

Southwest Minnesota Speaking of Cannabis Campaign Regional Evaluation Report

August 2026

Prepared by



Professional
Data Analysts



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Executive Summary

Cannabis education campaign has wide reach across southeast Minnesota

Eleven counties in southeast Minnesota partnered together in the spring of 2026 to run a regional cannabis education media campaign. They used the [Speaking of Cannabis](#) campaign, which was designed to inform adults who have kids in their lives about **the impacts of cannabis on the developing brain, strategies for talking to kids about cannabis, and ways to safely store cannabis in the home**. The campaign ran on digital media (including websites, social media, and streaming audio), radio, print, emails, and local onsite media channels, along with digital and in-person community outreach. Across the 11 counties, campaign highlights include the following:



6.3 million digital impressions¹

Over 191K clicks and views of ads



127 onsite displays at community locations

7.1 million estimated monthly impressions¹ of onsite displays



50 local newspaper ads

10 local press releases



30 organic social media posts

Over 11K organic social media impressions¹

95 likes, shares, and clicks



31 community presentations

2,507 attendees

Interview participant feedback²

- Found campaign messages to be timely, relevant, and saw multiple uses for campaign resources and talking tips
- Connected with message about impact on developing brain
- Appreciated the reminder to safely store cannabis, even for those without kids in the home

Future opportunities

- Continue to pursue cross-county partnerships to maximize impact of cannabis education efforts
- Explore opportunities to distribute campaign materials to families through schools and parent groups²
- Continue to promote local resources for cannabis treatment and recovery for families and teens²

¹ Impressions = number of times an ad was displayed to users

² Based on interviews with residents from participating counties



Introduction

This section provides an overview of the Speaking of Cannabis media campaign that was implemented in southeast Minnesota in the spring of 2026.

Pictured: Local public health staff with campaign materials

Background

Report Introduction

In 2023, the state of Minnesota legalized recreational cannabis use for adults ages 21 and older.¹ Legalization can contribute to increased cannabis use among adults², and it also increases exposure and access for youth. Adults play a key role in teaching kids and teens how to make good choices that will impact their long-term physical and mental health. Thus, it is more important than ever to educate people of all ages about the risks and impacts of using cannabis.

Purpose of Report

This report describes the implementation, reach, and impact stories of a regional cannabis education campaign led through a partnership of 11 counties in southeast Minnesota. The counties contracted with [Professional Data Analysts](#) (PDA), an external evaluation firm, to develop this report summarizing campaign activities, media metrics, and stories of campaign impact from interviews with people across the region.

¹ mn.gov/ocm/laws/cannabis-law.jsp

² Gali, K., Winter, S. J., Ahuja, N. J., Frank, E., & Prochaska, J. J. (2021). Changes in cannabis use, exposure, and health perceptions following legalization of adult recreational cannabis use in California: A prospective observational study. *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy*, 16, 1-10.

³ Data is from 9th and 11th grade students from the 2025 Minnesota Student Survey. One county did not have data available in 2025 and is not included here. education.mn.gov/mde/dse/health/mss/

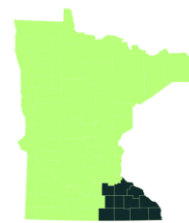
Cannabis statistics in southeast Minnesota³:

45% of high school students think there is **no risk or slight risk** of people harming themselves physically or in other ways **if they use marijuana once or twice a week**

12% of high school students think their parents feel it would be **not at all or only a little bit wrong** for them to use marijuana

9% of high school students have **tried marijuana** at least once

Participating counties in southeast Minnesota



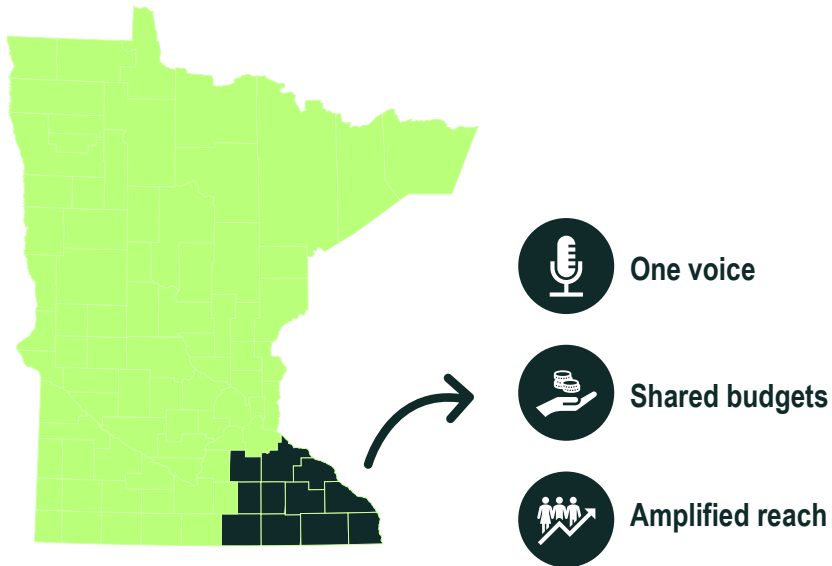
Dodge County	Olmsted County
Fillmore County	Rice County
Freeborn County	Steele County
Goodhue County	Wabasha County
Houston County	Winona County
Mower County	

Campaign Overview

County Partnership

The 11 counties chose to work together on this project to maximize the campaign's impact across southeast Minnesota. The counties established an interagency agreement to share grant funding from the Minnesota Department of Health.¹ Throughout the project, staff from each county met regularly to collaboratively plan, make decisions, and discuss issues. A subgroup of the counties served as a project leadership team and coordinated with the media vendors and other partners.

Southeast Minnesota partnership model



Powered by Bing © GeoNames, Microsoft, TomTom



¹ This activity is made possible by a grant from the Cannabis & Substance Use Prevention program of the Minnesota Department of Health's Health Improvement Bureau.

Campaign Development & Strategy

The counties selected a media campaign called **Speaking of Cannabis**. This campaign was first launched in northern Minnesota in 2025.² The southeast Minnesota team utilized a combination of existing campaign materials with additional resources and outreach strategies tailored to their region. Many materials promoted the campaign website:

www.speakingofcannabis.org.



Target audience

Adults who have kids and teens in their lives, such as parents, caregivers, grandparents, mentors, and other adults



Campaign objectives

1. Educate parents, caregivers, grandparents, mentors, and other adults with kids in their lives about the effects of cannabis on the developing brain.
2. Empower those adults to talk to the kids in their lives about not using cannabis.
3. Encourage safe storage for those adults who use cannabis.

² The Speaking of Cannabis campaign was created in partnership with public health staff from Carlton, Cook, Lake, and St. Louis counties, and the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa's Human Services Division.

Campaign Overview

Campaign Messages

The Speaking of Cannabis campaign focuses on four messages, and each ran on a range of digital, print, broadcast, and local onsite media. A video was created to accompany each message. Local adults provided feedback to help refine messaging before the campaign launched.

The first two campaign messages center on the effects of cannabis on the developing brain. They explain how cannabis continues to negatively impact brain development into late teens and young adulthood, even though it is legal to use in Minnesota starting at age 21.

The third message provides tips for talking to teens about not using cannabis, including staying calm, asking open-ended questions, and listening, to make a safe space for those conversations.

The fourth message focuses on safe storage of cannabis products. This includes keeping cannabis stored up and away from children and pets and protecting them from accidental exposure.

Creative messaging



Effects of cannabis on the developing brain

Tips for talking to teens
about cannabis

Safe storage of cannabis

Campaign Overview

Campaign Activities

The counties contracted with two media vendors to promote the campaign. O'Rourke Media Group ran digital, print, and broadcast media efforts and PlaceBased Media ran local onsite media.

