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How to talk about Social Determinants of Health

Simcoe County Museum

November 1, 2019

Messaging 101



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Research Says:

1. **Traditional phrasing of social determinant language consistently tested poorly in every phase of research.** However, the concept behind social determinants of health did resonate with audiences.
2. **Priming** audiences about the connection with **messages they already believe** makes the concept more credible.
3. **Use 1 strong and compelling fact** – a surprising point that arouses interest, attention, and emotion – for maximum impact.
4. **Identify the problem, and offer potential solutions.**
5. **Incorporate the role of personal responsibility.**
6. **Mix** traditionally conservative values with traditionally progressive values.
7. **Focus broadly on how social determinants affect all of us** (vs a specific ethnic group or socioeconomic class.)

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. "A New Way to Talk about the Social Determinants of Health." 2010.

<https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2010/01/a-new-way-to-talk-about-the-social-determinants-of-health.html>



Top tested long-form message on SDOH:

...We need to stop thinking of health as something we get at the doctor's office and instead as something that starts in our families, in our schools and workplaces, in our playgrounds and parks, and in the air we breathe and the water we drink. The more you see the problem of health this way, the more opportunities you have to improve it. Scientists have found that the conditions in which we live and work have an enormous impact on our health, long before we ever see a doctor. It's time we expand the way we think about health to include how to keep it, not just how to get it back.

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. "A New Way to Talk about the Social Determinants of Health." 2010.

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Top tested short form messages:

- All Americans should have the opportunity to make the choices that allow them to live a long, healthy life, regardless of their income, education, or ethnic background.
- Your neighbourhood or job shouldn't be hazardous to your health.
- Health begins where we live, learn, work, and play.
- The opportunity for health begins in our families, neighbourhoods, schools, and jobs.

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. "A New Way to Talk about the Social Determinants of Health." 2010.

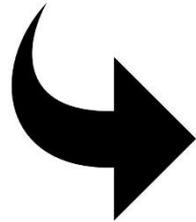
<https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2010/01/a-new-way-to-talk-about-the-social-determinants-of-health.html>



Framing:

Stories are never neutral. The frame defines point of view and power in the story.

Consider the framing of these two images within the captions:



“A young man walks through chest-deep floodwater after *looting* a grocery store in New Orleans on Tuesday, Aug. 30, 2005.”



“Two residents wade through chest-deep water after *finding* bread and soda from a local grocery store after Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans.”



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Potential Elements of a Framework:

1. Problem statements
2. Values
3. Policy explanations
4. Explanatory Metaphors
5. Valence – negative or positive

O'Neil, M., and Sweetland, J. (2018). Piecing it together: A framing playbook for affordable housing advocates. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/assets/files/housing/enterprise_housing_playbook.pdf



1. Problem Statements:

Who/what is responsible?

Example: Affordable Housing vs. Housing Cost and Availability

| Affordable Housing | Housing Cost and Availability |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Individual/consumer problem | Societal/Policy problem |
| Solution: better budgeting, moving, better self discipline | Solution: better policy |

| Instead of this... | Try this... |
|--|--|
| Our community has a shortage of affordable housing units. | Our community's housing costs have outpaced local incomes. |
| People who work low-wage jobs often must spend more than half of their earnings on rent. | Housing costs are rising faster than income and earnings. We need to work on both sides of the equation, adjusting both housing and economic policies. |

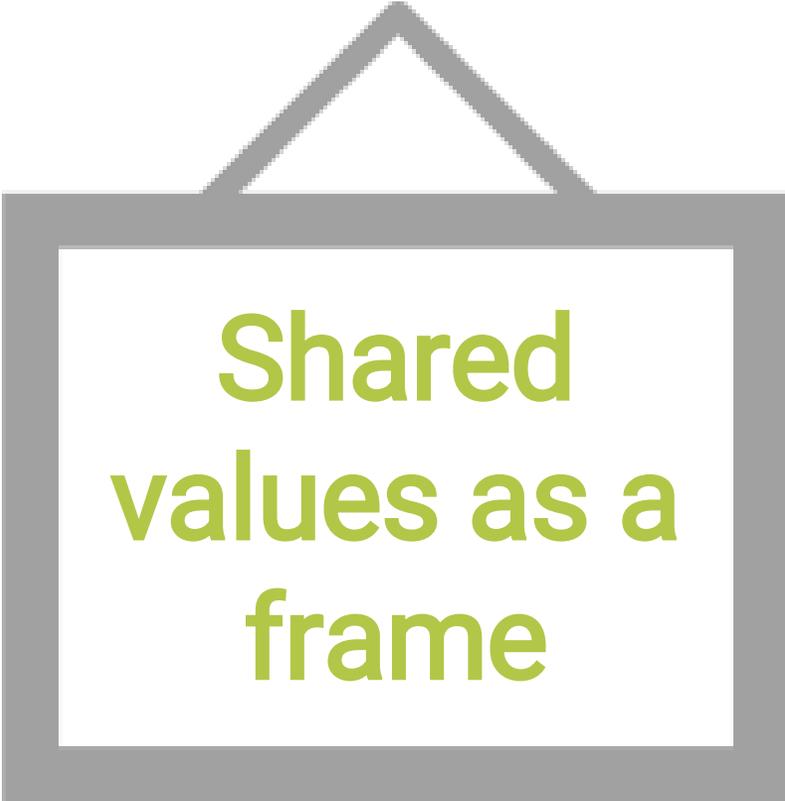
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2. Values

Why do we care?



