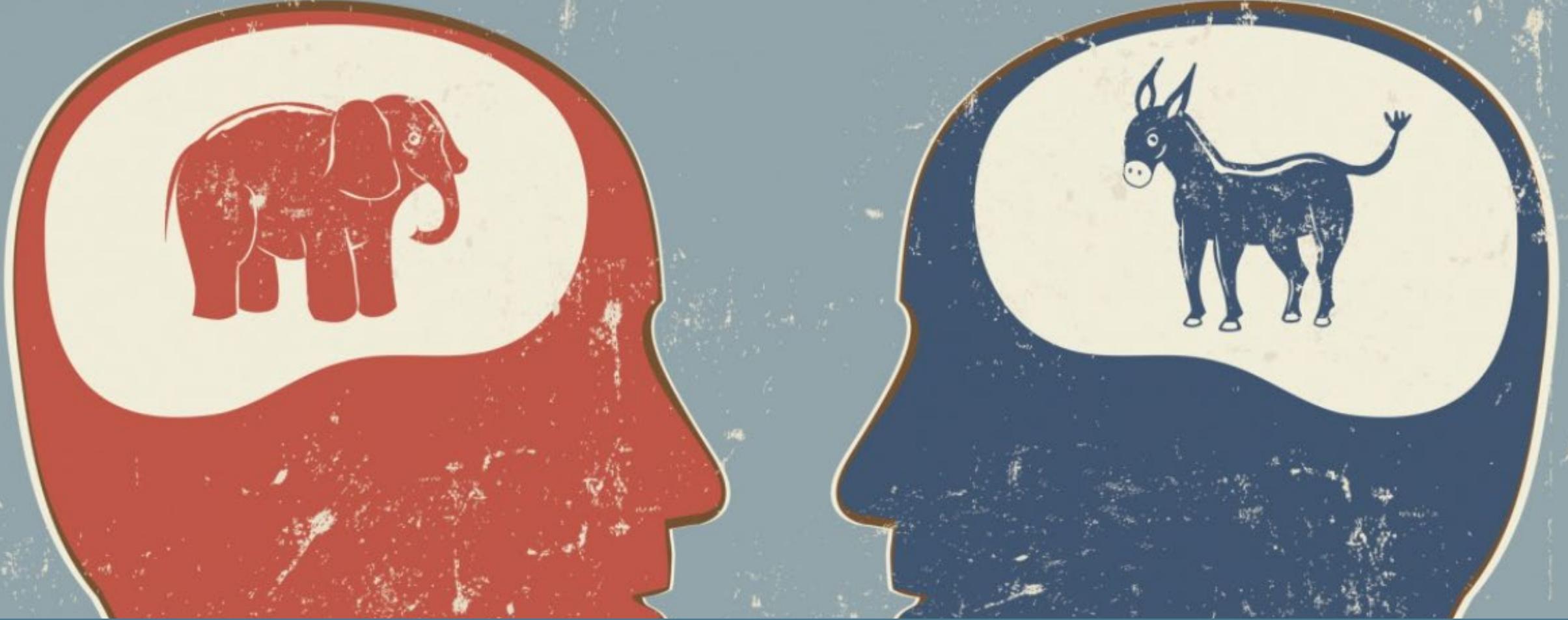


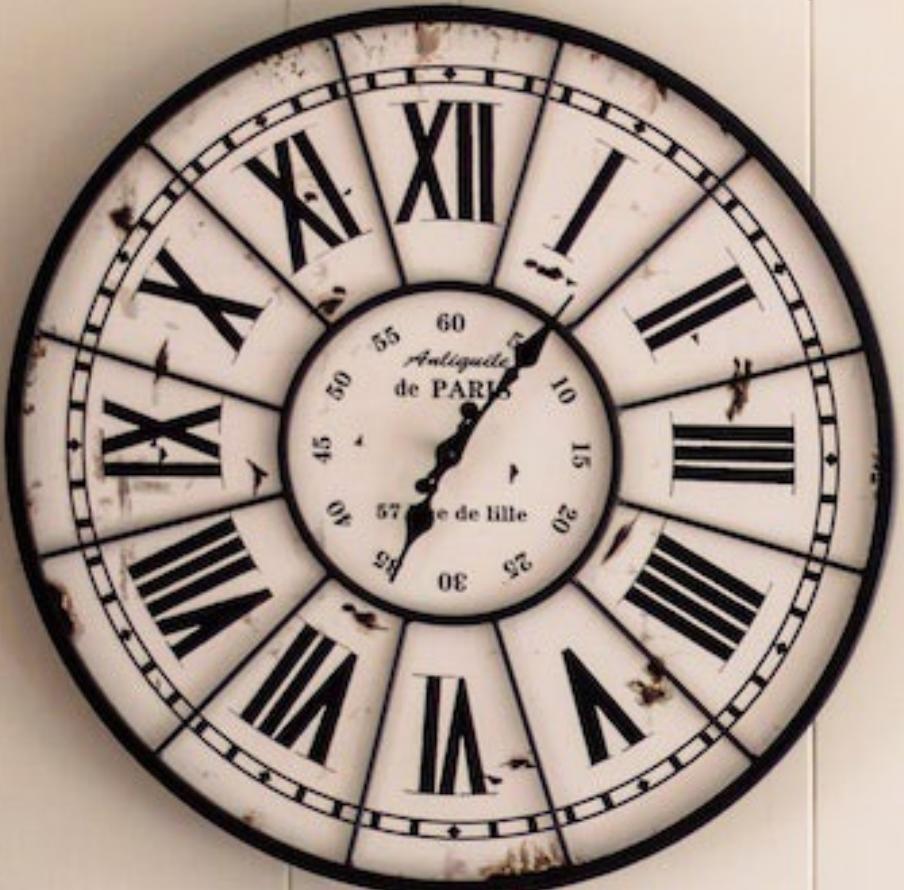
Public Health Messaging Across Differing Viewpoints

