

THE ARTICLE

Social Marketing and Community Capacity Building: Comparing Two Approaches

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Communities are complex systems. They are more akin to raising a child versus baking a loaf of bread whereby, you follow a step-by-step recipe and can expect to get a perfectly baked loaf of bread each time. In the face of complexity within a community, there are also many different approaches being used to target specific groups, audiences or sectors to help address critical challenges and provide solutions or support.

Social marketing harnesses commercial marketing knowledge to understand the wants, needs and aspirations of people and how to offer products (tangible and intangible) that people believe meet their needs. Social marketing strives to create conditions that support behaviours, which increase the well-being and quality of life for individuals, families and societies across the globe. This is distinct from social media, and is utilized to address the determinants of health and social challenges using an array of interventions—often focused on making them fun, easy and popular.

There is a distinct difference between social marketing (in the context of public health) and community capacity building. This article provides a brief comparison of the two approaches as a means to support improved health and well-being of individuals and communities.

What is Social Marketing?

One well-known definition of social marketing is: "The application of commercial marketing technologies to the analysis, planning, execution, and evaluation of programs designed to influence voluntary behavior of target audiences in order to improve their personal welfare and that of society." [1] Note the following key points in this definition.

Social marketing:

- Uses commercial marketing strategies;
- Involves influencing voluntary (not forced or coerced) behavior change (not just increased awareness or increased knowledge);
- Promotes an end goal of improved personal welfare and improved welfare of society.

What is Community Capacity Building?

BCHC defines community capacity building as the processes and activities that maximize individual and community potential. A comprehensive, integrated approach to capacity building nurtures excellence and expansion in all areas of human and community development: physical, psychological, social, cultural, environmental and economic. In this way, capacity building efforts reflect the complexity of people, and the communities in which we live our lives.

BCHC offers services to support community groups and local governments to assess, enhance and mobilize the capacities they need to continually create and improve community health and well-being. [Learn more](#) about how we can work with you to create customized approaches to fulfill on your healthy communities goals [here](#).

[1] Alan Andreasen, Marketing Social Change: Changing Behavior to Promote Health, Social Development, and the Environment, p. 7

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

Find out more about BC Healthy Communities approach: www.bchealthycommunities.ca/healthycommunities



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Comparison Chart Between Social Marketing and Community Capacity Building

Social Marketing [1]	Community Capacity Building
Focus on “what is” (i.e. the problem) as identified by professionals or consumers	Focus on “what could be” as defined by community
Prescriptive	Inquiring
Targeted messages to appeal and promote	Conversations to build curiosity, awareness and relationships
“Sell” new attitudes, choices and behaviours	Explore root causes of attitudes, choices and behaviours, and what it will take to make changes
Emphasis on measurable outcomes in attitude, choice, and behaviour	Emphasis on supportive relationships, reciprocity, and resilience
Promote ideas and goals	Engagement to identify shared ideas and goals
Focus on consumer	Focus on citizen
Target audience	Include and involve diverse community members
Identify topic	Identify purpose and principles; community chooses topics to explore and address purpose and principles
Persuade and promote	Engage and expand (knowledge, skills, self-awareness, other awareness, cultural awareness, relationships, commitment to community well-being, etc.)
Promotes cost/benefit analysis (i.e. costs of not changing behaviours, or investing)	Promotes the potential for health and well-being of individuals, families and communities.
Market a range of slogans, products, services, or practices	Explore how everyone can contribute to the goal of healthy children in healthy families in healthy community, and “best practices” of community building
Promote use of available services	Raise awareness of and promote use of broad range of community assets: formal and informal
Focus on change in individuals. Change efforts address single identified issue.	Sees early childhood development as an issue that affects individuals and communities. Focusing on one issue, enhances community capacity to address a range of important community issues.
Change individual thinking and choice	Change individual and cultural thinking and choice
Communications strategy as primary tool, i.e. TV, radio, newspaper, internet, social media, banners and balloons	Primary tools are relationship building, shared learning, and engagement