The counties conducted additional activities to supplement the paid media, including organic social media posts, emails, press releases, newspaper ads, spotlight articles, and community presentations. The counties also ordered and distributed printed materials in English, Spanish, Somali, Arabic, and Karen.

Media Timeline

The campaign ran from February 13 to July 29, 2026, across a range of channels. Between February and May, a new campaign message launched on the digital channels approximately every four weeks (see timeline below). The onsite media was posted in community locations across the counties from March 30 to July 29 promoting multiple campaign messages. A comprehensive list of media channels is included on the next page.

Campaign timeline



Digital media



Onsite media

Campaign messages	February	March	April	May	June	July
Your brain is your greatest superpower						
Cannabis can harm a growing brain						
How do I talk to my teen about not using cannabis? ¹						
Keep your cannabis up and away from children						

¹ This message ran for an additional two weeks on streaming audio in May.

Campaign Media Channels

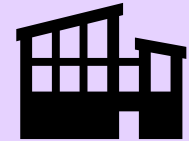
Digital Media

Performance Max (Google Advertising)
Targeted display (Google Advertising)
Targeted social media (Facebook and Instagram)
YouTube
Connected TV
Streaming audio
Targeted email



Onsite Media

Posters
Standeers
Brochures
Rack cards
Window clings



Print and Broadcast Media

Print newspaper ads
Press releases
Spotlight articles
Local radio ads



Community Outreach

Organic social media posts via local public health
Organic emails and e-newsletters
Local presentations
Additional county activities



“

I definitely understand the effects of [cannabis on] the young brain and how fragile we are. And how easy it can be to abuse...

- Wabasha County resident



Media Metrics

This section provides a summary of media metrics from the campaign across digital, print, broadcast, and onsite channels, along with county-led outreach activities.

Pictured: Campaign display in Goodhue County

Key Media Metrics

Advertising Metrics¹

Impressions

The number of times an ad was displayed to users on a platform.

Clicks

The number of times users clicked on an ad to visit the website or landing page.

CTR - Click Through Rate

The percentage of people who clicked on an ad after seeing it. This measures how engaging or relevant the ad is. Formula: $\text{Clicks} \div \text{Impressions}$.

View Rate (YouTube)

The percentage of people who watched a video ad after it was shown to them. This indicates how compelling the video content is. Formula: $\text{Views} \div \text{Impressions}$.



Campaign Engagement Metrics¹

Events (Google Analytics)

Specific actions users take on a website that are tracked in Google Analytics, such as button clicks, form submissions, video plays, or file downloads.

Engagement Time (Google Analytics)

The amount of time users actively spend interacting with a website or page while it is in focus on their screen.

Reach (Targeted Social)

The number of unique users who saw a piece of content or advertisement.

Comments (Targeted Social)

The number of times users responded to a post by writing a comment.

Reactions (Targeted Social)

The number of times users interacted with a post using reaction buttons (Like, Love, Care, etc.).

Shares (Targeted Social)

The number of times users shared a post to their own profile, page, or network, helping extend its visibility.

¹ Source: Speaking of Cannabis Digital Campaign Performance report, February-June 2, 2026. Prepared by O'Rourke Media Group.

Digital Media



Over 6 million impressions were delivered across digital platforms

The campaign delivered a substantial number of messages across a variety of digital platforms to reach audiences across all 11 counties.

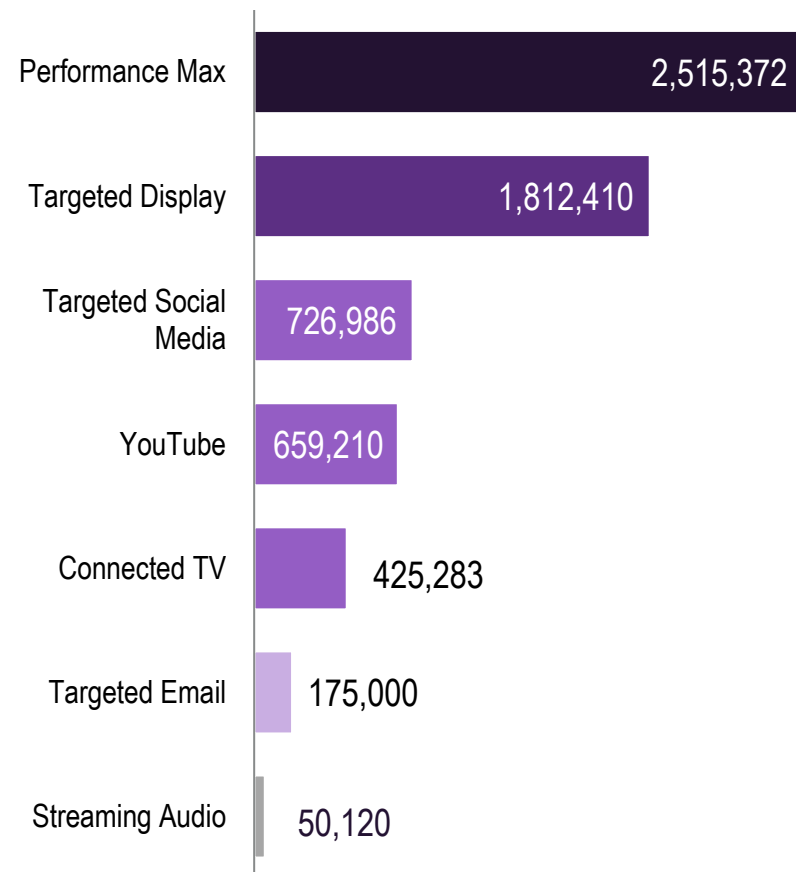
Paid media included digital placements via Google Advertising (Performance Max and Targeted Display)¹, targeted ads on social media (Facebook and Instagram), targeted emails, and ads on YouTube, Connected TV, and streaming audio (including iHeartMedia Radio local stations, Associated Press Radio, and Spotify). Paid media impressions represent the number of times an ad was displayed to users on a platform. Across all paid media channels and counties, the campaign displayed ads over six million times.

Google Advertising (Performance Max and Targeted Display)¹ delivered the highest number of impressions for the campaign, followed by targeted social media, YouTube, and Connected TV. Campaign materials were included in 175,000 targeted emails, and streaming audio delivered over 50,000 impressions.

¹ Performance Max and Targeted Display are run through Google Advertising. Performance Max delivers ads across Google Search, Maps, YouTube, and other Google properties. Targeted Display includes visual banner ads on websites and apps visited by the campaign's target audience.

