Framing to Messaging
Strategies for changing the conversation about Oral Health

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FrameWorks Institute
A Multidisciplinary Approach to Communications

- Advocacy
- Language & Linguistics
- Sociology
- Digital Media
- Anthropology & Psychology
- Public Health
- Political Science
- Administration
- Communications & Campaigns
FrameWorks is on a mission...

to advance the nonprofit sector's capacity
to frame the public discourse on social problems.
Examples of FrameWorks’ Research

• Harvard University Center on the Developing Child – how to translate science of early childhood brain and biological development

• Paul Hamlyn Foundation – how to promote a more productive discussion about crime and criminal justice reform in the UK

• National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children – how to use communications as part of an innovative strategy to prevent child maltreatment in the UK

• Alberta Family Wellness Initiative – how to talk about the science of addiction; training researchers, practitioners and policymakers to use frames to close the research/practice gap

• Public Health Informatics Institute – how to help public health professionals understand the function and the value of informatics as a crucial part of population health improvement


• DentaQuest Foundation – how to help the public understand the importance of oral health to overall health, and engage policymakers in thinking of oral health as a social justice issue
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<tr>
<th><strong>Framing</strong></th>
<th><strong>Strategic Communications</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drives public narrative in a new direction</td>
<td>Drives action toward specific, measurable goals</td>
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<td>Establishes contours, terms, context of an issue</td>
<td>Works within current discourse</td>
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<td>Consistent over time to achieve long term goals</td>
<td>Varied across settings, audiences, etc.</td>
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<td>Key tools: values, metaphors, selection of themes</td>
<td>Key tools: Messages, calls to action</td>
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<td>Coordinates narratives, positioning, across a field</td>
<td>Plans outreach and engagement along a calendar</td>
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Informed by the work of the Perception Institute
Frames are sets of choices about how information is presented:

What to emphasize, how to explain it, and what to leave unsaid.
Frames Can Help Make Change

Communication → Discourse → Thinking → Policy
When a frame “works,” it moves thinking in multiple ways

- Knowledge:
  If people have oral health issues, this can create severe health problems in other parts of the body.

- Attitudes:
  If people in this country have poor oral health, our country has failed in its responsibilities.

- Policy support:
  Health clinics should produce materials in multiple languages to inform people about oral health, no matter what language they speak.
What Does it Take to Reframe an Issue?

Map the terrain

Develop a strategy to navigate to higher ground

Build a caravan, equip the travelers, and start moving
We conducted a comprehensive investigation

**Expert Interviews**
What needs to be communicated?

**Cognitive Interviews**
How does the public think?

**Media Content & Field Frame Analysis**
What frames are in play already?

**Tool Design**
What reframes are plausible?

**On-the-Street Interviews**
Which reframes seem to work?

**Controlled Experiments**
Which reframes drive policy preferences?

**Persistence Trials**
How will this frame fare in the world?
How can advocates make progress on oral health reform?

Map the Gaps study compared expert and public thinking

Surround Sound study analyzed effects of frames used in media and advocacy

Reframe Design study developed and tested a number of frame elements

Toolkit and trainings
Communications challenges

• Oral health is narrowly understood as about teeth, and the health of the mouth

• Barriers to care are systemic rather than individual behaviors

• Inequities seem inevitable

• The oral health system is a public health system

• Prevention efforts need to be well-framed
You Say...They Think

AAA

Expert/Advocate

BBB

Public
“We can improve oral health and even eradicate some problems with widespread prevention efforts.”

“Of all the things that the society has to pay for, I put oral health as near the top.”
Cultural models are presupposed, taken-for-granted models of the world that are widely shared by the members of a society and that play an enormous role in their understanding of that world and their behavior in it.”

— Naomi Quinn and Dorothy Holland, *Cultural Models in Language & Thought* (1987)
Cultural Models help us “think fast”

- Cognitive short cuts created through years of experience and expectation.
- Many are widely shared across a population, and are reinforced in media, education, custom, and elsewhere.
- People rely on cultural models to organize and make meaning out of experiences, feelings, questions, communications, media…in short, life.
Implications for communicators?
Oral Health

- Good oral health=no cavities
- Pretty smile and fresh breath
- Self-esteem and social status
- Mouth=gateway to the body

Causes of Problems

- Poor personal hygiene
- Bad parents
- Too much sugar and smoking
- Choosing to delay or avoid care
- “Cultures” of poor self-care

Health

- Health Individualism
- Health hierarchy (vital organs vs. other stuff)
- Consumerism

What’s in the Swamp of...