Amelia Burke-Garcia, PhD, MA

January 27, 2022



Political polarization in the U.S. has been growing significantly in recent years.



The overall share of Americans who consistently express conservative or liberal opinions has doubled over the past twenty years (from 10% to 21%).



Ideological thinking and partisanship are now more closely aligned than ever before.

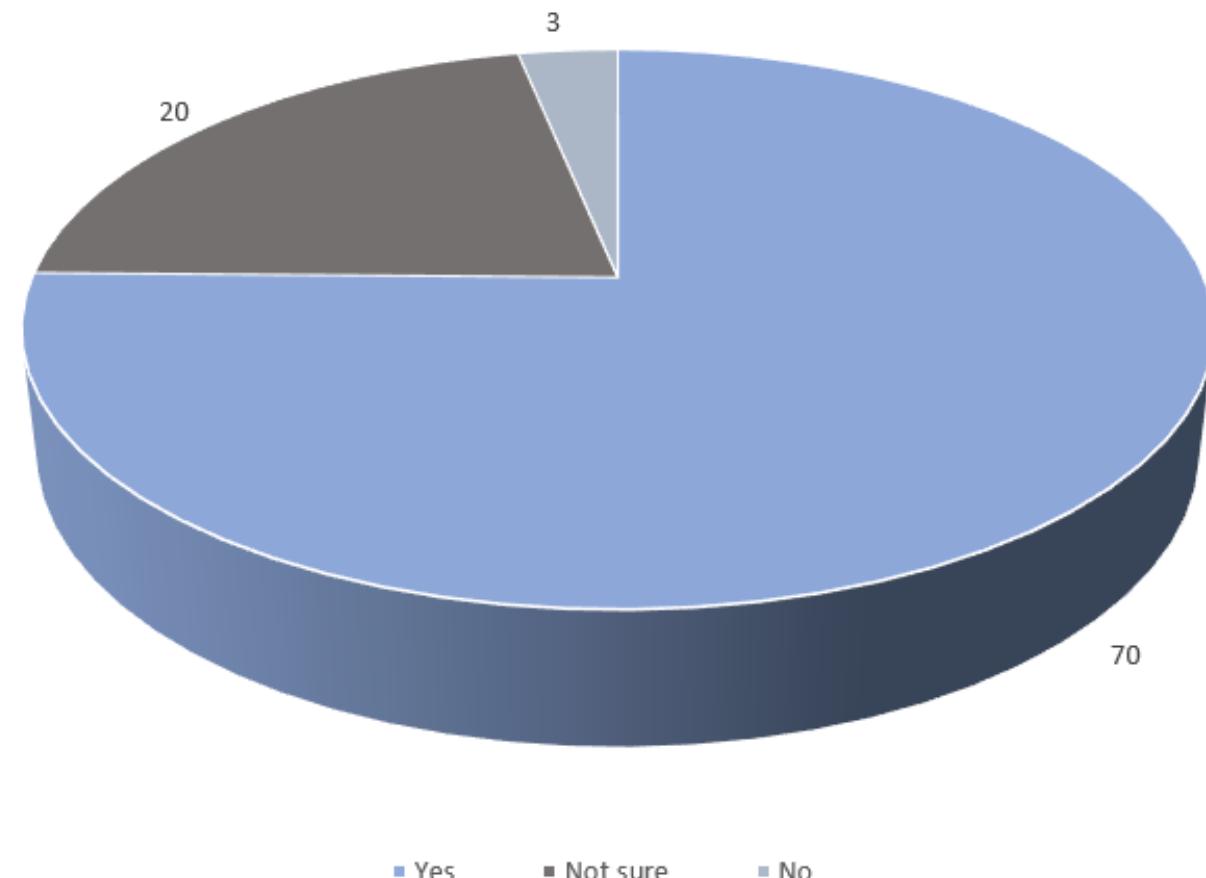
This is happening faster in the U.S. than in any other democracy.