6.3 million total impressions

Total digital media impressions, by channel



Digital Media



Digital media had high engagement rates across a range of channels

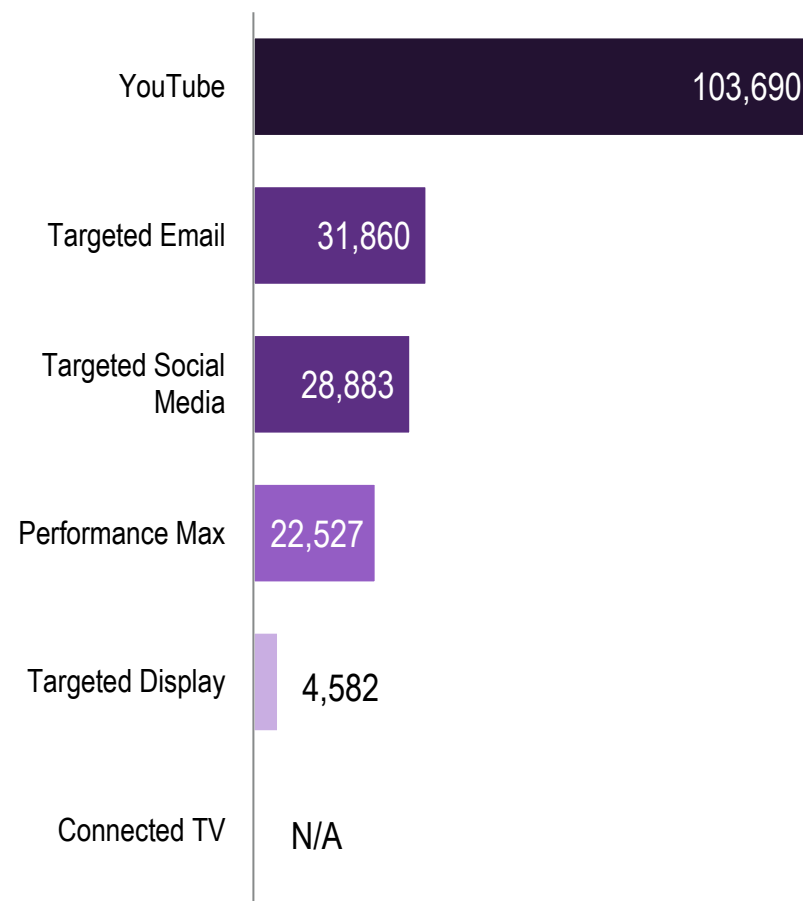
Paid media clicks and views varied across channels. Overall, paid media had just under 200,000 clicks and views during the campaign. YouTube had the highest engagement, with over 100,000 views. Targeted email, social media, and Performance Max all had similar totals for engagement across clicks/views.

Paid media performance consistently surpassed industry standards for ad engagement. Across all channels with available metrics, the campaign achieved above-average engagement compared to industry averages for click-through and view rates. The campaign had a notably high open rate for targeted emails, as well as especially strong performance across YouTube and social media platforms. Engagement rates for paid media in each individual county also surpassed industry averages, indicating strong overall performance by the campaign throughout the region.

Channel	Engagement Rate	Industry Average
YouTube	15.73%	10% view rate
Targeted Email	18.21%	10% open rate
Targeted Social	3.97%	0.90% click through rate
Performance Max	0.90%	0.59% click through rate
Targeted Display	0.25%	0.10% click through rate
Connected TV	N/A	N/A

191,542 total clicks and views

Total paid media clicks/views, by channel



Onsite Media



Over 100 onsite placements generated over 7 million estimated impressions per month across the counties

A total of 127 local onsite advertisements, also known as out-of-home campaign displays, were distributed at locations throughout the 11 counties, generating an estimated 7.1 million monthly impressions. Onsite media can help extend a campaign's reach in local communities by placing ads in neighborhood-specific locations and cultural hubs with high foot traffic from diverse populations.¹ Installments included 107 planned placements, with 20 additional bonus brochure and window cling placements.

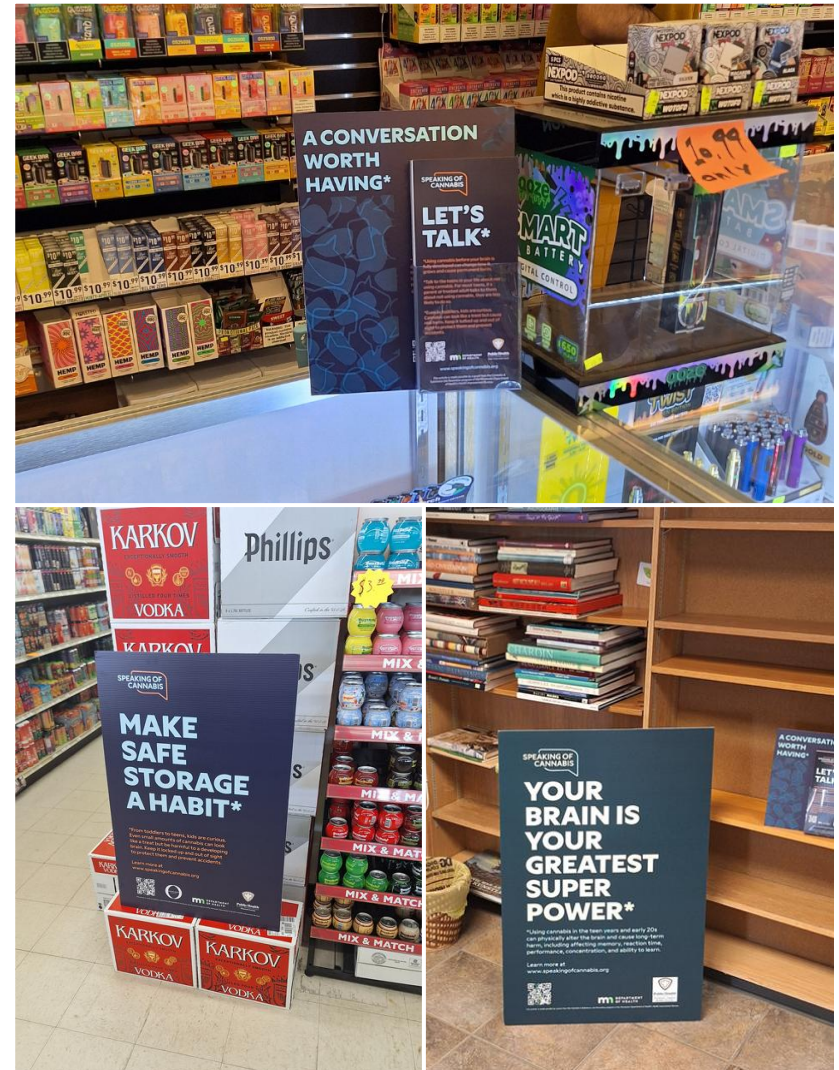
Onsite placements included a wide variety of locations and elements to reach audiences. Campaign elements placed in local communities included:

- Posters
- Brochures & rack cards
- Standees
- Window clings

Neighborhood locations included:

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------|
| 49 liquor stores | 9 churches |
| 22 libraries | 9 convenience stores |
| 18 tobacco shops | 5 dispensaries |
| 10 community centers | 5 family practice clinics |

Local onsite media examples²



¹ Source: MN Cannabis Prevention SE Counties report. Prepared by PlaceBased Media.

² Campaign displays in Dodge, Olmsted, and Fillmore counties.

Print and Broadcast Media



Campaign coverage included local print and broadcast media, increasing reach across counties

Press releases and spotlight articles highlighted and expanded campaign messages for local audiences.

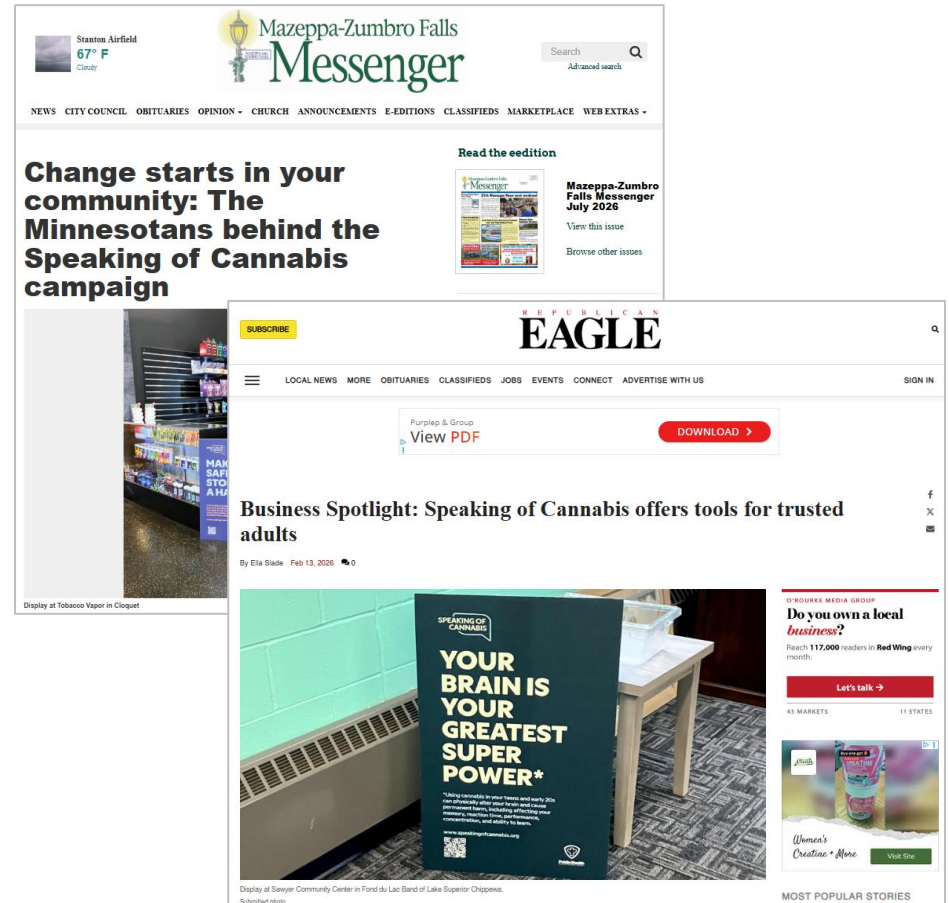
Local public health staff helped draft and locally distribute **10 press releases** during the campaign. These were featured as spotlight articles in local online newspapers.

