

The power of news media in Social and Behavior Change Communication (SBCC)

The news media is well positioned to complement SBCC and advance public health in a rapidly changing world.



Internews partners with health agencies around the globe to drive evidence-based awareness and action to promote health and wellbeing. We support journalists with the tools and training to understand scientific advances in health, to counter stigma and to challenge societal norms by highlighting human interest stories and uplifting community voices. We also empower media and Civil Society Organizations to watchdog health policy and to hold authorities accountable for ensuring effective health services.

Independent quality journalism is integral to SBCC, powering its reach, relevance and impact

Health media stories...

Disseminate critical information at scale, that can influence the social determinants of health, namely societal norms, policies and laws, building environments that facilitate SBC.

Inform behavior change by teaching people how to think; prompt people to question prevailing beliefs and behaviors, thereby helping them make informed choices about their health.

Are by definition topical and varied, informing and educating the public in an ongoing way and combined with demand and use activities can bring about social and behavioral change; can be highly responsive to current issues because of the quick turnaround time to produce and air them.



Quality health journalism can provide the supportive, enabling environment in which SBC efforts will have a better chance of success, whereas even the best SBC interventions can be derailed by poor journalism and misinformation. While high quality health journalism is a part of SBCC, it stands out because of the commitment journalists have for objectivity. Journalists need to provide space for dissent and help audiences weigh varying points of view with the help of authentic evidence and enable them to make up their own minds. Journalism's commitment is to truth-telling and to be accountable to its audience – who, in turn, would use the best available evidence to make informed decisions. Grassroots narratives featuring trusted sources, that meet people where they are, can ground SBC approaches and help course corrections. Health journalism when combined with SBC interventions create a comprehensive, organic and harmonious approach to behavior change.

Stimulate large scale public discourse about the ecosystems that aid or deter healthy choices, extending the reach of SBCC to influencers and decision makers.

Promote discussions on why multiple sectors need to engage to shape healthier ecosystems; can shine a light on how the many dimensions of power and decision making by governmental and private actors can either deter or promote public health.

Independently monitor and analyze various health risks of communities and inform SBC; play a watchdog role, tracking societal disparities and unearthing stories of community resilience and recovery.

Internews builds synergies between news media and SBC interventions towards better public health, gleaning rich lessons in the process:

More than ever before, journalists are needed to navigate the infodemics that can derail the impact of SBCC.

In the current health infodemic of rumors, misinformation and conspiracy theories, the need for quality health journalism has never been greater. Journalists practice verification to tell factual stories that convey the contextual truth of people's lives.



Example: Internews's [Rooted in Trust](#) project is a pandemic information response program countering the unprecedented scale and speed of the spread of rumors and misinformation about COVID-19. The project strengthens the local capacity of humanitarians, media, and health communicators to ensure their COVID-19 information work is shaped by and responsive to the needs of the vulnerable communities already affected by humanitarian crises across 13 countries.

Hyperlocal media stories can shape receptive local environments in which SBC interventions can better succeed.

The effective delivery of vital health information, products and services is dependent on the flow of locally resonant information in languages people can understand and from sources they trust. Trained local journalists can support SBC interventions by being responsive and responsible partners who fill in the context, verify facts, and explain the most relevant local issues.

Example: During Guinea's Ebola outbreak of 2014-15, Internews's targeted media activities trained and mentored journalists in the most affected areas and launched "[Ebola Chrono](#)", a daily newsletter and radio program. Between January 19, 2015 and April 15, 2016, the Internews team produced 317 daily editions of Ebola Chrono in French, which were broadcast by 40 radio stations. Internews also produced 276 weekly summaries in local languages (Malinke, Poular, Susu, Kissi and Gerze).

The news media helps stitch together complex conversations between decision makers, researchers, governments and the public to better integrate and scale up SBC approaches.

There is an acute and overlapping crisis at the intersection of health and the impacts of climate change, humanitarian emergencies and gender and socioeconomic inequities. For SBC specialists this represents a complex set of behavior change messages. The news media can tip the scales for or against SBC campaigns, making this a compelling reason to include news media into the overall SBC strategy from the start. When trained to present scientific evidence in compelling ways, journalists, health advocates and social influencers can together make people aware of the prevalence and risks associated with diseases and lifestyles, educate audiences about the steps they can take to protect themselves and others, and move stakeholders to shape environments in which communities have access to healthy options. Internews has proven expertise and experience to strengthen journalism skills and create a science-based enabling environment for health decision making, that can complement and strengthen SBC approaches.