Are you seeing polarization amongst the audiences you serve?

Are you seeing polarization amongst the audiences you serve?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Not sure



The Impact of Social Media



50 percent of Internet users report that they hear about the latest news via social media before ever hearing about it on a news station.



Social media users tend to promote their favorite narratives, form polarized groups and resist information that doesn't conform to their beliefs.



An average user will only read an article for 15 seconds or less and the average video watch time online is 10 seconds.

“Falsehood diffused significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth in all categories of information.”



Sinan Aral, Massachusetts Institute
of Technology



“A plethora of inaccurate and even potentially lifethreatening content [is] readily accessible to anyone with a modem and an Internet browser.”

~ Risk and Petersen (2002, p.2713)





The Internet plays a large role in disseminating anti-vaccination information.



MUNCHIES
FOOD BY VICE

A Disturbing Number of People Think Coronavirus Is Related to Corona Beer

Google search trends illustrate that we're surrounded by very, very confused people when it comes to the rapidly spreading illness.

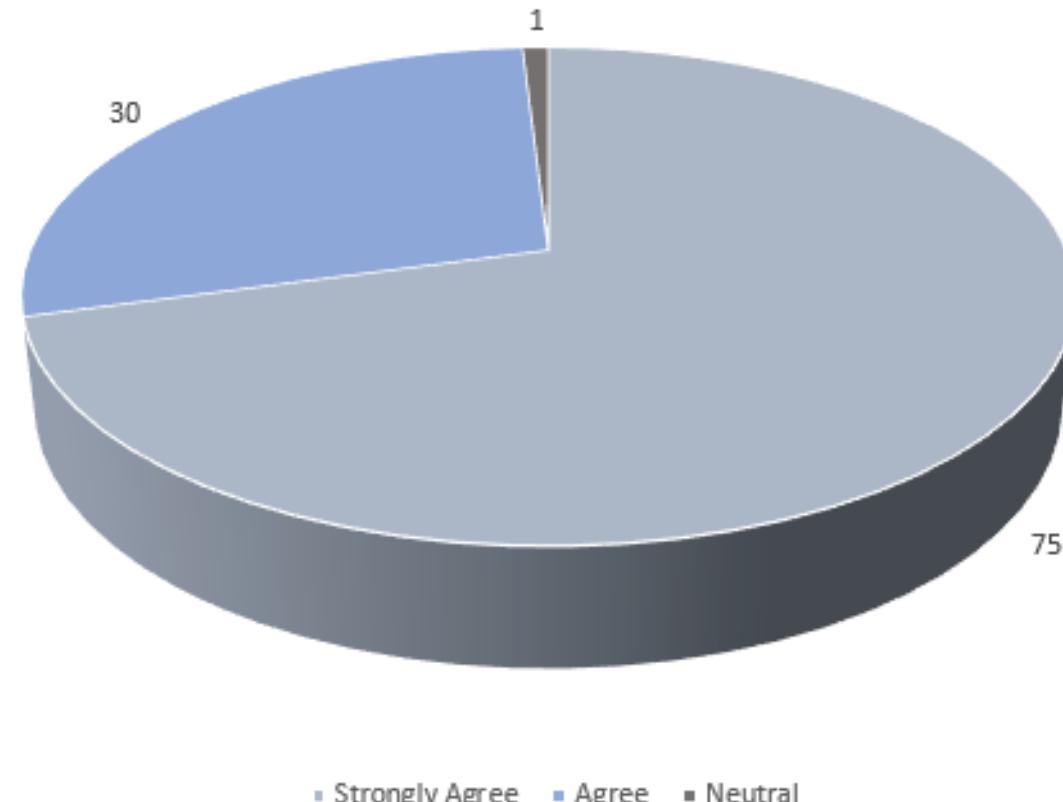
JC

By [Jelisa Castrodale](#)

The role that social media is playing in promoting misinformation is of great concern to me.

- 1. Strongly agree**
- 2. Agree**
- 3. Neutral**
- 4. Disagree**
- 5. Strongly disagree**

The role that social media is playing in promoting misinformation is of great concern to me.



