



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

NACCHO Local Health Department (LHD) Public Service Announcements (PSA)

How to Use a PSA:

Radio stations often run free public service announcements (PSAs) on behalf of government agencies and non-profit organizations.

For this reason, each day the nation's media outlets receive large numbers of requests for free time or space for PSAs - encouraging them to give their program or announcement special attention. Most PSAs are not selected and the reasons are many and varied. Among the most important are:

- Poor message design
- Irrelevant subject matter

According to broadcasters, three primary criteria are used in selecting PSAs:

- Sponsorship
- Relevance of the message to the community
- Message design

Broadcasters also seek quality, and have raised concerns ranging from “muddy messages” to “poor execution.” Subject problems include topics that are of little interest to the general public or are too complex to lend themselves to brief delivery.

Yet even well-produced, relevant PSAs often fail to receive the attention they deserve. This is often due to poor presentation of the PSA to the media outlet. Don't ignore the importance of writing a letter to radio stations promoting your PSA – a “pitch letter” – that tells your story and sells it to the media.

Bear in mind also, that radio stations are increasingly rejecting pre-recorded PSAs, and instead have their announcers read the scripts “live.” (However, if there is a compelling reason for distributing a pre-recorded PSA, check with your local radio station for advice on production.)

This guide includes the following tools that you can use to inform and educate the population of the region your health department serves:

- Basic guide to writing a PSA (How To Create A PSA)
- Two sample PSA scripts for 30, 20, and 15 second slots on air
- A sample pitch letter that you can customize for your own region

How to Create a PSA:

Writing a PSA:

- Stick to the basics -- who, what, when, where, how, why, as appropriate to the purpose of your PSA.



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- Read your PSA out loud, and note the time it takes. A PSA should be concise enough to be read aloud in thirty seconds or less.
- Time your copy with a stopwatch: Write 12 seconds of script for a 15-second spot, and 27 seconds for a 30 second spot. This allows for variation in the announcer's speech pattern and ensures all your information is read.
- The writing style for a PSA should flow as if you were speaking. As opposed to a bulleted list, it should be in paragraph form.
- Because you've only got a few seconds to reach your audience, the language should be simple and clear. Take your time and make every word count.
- The best PSAs usually request a specific action, such as calling a specific number to get more information. You usually want listeners to do something as a result of having heard the PSA.

Scheduling:

- If you are promoting a particular event, make sure your PSA arrives at the stations at least three weeks in advance of the date.
- If you are sending a PSA that has no fixed time limit, you may want to "freshen" your message by sending a new PSA every few months; if so, indicate on the script, "Air until [date]," and be sure to send a new PSA after the expiration date of the old one.

Remember!:

- Be sure to include contact information.
- Send the PSA script on your organization's letterhead, if possible.
- Include the name and daytime phone number of a contact person in case the station has questions or needs more information. If you do not want the contact person's phone number broadcast on the air, you should indicate that.
- If you are including a phone number in your PSA message ("For information, call xxx-xxxx"), double-check to make sure the number is correct!



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:30 Second PSA Script:

What do clean drinking water, safe foods, and flu shots have in common?

They're the result of ongoing efforts by America's Public Health System to keep our communities healthy.

The [INSERT HEALTH DEPARTMENT NAME] works every day to prevent disease, promote healthy living, and respond to threats to our wellbeing.

Learn about important public health activities in your area at [INSERT WEBSITE ADDRESS or PHONE NUMBER].

A message from the [INSERT HEALTH DEPARTMENT NAME].

:20 Second PSA Script:

From providing clean drinking water to immunizing our children, the [INSERT HEALTH DEPARTMENT NAME] works every day to prevent disease, promote healthy living, and respond to threats to our wellbeing.

Learn about important public health activities in your area at [INSERT WEBSITE ADDRESS or PHONE NUMBER].

A message from the [INSERT HEALTH DEPARTMENT NAME].

:15 Second PSA Script:

The [INSERT HEALTH DEPARTMENT NAME] works every day to prevent disease, promote healthy living, and respond to threats to our wellbeing.

Learn about important public health activities in your area at [INSERT WEBSITE ADDRESS or PHONE NUMBER].

A message from the [INSERT HEALTH DEPARTMENT NAME].

A MESSAGE FROM THE [INSERT HEALTH DEPARTMENT NAME].



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:30 Second PSA Script:

For many [INSERT NAME OF COUNTY/CITY] residents, [INSERT HEALTH NEED] is a serious threat to their health.

That's why the [INSERT HEALTH DEPARTMENT NAME] is launching [INSERT PROGRAM/INITIATIVE INFORMATION]. Our goal is to protect our communities by preventing disease, promoting healthy living, and responding to threats to our wellbeing.

Learn more about [INSERT PROGRAM/INITIATIVE NAME] and other public health activities at [INSERT WEBSITE ADDRESS or PHONE NUMBER].

A message from the [INSERT HEALTH DEPARTMENT NAME].

:20 Second PSA Script:

For many [INSERT NAME OF COUNTY/CITY] residents, [INSERT HEALTH NEED] is a serious threat to their health.

That's why the [INSERT HEALTH DEPARTMENT NAME] is launching [INSERT PROGRAM/INITIATIVE INFORMATION].

Learn more about [INSERT PROGRAM/INITIATIVE NAME] and other public health activities at [INSERT WEBSITE ADDRESS or PHONE NUMBER].

A message from the [INSERT HEALTH DEPARTMENT NAME].

:15 Second PSA Script:

[INSERT HEALTH DEPARTMENT NAME] is launching [INSERT PROGRAM/INITIATIVE INFORMATION].

Learn more about [INSERT PROGRAM/INITIATIVE NAME] and other public health activities at [INSERT WEBSITE ADDRESS or PHONE NUMBER].

A message from the [INSERT HEALTH DEPARTMENT NAME].



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Sample PSA Pitch Letter:

A key step in bringing any PSA to the public in your community involves writing a letter promoting its placement — the “pitch letter.”

A sample PSA pitch letter is provided in this section (next page). Whether you adapt this sample or write your own, be sure to cover the following points:

- Keep it brief, no more than one page.
- Get to the point quickly.
- Show how and why the issue is important to the people in your community.
- Underscore that the actions suggested in the PSAs are easy to take, and can advance the health and wellbeing of the community.
- Ask that the PSA be aired.
- Mention that you will be contacting them to follow up on your request.



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Date

Name of Appropriate Person at Radio Station

Their Title

Station Name

Address

Dear [Addressee],

What do filling a glass of water from the faucet, ordering food in a restaurant and making sure your kids don't catch the measles have in common? They are all made safer, better and more reliable thanks to the work of your local Public Health Department.

These examples represent but a small fraction of the work that [INSERT HEALTH DEPARTMENT NAME] undertakes. All day, and every day, we work to preserve the health and wellbeing of our communities. Yet many people still do not understand how their local health department operates, and how it can help to manage and improve their own health.

That is why we need your help. From fighting obesity, to smoking cessation and across a range of health needs, [INSERT HEALTH DEPARTMENT NAME] has resources that promote healthy living and work to improve the quality of life in our communities.

We need to let people know about the programs and tools available to them. Especially with [INSERT LOCAL SPECIFICS RELATED TO TOPICAL HEALTH NEEDS IN THE AREA]. The enclosed PSAs highlight the work of [INSERT HEALTH DEPARTMENT NAME] and build awareness of the resources we provide.

We urge you to air these PSAs on behalf of all members of our community. I would appreciate a chance to discuss this initiative with you, and will call you next week to set up a time that is convenient.

Sincerely,

SIGNATURE LINE

YOUR NAME

YOUR TITLE