- ["Speaking of Cannabis offers tools for trusted adults"](#)
- ["Minnesotans behind the Speaking of Cannabis campaign"](#)
- ["Starting the conversation on cannabis"](#)
- ["Encouraging conversations about cannabis"](#)
- ["Understanding cannabis and cannabinoids"](#)
- ["Understanding the culture of cannabis language"](#)
- ["Inside the Speaking of Cannabis campaign's multi-platform outreach"](#)
- ["Facts from the Speaking of Cannabis campaign"](#)
- ["11 counties unite to inform adults about cannabis"](#)
- ["11 Southeast Minnesota counties partner to protect children from accidental cannabis exposure"](#)

Print newspaper ads enhanced local campaign coverage.

A total of **15 newspapers** in the region ran two ads per paper in March and April. Twenty additional ads accompanied spotlight articles in newspapers owned by O'Rourke Media Group.

Spotlight article examples



Local radio provided additional campaign reach. Radio ads aired on Leighton Media's KCLH 94.7 "The Moose" for Houston County and streaming to reach remaining counties. See page 13 for more information on streaming audio performance.

Community Outreach



Counties reached the community through organic social media posts, local presentations, and emails

Counties promoted the campaign from their social media accounts. In addition to paid social media advertisements, O'Rourke Media Group created social media posts with campaign images and accompanying captions that were posted on local public health social media pages (Facebook and Instagram). Posts covered multiple campaign messages. See the next page for example social media posts.

Local public health staff also led presentations on campaign topics throughout the community. Counties presented to a range of audiences, including youth, parents, educators, local officials, public health and social services professionals, and the general public.

Counties sent campaign emails to community members and partner organizations. The emails included graphics linking to the campaign website and encouraged partners to share the messages with their networks as well. The email toolkit is shown on the following page.

Counties posted 30 social media posts, with over 11,500 impressions



30 organic social media posts

11,590 impressions

95 likes, shares, and clicks

Community presentations reached over 2,500 people



31 community presentations

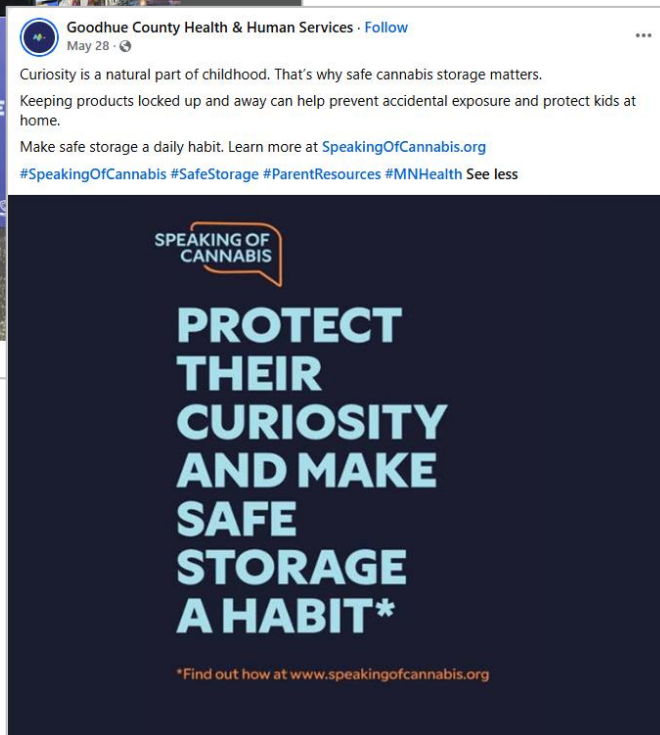
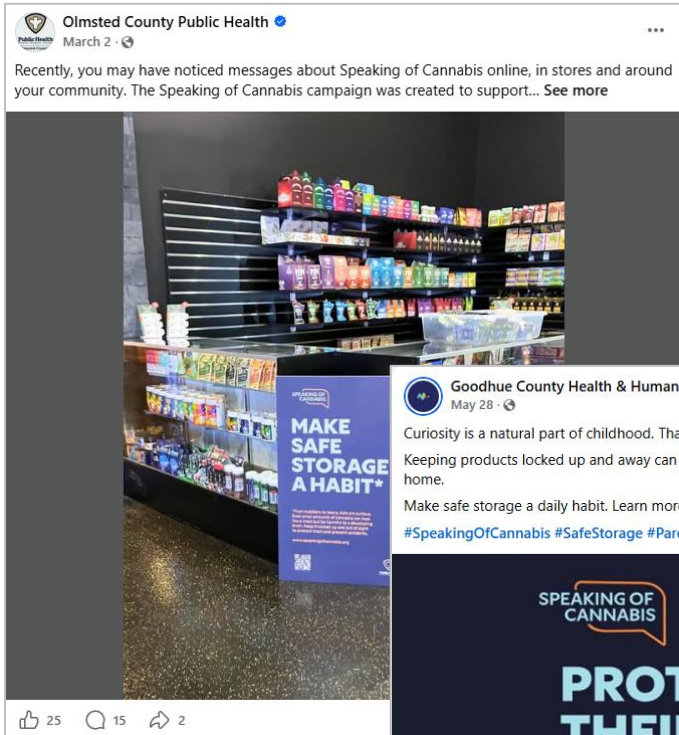
2,507 attendees