Shared
values as a
frame

For a value to work, it must help show the issue is a collective one, and establish a sense that there are solutions.



Frames: values that tested well... and that didn't



Ingenuity

Worked well in Alberta for reframing addictions – We're Albertans, we've never had a problem we can't solve!



Collective Growth and Prosperity

Economic and community vitality requires that people have the resources they need to participate and contribute.



Individual Responsibility

Important to give people the opportunity and the tools to make good choices.



Balance, Equality

Small 'c' conservatives find the idea of balance and equality very off-putting, because they see resources as zero-sum: any plan that uses the language of equality activates fears of taking things away from the "haves" to give to the "have nots."



Opportunity for All, Empathy

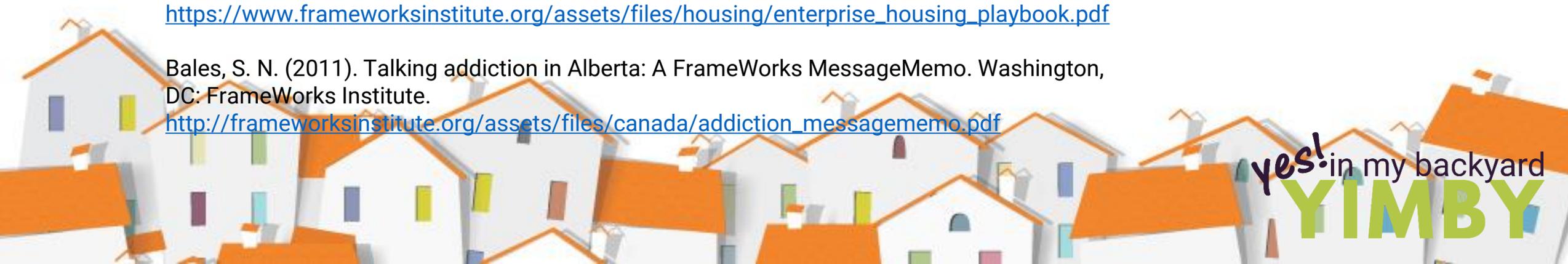
Same issues as balance/equality.

O'Neil, M., and Sweetland, J. (2018). Piecing it together: A framing playbook for affordable housing advocates. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/assets/files/housing/enterprise_housing_playbook.pdf

Bales, S. N. (2011). Talking addiction in Alberta: A FrameWorks MessageMemo. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

http://frameworksinstitute.org/assets/files/canada/addiction_messagememo.pdf



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3. Policy Explanations:

Explanatory Chains

How Housing Policy Disadvantages Low-Income Households



Because housing plays such an important role in community wellbeing, our government budgets include funds to help Canadians buy or rent their homes through a number of housing-related programs.

Right now, very little of this money goes to the people with the lowest incomes.



One effect is that people with less money must spend a greater portion of their incomes on housing. This puts them at a disadvantage in other areas of life, as they are then able to spend less on things like education and health.



Our current policy approach gives the least help to those who need it the most. We can change this. In a time when housing costs are rising more quickly than incomes, we should make it a priority to ensure that everyone can secure a decent place to live.



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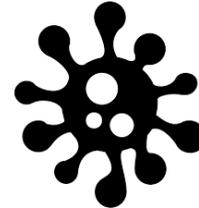
4. Metaphor:

Making the intangible, tangible



In an experiment, two groups were given the same statistics about crime in a city, but a different metaphor for crime was used for each.

Participants who read the description of **crime as an opponent** overwhelmingly favoured **tougher law enforcement** as the appropriate response.



Participants who read the version comparing **crime to a contagious virus** favoured **preventive programs** to address crime.

These metaphors **subconsciously triggered an understanding of crime based on the understanding of the thing they were being compared to.**



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Metaphor that tested well:

Solving the Puzzle

Comparing building healthy, resilient communities to a puzzle with many pieces, position [your cause] as a central piece of the puzzle and [your agency] as having the unique skill set to solve the puzzle.

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5. Valence

+/-

Generally speaking...

Positive messaging that focuses on what can be achieved outperforms messaging that highlights the cost of inaction.



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