Strategies for Health Communicators

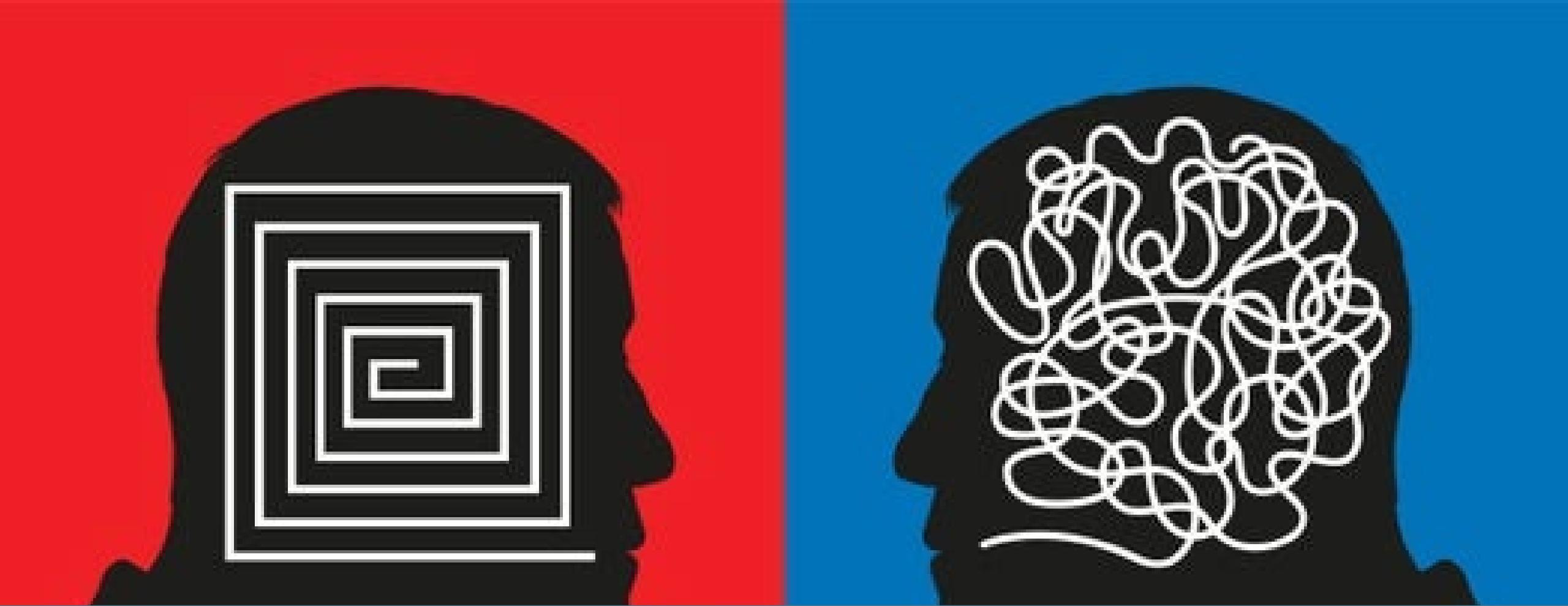
Research on Messaging Difficult or Polarizing Topics

Findings differ in terms of how messaging can persuade people about key health issues

The literature suggests several strategies that can be useful in constructing effective messaging:

- Framing strategies
- Reducing psychological distance
- Emotional appeals
- Efficacy cues
- Weight of evidence/weight of expert reporting
- Inoculation/correcting misinformation
- Separating science from conspiracy theories

For today's purposes, I offer the following thoughts on how to reach different groups of people with differing beliefs...



Not all counter-beliefs are irrational.

Areas of uncertainty exist when exact knowledge does not exist (or knowledge is shifting).



Don't underestimate
the power of research.





One-size-fits-all messaging no longer works; rather, tailor messages to the drivers of people's beliefs.

The messenger is very important – for consistent and changing information.



What is perceived as trustworthy is situational and can be negotiated.





Realize that you won't be able to move all people.

Of all of these ideas, the one that was most interesting to me was:

1. Not all counter-beliefs are irrational.
2. Areas of uncertainty exist when exact knowledge does not exist (or knowledge is shifting).
3. Don't underestimate the power of research.
4. One-size-fits-all messaging no longer works; rather, tailor messages to the drivers of people's beliefs.
5. The messenger is very important – for consistent and changing information.
6. What is perceived as trustworthy is situational and can be negotiated.
7. Realize that you won't be able to move all people.