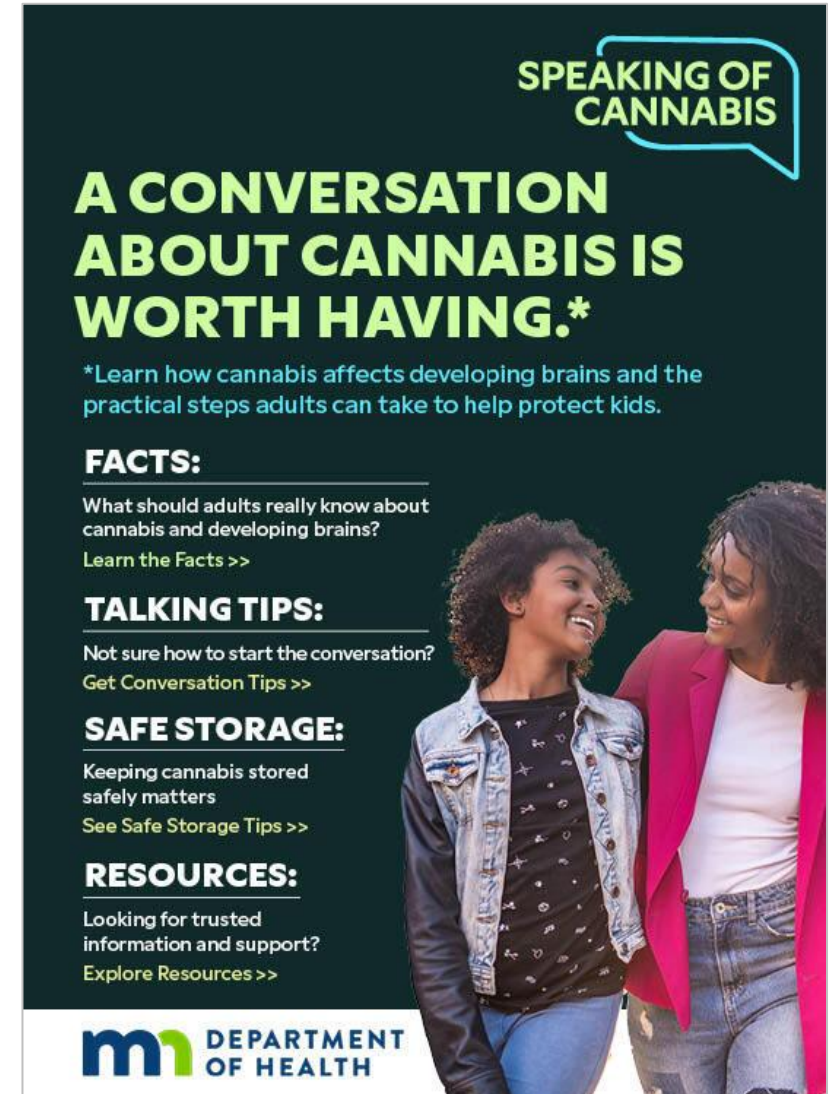
Pictured: Local public health staff at a community outreach event

Community Outreach

Organic social media post examples



Email toolkit



Website Activity



There was an uptick in engagement with the Speaking of Cannabis website during the media campaign

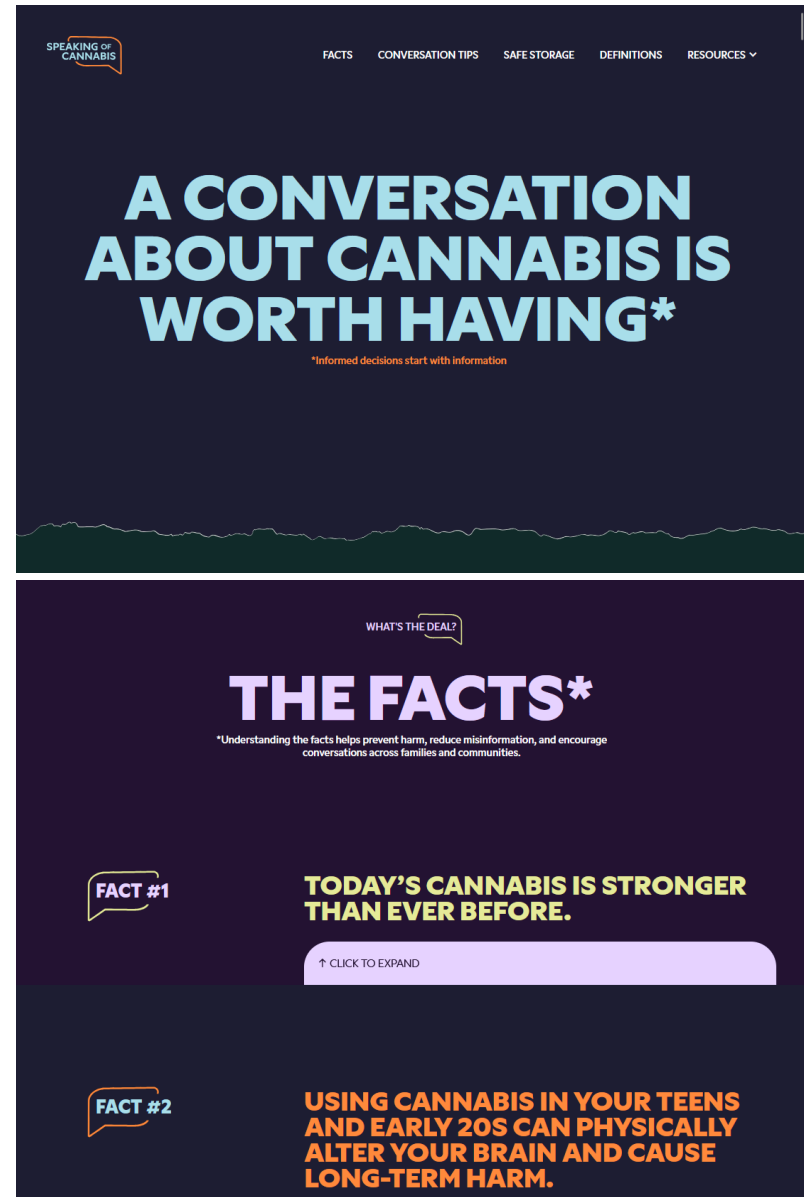
Digital ads linked to a central campaign website (www.speakingofcannabis.org). The site includes facts about cannabis and its health effects on the developing brain, definitions and talking tips for parents and trusted adults to help guide discussions of cannabis with teens, and information about safe storage of cannabis products at home. The website also includes a variety of resources, including information about cannabis laws, resources for recovery and support, and local resources in each county.

There were 25.9K new website users, generating 142.8K website engagements, such as button clicks, video plays, or file downloads on the website during the campaign promotion in southeast Minnesota.¹ Visits to the website were driven by a combination of paid media ads and community outreach activities.

In addition to English, website user languages included Spanish, French, Chinese, Vietnamese, Lao, and Portuguese.

¹ Some of the website traffic may have come from outside of the 11 counties.

Campaign website screenshots



“

[The campaign] could be an excellent tool to start a conversation... I don't feel like there's such thing as having too much information.

- Goodhue County resident



Impact Stories

This section includes stories of impact from the Speaking of Cannabis campaign based on interviews with community members.

Impact Story Overview

Interview Methods

The external evaluator, PDA, conducted phone interviews with community members about the Speaking of Cannabis campaign in May-July 2026. The purpose of the interviews was to collect and share stories of impact from adults who regularly interact with kids or teens and saw or heard the campaign.

Interviews asked about campaign exposure, engagement, message recall, campaign perceptions, and impacts on the individual's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.

PDA developed a recruitment flyer and email template for each of the 11 counties. The counties were asked to post the flyer at the locations of in-person media placements, along with other community locations that might reach the target population (e.g., schools, youth-serving organizations, libraries, community centers). Counties were also asked to send the recruitment email to those who received the campaign emails and other people in their network who work with the target population. In addition, several counties shared recruitment information on their social media pages.

People interested in completing an interview added their contact information to an online form and answered a few questions about their level of campaign exposure. Those who completed an interview received a \$30 electronic gift card to compensate them for their time. PDA recorded interviews, with the participant's permission, and created transcripts of each conversation. The transcripts were used to develop the key takeaways and impact stories on the following pages.

Data Quality Review

Throughout recruitment, PDA received suspected fraudulent responses to the online form. This is common with studies that recruit participants online and offer a monetary incentive. To ensure the interview participants legitimately reflected the target population and geographic area, PDA conducted several data quality checks before contacting people to schedule an interview.

Interview recruitment flyer

Have you seen ads like this?

SPEAKING OF CANNABIS

CANNABIS CAN HARM A GROWING BRAIN*

*Just because it's legal doesn't mean it's safe.

SPEAKING OF CANNABIS

YOUR BRAIN IS YOUR GREATEST SUPER POWER*

* Using cannabis in the teen years and early 20s can physically alter the brain and cause long-term harm, including affecting memory, reaction time, performance, concentration and ability to learn.

