marketing and Stigma Change

In the past few years, NCSE has been engaged in efforts to research and evaluate social marketing approaches to stigma change. Broadly put, social marketing represents the strategic use of economic and social forces in order to change behaviors that lead to social problems (Kotler, Roberto, & Lee, 2002). Domains in which social marketing have been used include health promotion, injury prevention, environmental protection, and community involvement. Social marketing is like commercial marketing in several ways. Both have a customer focus; i.e., the target of change is a market sector that is defined in terms of social exchange between the group in control of marketing and the group whose behavior is the focus of change. These sectors are segmented; the effectiveness of marketing depends on defining relevant sectors and then crafting a marketing format that reflects the sectors needs and interests. Customers of both efforts must perceive the benefits of partaking in the product or behavior exceeds the costs of engaging in a different behavior.

Despite these similarities, there are notable differences between social and commercial marketing. The two approaches markedly vary in terms of product. Commercial marketing circumscribes products or services that are purchased by the market segment. The product in social marketing is behavior change. Behavior change includes accepting, rejecting, modifying, and abandoning targeted behaviors. The major reinforcer describing success differs across approaches. Goals of commercial marketing are financial, mostly pursuing to maximize profit. Social marketing seeks to address societal problems through behavior change of the targeted population. Approaches also vary in terms of competition. Competition in commercial marketing is the other companies or organizations that sell similar products. Competition in social marketing is the status quo behavior that keep a group from diminishing the social problem.

A variety of government and NGO-based efforts around the world have used social marketing strategies to attack the stigma of mental illness. Prominent in social marketing efforts are public service announcements (PSAs), issue-focused advertisements, featured in television, radio, print, outdoor, online, mobile and other media. Typically, these are developed as part of a broader social marketing campaign, a multi-level program designed to tackle stigmatizing attitudes and discriminatory behavior. Significant resources are being invested into these approaches to erasing the stigma of mental illness. Hence, evaluating these kinds of approaches have become a public health priority, one NCSE has actively joined.
Research on social marketing and stigma change is not an obvious enterprise. It offers many challenges when compared to the narrower kind of research that has dominated evaluations in this arena thus far. Key issues include:

- **Penetration:** assessing the degree to which a population is aware of and remembers the gist of a social marketing campaign;

- **Impact:** evaluating whether the campaign actually changes stigmatizing and affirming attitudes and behaviors; and

- **Population:** doing this kind of work with the restricting exigencies of mapping population response.

Below are recent NCSE activities in this regard:

**Publications:**

Corrigan, P.W., & Gelb, B. (2006). Three programs that use mass approaches to challenge the stigma of mental illness. Psychiatric Services, 57, 393-398. [Click here](#) to download a copy of the manuscript.

Corrigan, P.W. (in press). Where is the evidence supporting public service announcements against mental illness stigma? Psychiatric Services. [Click here](#) to download a copy of the
manuscript.

Involvements:

NCSE PI Patrick Corrigan is on the steering committee of the SAMHSA Resource Center to Promote Acceptance, Dignity, and Social Inclusion Associated with Mental Health

[SAMHSA ADS Center](http://www.stopstigma.samhsa.gov/)
Helping Veterans Overcome Mental Health Stigma

NCSE recently partnered with Washington, D.C.-based strategic communications firm Reingold, Inc., on a project with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs that aims to help Veterans overcome the stigma associated with getting mental health treatment. NCSE worked with Reingold and other partners to develop an outreach plan for the campaign that incorporates leading research on stigma reduction.

Veterans who fear and avoid the stigmatizing labels they associate with people who have mental health challenges are a key audience for the campaign. Because of this label avoidance, these Veterans do not seek help—and may not even recognize that they have mental health issues that could be treated.

Stigma research and best practices in reducing stigma is fundamental to the campaign’s messaging framework. The campaign aims to create awareness among Veterans and their families that a more fulfilling life is possible. To encourage Veterans to seek the support and mental health services they need, the campaign will leverage a contact approach, involving personal interactions with and exposure to persons who have dealt with mental health challenges.

As much as possible, campaign elements will be targeted, local, credible, and continuous—and rely on trusted intermediaries and key influencers to deliver carefully tailored messages to Veterans and their families.

Peersnet: The Alameda County Social Inclusion Program

Peers Envisioning and Engaging in Recovery Services (P.E.E.R.S) is starting a social inclusion campaign using a social marketing research approach. P.E.E.R.S is a consumer-run, nonprofit organization that advocates for mental health consumers on every level of the mental health system. P.E.E.R.S and NCSE have collaborated in the planning, development of message, pretesting, implementation, and evaluation of the program. The P.E.E.R.S social marketing program aims to increase anti-mental health stigma activism for users of the popular social network Facebook using application pledges.

California Wellness and Dignity Collaborative

The California Wellness and Dignity Collaborative is a non-exclusive workinggroup of consumer-run and consumer advocacy organizations with significant experience in programs and policy related to reductions/elimination of stigma and discrimination which has committed to coordinating efforts, sharing Resources and enlarging opportunities jointly in order to accomplish the best Possible impacts for promoting dignity, hope, self-determination and justice for all those affected by mental health stigma in California. Click here to view the charter for the collaborative.