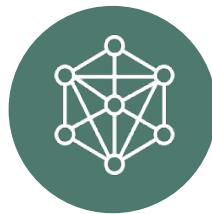
Case Study: *How Right Now* Campaign

Formative Research: What We Did



eScan

>700 peer-reviewed and grey publications and existing communication campaigns – in both English and Spanish



Data Distillation

>20 data sets analyzed



Social Listening

>1 million social media posts (a total of 129,322 were relevant) – in both English and Spanish



Partner Needs Assessments

>150 partner and influencers assessed; 16 needs assessment calls held



Partner Listening Sessions

6 partner listening sessions conducted to date; 29 members of audiences participated



Online Focus Groups

10 online focus groups conducted; 58 members of audiences participated

AmeriSpeak® May Omnibus Survey

Total Weighted Sample: 250,925,936

Total Unweighted Sample: 1,065

1,004 (English-language)

61 (Spanish-language)

Total Weighted Screened Sample: 161,265,124

Total Unweighted Screened Sample: 731

682 (English-language)

49 (Spanish-language)

What We Learned

Validation messaging resonates

Hope and resilience messaging resonates

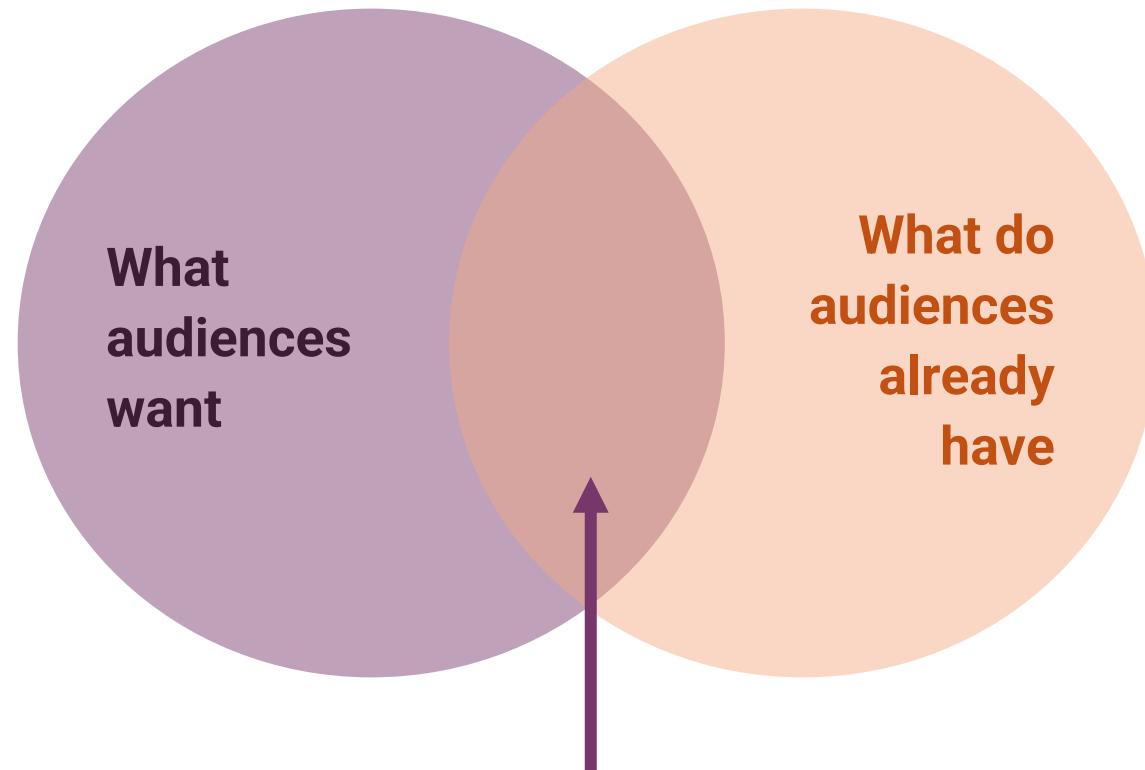
People want help, but make it easy and have it come from a trusted source

Need to meet them where they are – culturally sensitive and not overbearing

There is a need for more translated – and transcreated – messages about COVID-19 for the Latinx population + partners that serve this community