We want to hear your thoughts about a recent cannabis education campaign that includes ads like these. We are conducting **phone interviews** with people who meet the following criteria:

- ➔ Age 18+
- ➔ Have a child or teen living in your home or regularly interact with children or teens
- ➔ Have seen the cannabis education campaign **Speaking of Cannabis**

Complete a phone interview and get a \$30 e-gift card

To sign up, scan the QR code or go to:
my.evalsurvey.com/speakingofcannabis

This activity is made possible by a grant from the Cannabis & Substance Use Prevention program of the Minnesota Department of Health's Health Improvement Bureau.

Interview Takeaways

The campaign resonated with interview participants and provided important messages about health impacts and safe storage

PDA interviewed six residents from the following counties: Dodge, Goodhue, Olmsted, Wabasha, and Winona. Interview participants represented a range of ages and roles, including parents, grandparents, and community members. Key findings from the interviews are summarized below. The following pages highlight individual stories and perspectives of the interview participants related to the Speaking of Cannabis campaign.¹

Key interview takeaways

- Participants were aware of the recent recreational cannabis legalization and felt the campaign was timely, relevant, and an important topic for their community.
- Participants had already used campaign resources in conversations or saw helpful contexts for doing so with their families, in schools, and in other youth settings.

Impacts of cannabis on the developing brain

- Participants connected with messaging about the effects of cannabis on brain development. For some, this was new information, and for others, it reinforced knowledge and served as an important reminder in light of recent policy changes.

Key interview takeaways (continued)

Talking with teens about cannabis

- Participants reflected that it is up to adults to create a space where teens feel safe talking about cannabis and asking questions. This requires intentional work by the adult over time.
- Participants noted that teens and young adults typically seek out advice from peers rather than adults. It is important for adults to be proactive and prepared to initiate these conversations, even when it's uncomfortable.
- Talking tips were appreciated. Even participants who felt prepared to have discussions with teens prior to the campaign said that more resources would be helpful and/or would benefit other parents in their community.

Safe storage of cannabis

- Participants appreciated the reminder to store cannabis up and away from their kids. They felt that adults need to take this message seriously and remember that this includes all types of cannabis and THC products.
- Participants emphasized that safe storage of cannabis is an important message for all adults to hear, even those who do not have kids or teens living in the home.

¹ While individuals agreed for their stories to be shared publicly, pseudonyms are used in all impact stories to protect the privacy of others mentioned.

Dodge County woman highlights the value of ongoing conversations with teens about cannabis

Lisa is a mother and grandmother living in Dodge County. She is no longer in the workforce due to health issues. In recent years, two of her teenage grandchildren lived with her until they grew up and moved out of the house. She maintains close relationships with her adult children and grandchildren.

Lisa shared firsthand experiences with cannabis use by young family members

Lisa first heard about the Speaking of Cannabis campaign while watching a local TV news broadcast. The campaign resonated with her because of her personal experiences with cannabis use by her kids and grandkids. She shared how her grandson struggles with mental health issues, and once he became an adult, he decided to stop taking his medications and transitioned to cannabis. She explains, *"he stopped using all the medications... but then pot became his go-to. And he [thinks he] can handle anything when he's smoking pot."*

Lisa understands the importance of the campaign messaging, particularly about how cannabis can impact the developing brain even into young adulthood. Having raised children and grandchildren, she saw firsthand how teens and young adults struggle to make good choices and think about long-term impacts of their actions.

"You are still making risky choices, because your frontal lobe is still in the process. It's the last part of your brain to fully develop... You're trying to determine risk versus reward. You're trying to understand that poor choices have consequences, because now it's not about grandpa and grandma holding you accountable, this is about society."

Lisa echoes campaign messaging on tips for talking to teens

Lisa found that sharing her personal and family experiences helped facilitate conversations with her grandkids about substances like cannabis and alcohol. She was able to explain her reasons for not using those substances and talk about potential consequences of poor choices, such as driving under the influence. She emphasized the importance of being honest and persistent with teens and young adults, continuing to ask open questions and create space for those conversations.

Safe storage of cannabis is important even after kids move out

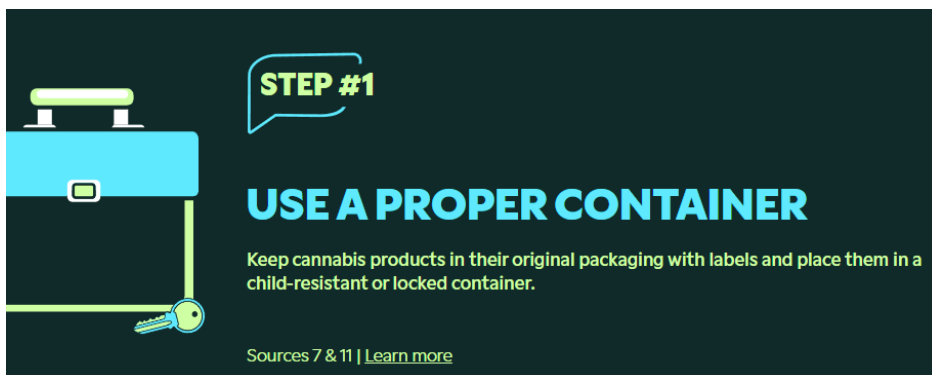
Lisa also values the campaign messaging about safe storage of cannabis. She keeps all medications in a locked and hidden safe, and she would do the same for cannabis. This was particularly important when she had kids and teens living at home, but she continues this approach since her grandchildren still visit.

Be proactive with cannabis conversations and seek out resources

Lisa wants to encourage parents to be proactive in talking to their kids about cannabis and other challenging topics. Having those conversations early can help prevent them from making poor choices later. Lisa emphasizes that resources, like the Speaking of Cannabis campaign, are available and helpful for approaching those difficult topics.

“Safe storage is... I think, the only [way]. If you're not putting [cannabis] in your adult bedroom that your children don't have access to, then you need to buy yourself a small fire safe and just lock it up...”

“For parents, my advice is [to] get off your phone. Get involved in your children's lives... And have tough conversations that are uncomfortable, for you, maybe, but they need to be had. And if... you feel like you can't have them, then seek the resources that'll give you the tips and tools, or who they can talk to, where you can point your teenager in the right direction.”



Screenshot from campaign website

Goodhue County non-profit worker says campaign is a reminder to keep safe cannabis storage top of mind

Christine lives in Goodhue County. She works for a non-profit organization in the community, frequently visiting schools as part of her work. She is also a parent of a teen and a young adult.

Christine shared the campaign with her kids and colleagues

She first learned about the Speaking of Cannabis campaign from an email sent by her supervisor and took time to read more about the campaign and visit the website. Christine recalls speaking about the campaign with her two children, as well as one of her colleagues. She appreciated the *“hopeful approach”* of the campaign, rather than focusing on negative messaging.

When asked if any of the campaign’s messages stood out to her, she said, *“Definitely the safe storage... you just want to be mindful.”*

Campaign presents cannabis facts from an educated source

She noted that the teens she knows face peer pressure. She hopes that by sharing facts about cannabis, the campaign can help prepare and educate teens before they are offered cannabis by friends.

“They struggle a lot with peer pressure alone, so let’s at least have the facts, know your risk. Hopefully, peer pressure won’t supersede the facts.”

“I think it’s quite relevant and important, any time you can educate people on things that are happening, and they can get the information from an educated source... versus getting information from their friends or hearsay or what they think it might be, so that they’re able to make an educated decision.”