Oral Health

Solutions

- Three simple things (brush, floss, go to the dentist)
- Better information for better decisions
- Low priority
- There’s nothing society can do

Oral Health System

- Dentist offices are the system
- Team=dentists, hygienists, receptionists
- Dental insurance coverage is supplemental
- Prevention=better, earlier self-care
Tested frame elements for oral health communications

- Targeted Justice value
- Keys to Oral Health metaphor
- Responsible Management value
Targeted Justice

Redirect public perceptions away from:

- Poor Outcomes = Poor Choices
- Individualism
- Focus on Problem

Move public thinking towards:

- Collective Responsibility
- Systemic Perspective
- Solutions

The story you’re telling:

Different situations call for different responses and groups have different needs. By making sure that our health system allows people to get the kind of support they need to maintain good oral health, we can create a more just and fair society.
Your issue matters because:

Using resources wisely means making smart decisions now to avoid problems later. When all communities have strong prevention efforts in place and access to oral health care, we can reduce costs by stopping problems before they start.

Redirect public perceptions away from:

- Individualism
- Us vs. Them
- Three simple things

Move public thinking towards:

- Systemic influences on oral health
- Collective responsibility
Keys to Oral Health

The story you are telling:
To get to good oral health, everyone goes through a series of doors - but for some people, they are locked. Without the keys, people cannot access oral health.

Redirect public perceptions away from:
• Three Simple Things
• Health Individualism
• Dentists’ Offices are the System
• Stigmatization of oral health problems

Move public thinking towards:
• Collective responsibility
• Systems thinking
• Collective efficacy (we can do something)
Putting It All Together
AVOID

this is about your smile
these disparities are awful!
prevention, full stop
leaving solutions to the imagination
zooming in on individuals

ADVANCE

this is about overall health
justice requires targeted efforts
public health prevention looks like this
illustrating innovative solutions
zooming out to barriers
We’re working to improve oral health access and care for all, especially mothers and children.

Health equity means oral health equity.

To get to health equity, we must invest in expanding access to preventative efforts in oral health.

To live up to our ideal of justice for all, we have to tailor sound prevention measures to the needs of specific groups.

We’re working on specific ways to meet the distinct oral health needs of mothers and children.

One-size-fits-all rarely works in health. In the interests of fairness, we need to respond to specific needs and circumstances.
Network Examples
Unlocking the Doors to Good Oral Health

Access to good oral health can be thought of like a series of doors. Some people have the keys they need to unlock every door, while others are missing one or more keys. If people don’t have all the keys, it doesn’t matter how hard they push – if they can’t unlock the door, they can’t achieve good oral health. Oral Health Ohio advocates for programs and policies that give all Ohioans the keys they need to unlock the doors to good oral health.

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<tr>
<th>The relationship between oral health and overall health is not understood.</th>
<th>Healthier mouths mean healthier people. And healthier people means stronger communities.</th>
<th>Engage non-oral health professionals in the relationship between oral and overall health</th>
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<td>I don’t have insurance coverage for dental care.</td>
<td>People have access to affordable dental insurance. People understand the benefits they have.</td>
<td>Advocate to maintain the adult dental benefit under the Medicaid program. Collaborate with stakeholders to educate beneficiaries of the dental benefits provided under the Medicaid program.</td>
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<td>I don’t understand what my dental care provider is telling me.</td>
<td>Providers of all types receive cultural competency and health literacy training.</td>
<td>Train dentists, hygienists, school nurses, public health workers, and nursing home staff in health literacy. Provide oral health training and resources to professionals in a variety of disciplines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not live near a dentist office.</td>
<td>Oral health services are offered at sites throughout the community.</td>
<td>Support school-based oral health services. Advocate for the Mobile Dental Facilities legislation.</td>
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<td>Daily oral hygiene is often a neglected part of nursing home care.</td>
<td>Nursing home staff are trained in oral hygiene practices.</td>
<td>Collaborate with partners to provide oral health training to nursing home staff. Advocate for oral hygiene standards in nursing homes.</td>
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North Carolina Oral Health Collaborative
Working Together
Influence diluted, or concentrated? The difference is a shared framing strategy.
Framing can Divide or Unify Movements

Public Health
Dentistry
Human Services
Community Development
Health Equity

Public Understanding
Effectively Framed Core Story

Meta Frame Movement Building

Public Health

Dentistry

Human Services

Early Childhood

Health Equity

Effective Framing

Changed Public Understanding; Demand for Better Policy
A common language is an essential ingredient in change efforts

“It is critical to have a common language - and a clarifying one - prior to social change.”

-Participant in framing training for Alberta Family Wellness Initiative
Resources

Unlocking the Door to New Thinking:
Frames for Advancing Oral Health Reform

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Thank you!

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