What We Aimed To Do



**What the campaign
brings together**

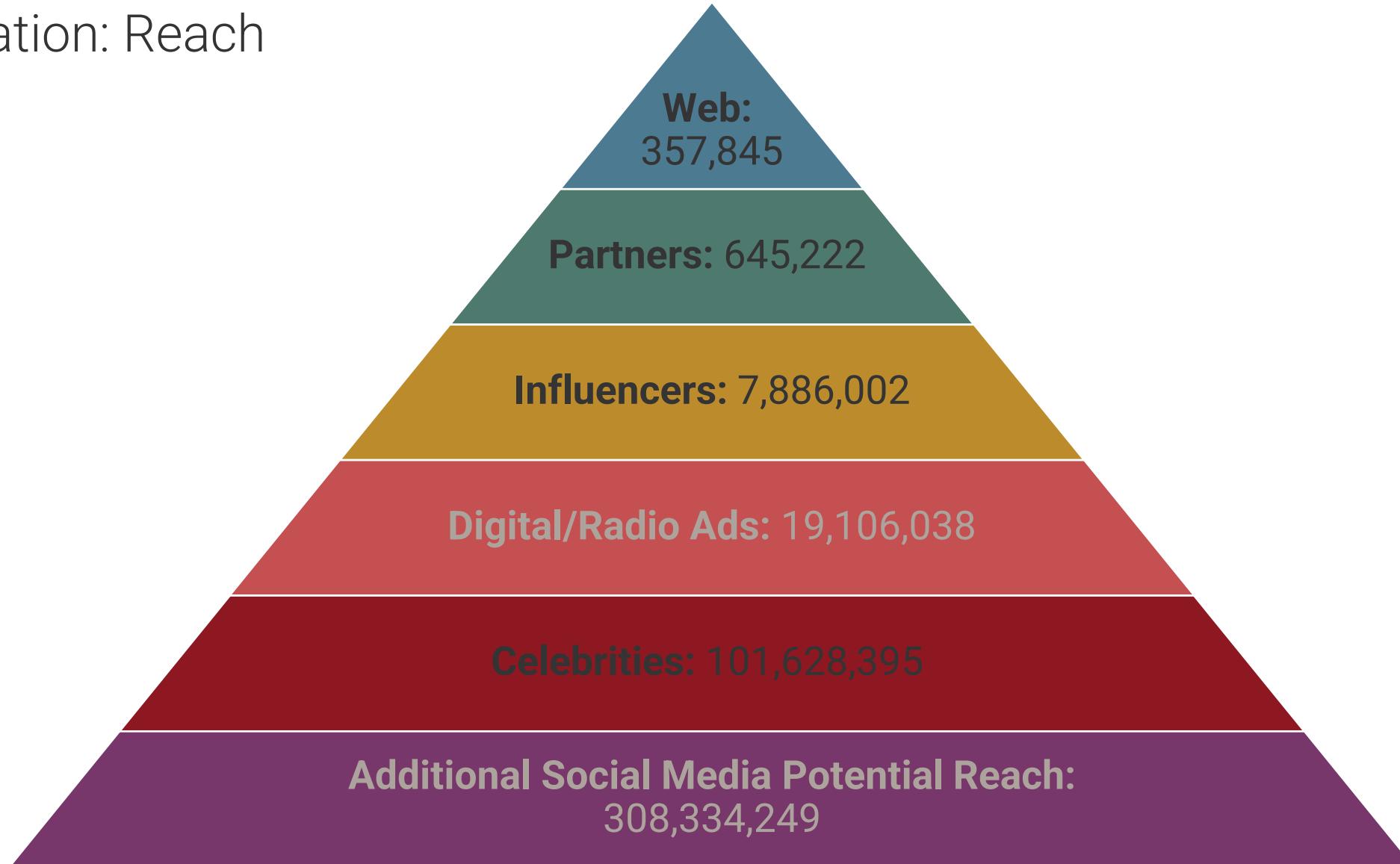
Messaging Strategy by Audience Group

Audience	Biggest Challenge	Possible Solution
People ages 65 and older	Isolation, Helplessness, Anxiety	Increase social connection, new ways of connecting with loved ones/friends, communities (overcome technology barriers); enhanced sense of connectedness and belonging
Their caregivers	Fear, Stress, Burnout	Techniques for managing stress (self-care, reaching out for support, reframing situation to reduce feelings of inadequacy/failure)
People living with pre-existing conditions (mental)	Loss of routine; Exacerbated mental/behavioral health issues; Isolation	Help with simple routine; self-care; stress management techniques
People living with pre-existing conditions (physical)	Fear of getting sick, fear of lost routine	Help with continued social distancing through reopening while building back some routine; self-care, self-management
People experiencing violence	Trapped; Helplessness; Trauma; Isolation	Helplines, virtual therapy, coping
People experiencing economic distress	Distress + Grief over loss (e.g., loss of control, employment, educational progress, ability to meet basic needs); Fear of getting sick	Connections to services (food, free resources and mental health services)