Campaign reinforced existing knowledge and reminded Christine about safe storage

When asked if she learned anything new from the campaign, Christine explained that she had a lot of awareness around the issue already from following the legislative efforts. Instead, the campaign was an opportunity to refresh existing knowledge, noting that it *“brought [cannabis] to top of mind... I do appreciate the campaign bringing things back up to the forefront, because we still have to be mindful of our youth... so that’s why I appreciate just the reminders, you know, ‘lock it up, keep labels intact’ and stuff, because people can become complacent so easily.”*

Although the campaign primarily reinforced her existing knowledge about cannabis, she found the statistics surprising, especially information about the strength of cannabis today.

“I don’t think that there’s such a thing as having too much information. I feel let’s inform, inform, inform.”

When asked if the campaign had an impact on any behaviors around cannabis, Christine said, *“definitely, in regards to storage,”* noting that the campaign was a call to *“treat it a little more serious”* in general, and especially if youth are in the home.

Campaign provides tools to start a conversation about cannabis

She was impressed with the campaign’s use of social media to reach youth in the community. In the future, she suggested the campaign explore ways to include teen voices or narratives in its messaging. Christine expressed interest in seeing how her organization might be able to incorporate some of the campaign materials into their work with youth and families, noting that the campaign *“could be an excellent tool to start a conversation.”*

“You know, it takes a big village, and I’m glad we can all be a part of it.”

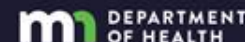


LET’S TALK*

***Using cannabis before your brain is fully developed can change how it grows and cause permanent harm.**

***Talk to the teens in your life about not using cannabis. For most teens, if a parent or trusted adult talks to them about not using cannabis, they are less likely to do so.**

***Even as toddlers, kids are curious. Cannabis can look like a treat but cause real harm. Keep it locked up and out of sight to protect them and prevent accidents.**



www.speakingofcannabis.org

Winona County teacher uses campaign to talk about cannabis with students, colleagues, and family

Sarah is a special education teacher in Winona County. She has been teaching for over 40 years and has extensive experience working with kids and teens. She is also a mother and grandmother.

Cannabis use is becoming more of an issue among students

Sarah first heard about the Speaking of Cannabis campaign at a national cannabis conference, and then, more recently, received an email about it from a local public health professional. She shared that cannabis use is an issue among her students, particularly in recent years.

"I've got kids here that use [cannabis]... We actually had a few instances this year where they tried sneaking in vapes with THC."

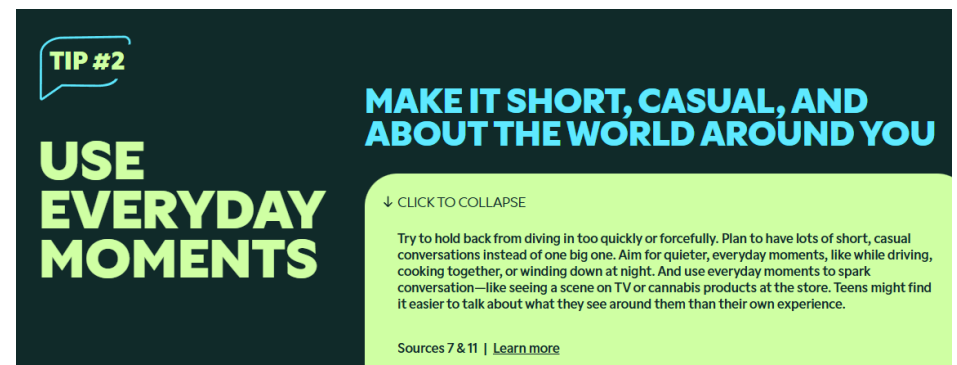
She explained that these experiences have highlighted the need for more resources and education around cannabis for school staff.

"We've had some experiences [with cannabis] this year that we haven't had before. So, we've been able to kind of take a step back and say, 'Okay, here's what we should be doing, here's how we need to be more mindful of what's happening... here's some education that we need to start getting more involved in than we have been in the past.'"

Sarah has started using campaign materials with students

When she received the campaign email, Sarah started looking through the materials and is now using them with her students. She likes the messaging about the developing brain and appreciates the conversation tips for talking to teens about cannabis.

"I've started pulling [campaign] stuff out, and I've been using it in the classroom for some talking points... which has been really helpful."



Screenshot from campaign website

Campaign provides helpful tools for teachers with new cannabis education mandate

Sarah shared how the state of Minnesota is mandating cannabis education in schools starting next year, and she feels that this campaign will be a very helpful tool for teachers to use.

“It's going to be really, really helpful for teachers, I think, to use that platform and to use some of your talking points and some of the information that you have on there... Anything that makes life easier for teachers, that they don't have to go out there and search for, that's huge.”

She recommends sharing the campaign materials with teachers' unions, school districts, parent teacher associations, and other parent groups as a resource to support the new cannabis education.

Sarah uses the campaign to educate other adults

Sarah has run into challenges when advocating for students to receive treatment for cannabis use, with some probation officers downplaying its harms. In response, she has shared the Speaking of Cannabis website with probation officers and is working to educate them about the strength of THC products and how it differs from cannabis *“back in the 60s and 70s”*.

“You get these other probation officers [saying], ‘Oh, it's just pot’. It's really not just pot... I've kind of been sending them little things. I actually sent one of them the link to your platform.”

Campaign also facilitated conversations with family

Outside of work, Sarah has also shared the campaign messaging with her adult son. She talked about a recent experience in which her young granddaughter smelled cannabis smoke in the park and asked Sarah about it. This prompted Sarah to talk to her son, using information from the campaign. She encouraged him to be prepared to talk about cannabis with his kids and to safely store cannabis at home.

“It was good, because I had just been studying your platform, and so I had some talking points for my son.”

Campaign prepares Wabasha County dad for future conversations about cannabis with his young kids

Will works in building maintenance in Wabasha County. He is a father to two young children, and he volunteers as a coach for his son's sports. He likes to be involved in the community and help make it a positive environment for his kids.

Campaign provides important tips to the community

Will first heard about the Speaking of Cannabis campaign from an email. He also remembers seeing campaign messaging outside of the email but could not recall the specific source. Since recreational cannabis has been legalized in Minnesota, Will has heard more people talking about the pros and cons of using cannabis. He feels that many people don't understand the full impacts of cannabis use, and it's important to share information like the Speaking of Cannabis campaign more broadly.

"It's a good thing to get good information out there... throw those red flags out there as far as harmfulness. And just wanting to better communities and lifestyles I feel is a really good thing, and I feel like it's a pretty honest [campaign]."

He found the campaign to be trustworthy and felt that it built on his existing knowledge of cannabis and its impacts. Will is interested in continuing to learn about this topic and share the message with others.

"Going forward, I'm definitely a little more aware and alert, and I'm willing to seek out more information on the campaign itself."

Will plans to start cannabis conversations with his kids before it becomes an issue

He thinks that keeping messaging positive, engaging, and easy to understand is key to reaching young people before they start experimenting with cannabis.

Though his kids are still young, Will feels that the campaign helped prepare him for future conversations with them about how cannabis impacts the developing brain. He wants to have open communication with his kids as they get older, so they feel comfortable talking to him about issues such as cannabis.

"I think waiting [for] conversations until they're a little bit older but catching them before it becomes an issue... So they can educate their friends and educate everybody."

The campaign reminded Will to store cannabis out of children's reach

The campaign also reminded Will of the importance of treating cannabis like medication and keeping it out of his children's reach, particularly when they're young.

"Obviously, safe storage of cannabis is very important, because to me, it's medicine. So it should be treated as such... to where, I wouldn't want my daughter getting into [other] medications. So, if I had cannabis medication, I wouldn't want her getting into that... it should be a locked cupboard... up and away from your children."

THE FACTS*

***Understanding the facts helps prevent harm and encourage conversation.**

- FACT #1** Today's cannabis is stronger than ever before.
- FACT #2** Using cannabis in your teens and early 20s can permanently affect things like memory, reaction time, performance, and concentration.
- FACT #3** Cannabis use has been linked to increased risk for mental health issues.

