Overall, the experts agreed that the Know the Signs campaign was strongly aligned with best practices and was one of the best media campaigns on the subject, mainly because it avoided many of the problems of prior campaigns, such as using stereotypical images associated with suicide. Specifically, the campaign scored the highest in areas listed in the table below; experts gave the campaign perfect or almost perfect ratings in all of these key domains.

There were, however, content areas that the experts identified as needing improvement. These areas for improvement were identified by experts during their discussion of campaign ratings. Experts believed that some of the information in the safety-planning section was either outdated or unsubstantiated and that it would be difficult for a potential helper to understand. The introductory video on the website’s home page was also viewed as difficult to understand.

Experts specifically noted that two of the warning signs reported in the materials (putting affairs in order and giving away possessions) were unsupported by scientific literature. With regard to the campaign’s imagery, some experts felt that the pictures looked like “stock images” or that the people depicted were “too good-looking” to seem realistic or relatable.

One point that was heavily debated among the experts was the phrasing of the “suicide is preventable” message. Some experts thought that such an absolute statement was insensitive to loss survivors and mental health professionals. Other panelists, however, believed that the message was extremely important for...
the general audience and that qualifying the statement by saying that “most” or “many” suicides are preventable detracted from the strength of the message. As a solution, experts suggested adding a component that acknowledged that not all prevention efforts would necessarily be effective and that although all suicides are worth trying to prevent, some may not be preventable.

Note
The rating tool used by the expert panel and a more detailed article on the Know the Signs campaign evaluation are forthcoming. The tool is currently available from the authors upon request.

Reference

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CalMHSA
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