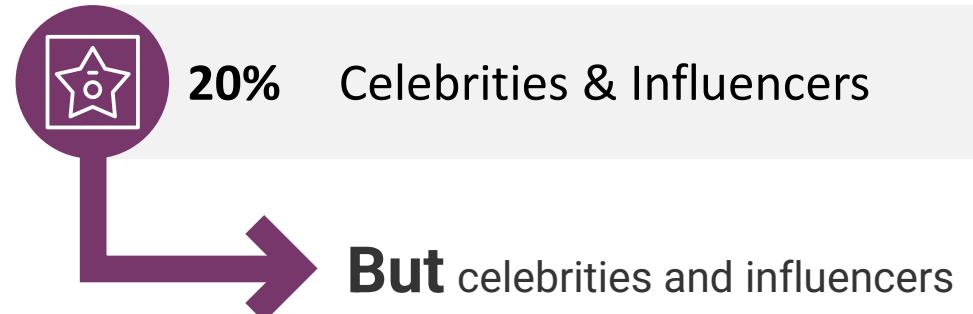
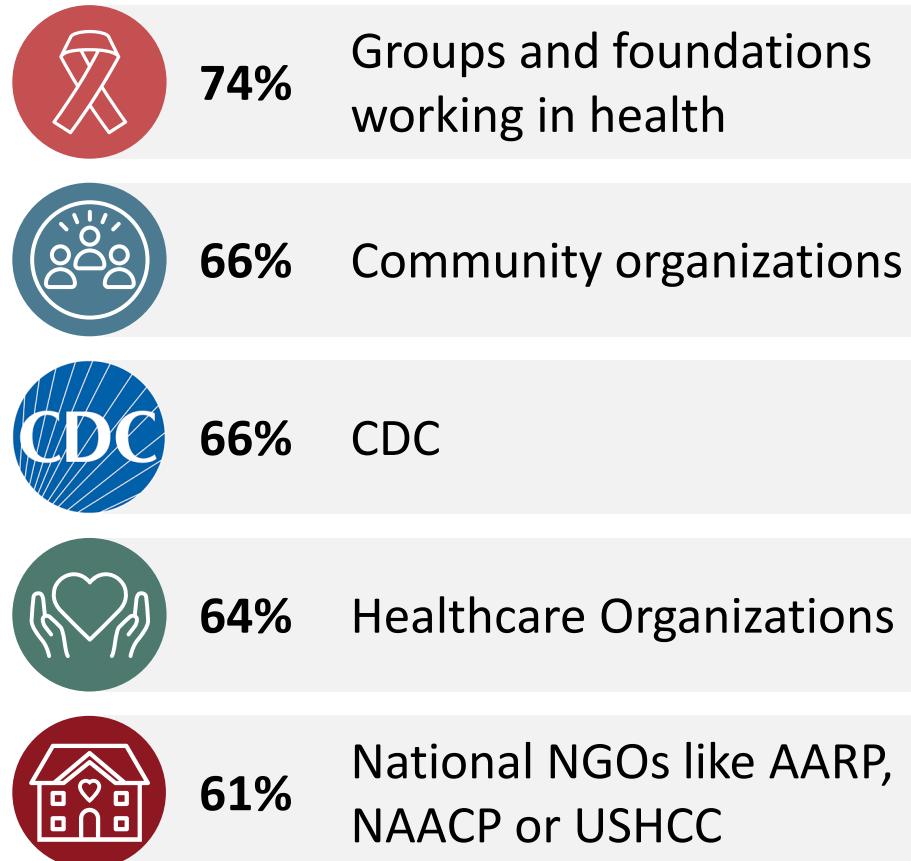
Campaign Implementation + Dissemination

Partners	Influencers + Celebrities	Ads
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Partners were convened monthly about HRN/QHA plans and to hear from themPartners shared messages and materials with their audiences via:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Social media channels (paid and organic)WebinarsSMS (text message) campaignsEmail blasts/newslettersIn-person events	<ul style="list-style-type: none">HRN/QHA engaged celebrities and influencers, providing them messages and materials to share on their social media platformsCelebrities and influencers received approved content that they could share with their followersSome messages were posted as approved; others, mostly with influencers, were adapted to include their individual voice and personal stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none">HRN/QHA ran targeted ad buys on traditional and digital platforms<ul style="list-style-type: none">Search ads on GoogleSocial media ads on Facebook and Instagram, including a small pilot on the platform RedditRadio ads

Evaluation: Reach



Evaluation: Source Credibility



20% Celebrities & Influencers

But celebrities and influencers were more trusted among:

- People experiencing economic distress
- African American/Black respondents
- Hispanic/Latino respondents

Summary of Findings

- During this period of rapid change, flexibility was key to campaign implementation
- Synthesizing multiple streams of data enabled the campaign to better understand rapidly changing contexts and emerging audience needs
- Influencer approaches and ads were best positioned for the priority audiences that most needed to hear our messages – especially with Spanish language speakers
- The most effective campaign messages offered positive messages AND actionable suggestions – a “1-2 punch”
- These adaptive techniques resulted in increased reach of and engagement with the campaign

Lessons Learned & Implications

- **There is a need for in-language and culturally appropriate communications and outreach strategies**
- **Flexibility is key – and ongoing data collection is key to this**
- **Communication and messaging should consider leveraging that “1-2 punch”**
- **Much information sharing and community building is happening natively on social media**
 - Leverage communication channels that meet people where they are

Q&A

Is there any data showing a generational difference in how polarized people are now? I anecdotally hear that seniors are more "radicalized" nowadays than others.

Answer from Dr. Burke-Garcia: Generally speaking, people tend to be more liberal when they are younger and become disproportionately conservative by retirement age. But I have not heard of data that specifically examines political radicalization by age group. In a quick search of the literature, I could not find anything recent on this topic.

How do you talk about uncertainty/changing messaging in such a way that you maintain credibility?

Answer from Dr. Burke-Garcia: I think it's important to emphasize the notion of "for now" or "based on current knowledge" in messaging in an environment where knowledge is shifting. Knowledge changes and people can be accepting of that, but problems occur when we come out with statements that sound indubitable and then change the message.

Any suggestions on effective uses of social media itself? I'm thinking of the 15 second time span.

Answer from Dr. Burke-Garcia: Social media is a hard platform to message complex topics, given the limited real estate available. Video, audio, and visual formats can help convey a longer message in a shorter space. Consider how to truncate a text-based messages and complement with accompanying video, audio, and visual elements. Graphics can help convey your message. “Stories” are a great way to tell a story in pieces. And remember, what is your main message? You don't have to tell a complex message with one tweet, post, or video. You can message something as part of a series. If you break it down into simple key messages, you can convey something point by point. And if you work with opinion leaders as messengers, they may be able to help you figure out which points of a message are most important to convey.

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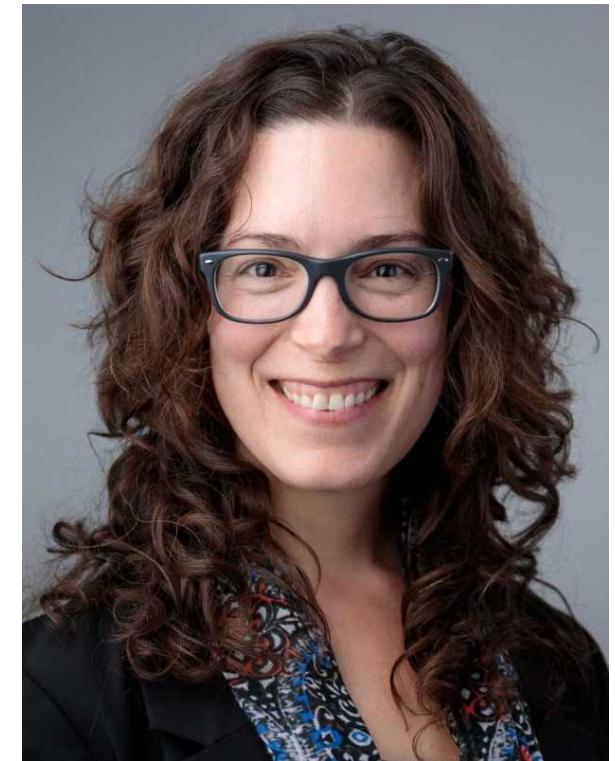
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About Dr. Amelia Burke-Garcia

Dr. Amelia Burke-Garcia is an award-winning digital health communicator and researcher with nearly 20 years of experience creating innovative and impactful digital interventions for health programs.

Most recently, Dr. Burke-Garcia has led the How Right Now campaign, intended to reduce adverse psychological and behavioral outcomes amongst key populations experiencing mental health issues during and as a result of COVID-19. Prior work has included supporting flu vaccination by working with MeetUp groups across the country and partnering with the Waze mobile application to promote HIV testing. She has also been examining the role of influencers in health communication and research for more than a decade.

She has been named as Diverse Health Hub's Woman of the Week and to VeryWellHealth.com's list of 10 Modern Female Innovators Shaking Up Health Care. Her book, *Influencing Health: A Comprehensive Guide to Working with Online Influencers*, was published in 2019. She holds a Ph.D. in Communication from George Mason University, a Master's degree from Georgetown University, and a Bachelor's degree from McGill University.





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