TALKING TIPS*

***Talk to the teens in your life about not using cannabis. Don't know where to start? We can help.**

- TIP #1** Ask open-ended questions. "What have you heard about cannabis?"
- TIP #2** Use everyday moments to spark conversations.
- TIP #3** Stay calm and listen. Be positive, curious, and respectful.



Wabasha County public health worker highlights importance of campaign messages about cannabis effects on the developing brain

Becca lives in Wabasha County and works in public health. She primarily works with families and conducts programs in schools. She is also a mother of four children, including three teens.

Messages from the campaign align with other county initiatives

She first heard about the Speaking of Cannabis campaign through an email. She remembered that the campaign had come up in a meeting with colleagues and in discussions about educational outreach, noting that the messages align with other county programs and campaigns around topics like drug and alcohol education. She also visited the campaign website after learning about the campaign.

Campaign images and messages stand out

Becca recalled the campaign's visual appeal, including large font in the campaign images. She described the images as eye-catching and felt that they stood out from typical flyers. She felt the information was engaging and trustworthy.

Becca mentioned the campaign's focus on awareness and highlighted the learning tools on the campaign website. When asked about specific campaign messages, she emphasized the importance of each one.

"All three [messages] are definitely important. But I do remember [the message] about the brain. I do remember the talking tips... I do remember the safe storage, because that prompts our county [staff] to get safe storage containers for our county."

Cannabis can impact teen athletics and academics

Becca talked about the importance of connecting messages about the effects of cannabis on the developing brain with tangible examples of how this could impact teens' daily lives. This may include increased anxiety and depression and impacts on athletic and academic performance.

"I think especially when you're talking about the brain development - for me, when I go out to the schools, [I] kind of discuss... the effects on the brain, but also how the effects of the brain interfere with their sports, their academics, things like that."

School communications are a good opportunity to share cannabis talking tips with parents

Becca also highlighted the importance of resources for talking with teens. She said talking tips and other campaign resources could be really helpful to share with parents at the schools she visits. She noted that she typically doesn't bring materials for parents with her into the classroom but does coordinate with schools to send out messages to parents about upcoming presentation topics. Becca thinks those communications would be a good opportunity for health teachers to share talking tips with the students' families.

Becca suggests future campaigns integrate personal stories from teens

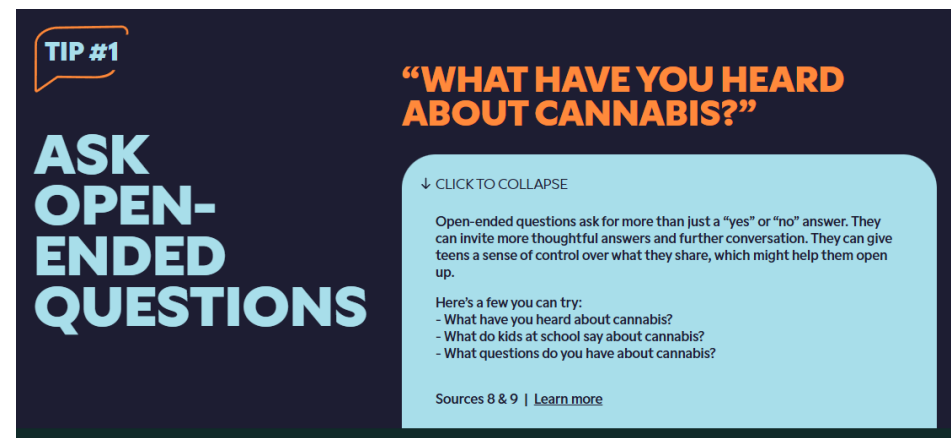
When asked about ideas for future messaging, Becca suggested including some statistics about cannabis and youth. However, she noted the importance of *"not just throwing a bunch of numbers out for kids"* but offering data points to reinforce the current messaging. She also suggested incorporating peer-to-peer communication into the campaign, such as testimonials or personal experiences, especially for materials targeted toward youth. She drew on her own experiences presenting to teens, noting that materials with *"a student or somebody talking, sharing their experience, whatever, I feel like that's when the kids get more engaged. When there's peers out there, it definitely gains their attention way more."* She thinks it would be helpful for parents to hear messages from other teens about their experiences as well.

"If a parent has a child who is struggling and trying to figure it out and there's videos that kids those ages are making for parents, like 'Hey parents, I've been there and done that or my best friend has done this'... that can be really helpful."

Campaign resources will be helpful to share with parents and school staff

Becca was enthusiastic about finding ways to bring the campaign into her professional work with the county and community. She also mentioned that shareable materials, such as stickers, brochures, or other items are always helpful to have on hand to distribute to schools and at community outreach events.

"It's definitely a resource that I will utilize in the coming school year to give out to parents and staff."



Screenshot from campaign website

Olmsted County parent emphasizes the importance of campaign resources for families struggling with cannabis addiction

Helen works as a nurse in Olmsted County. Her job involves visiting schools throughout the county, where she works with students ranging from kindergarten to high school. She is a mother to two teens, ages 14 and 18.

She shared that a family member had been struggling with addiction to THC vapes, and she has been helping support their recovery. This personal experience motivated her to share her thoughts on the campaign.

Helen first encountered the Speaking of Cannabis campaign through emails at work. She did not remember seeing the campaign in the community but noted she may have seen a poster. However, after learning about the campaign at work, she spent time exploring the campaign website to learn more about it.

Campaign messaging on the developing brain is compelling

Helen said the messages about addiction and the impact of cannabis on the developing brain stood out to her as compelling and important. When asked what she would want to see in future campaigns, she emphasized the importance of reaching children early to maximize message impact.

“Because a lot of [kids] see it now as legal, and so then they think it’s not bad for them. [They don’t realize] that it affects young people’s brains much differently than an older person’s brain. Just that it affects their mental health and their cognitive ability the younger that they start.”

It’s important to reach teens directly as well as adults

Helen said that as a nurse and parent, the campaign did not necessarily introduce new information to her, but it did support knowledge and experiences she already had. She liked some of the campaign graphics and the way information was presented. She felt it was important for the campaign to reach teens directly in addition to parents or other adults. She had also shown the website to her family, noting that her teen did not find the website as eye-catching. She suggested exploring ways to bring the campaign’s messages to platforms like TikTok or Snapchat, where teens are already talking about vaping and cannabis use.

Campaign helps with cannabis conversations, even for those who feel prepared

Before seeing the campaign, Helen thought she would be prepared to have discussions with teens because of her work experience. She shared, *"but once it actually happens, all that goes out your brain when it's actually your kid."* While she already felt she had knowledge included in the campaign, she appreciated *"the wording on how to talk to your kid, because those are things I had to learn to change."* She felt that the campaign's messages and materials can help other parents or adults prepare for similar conversations.

"It would be helpful for parents to have these talking points."

Recovery resources are key for both parents and teens

One topic Helen would like to see the campaign expand is information about recovery resources. While she found some general resources on the campaign website, she thought more specific resources and recommendations for both parents and teens would be helpful. In particular, she noted the importance of including resources outside of substance use recovery centers, such as local behavioral therapy options, that may better fit younger teens.

"I think [the campaign website] is raising just a huge, important point about having recovery resources. So that anybody who's encountering the campaign and the materials, whatever part of the experience they might be at, there are resources for them."

Safe storage is important for all types of THC products

Helen also noted that the message on safe storage is *"super important"* but suggested expanding the message to emphasize that the 'up and away' message is not just for medication. When she first saw the safe storage video, she said it was not obvious to her that THC products and vapes should be included along with medications.



Screenshot from safe storage campaign video

“

When your teens are talking about marijuana, have an honest conversation about how it affects their brain. And that you can't control [their] choices, but you would hope that they hold off until they're [older] to try it...

- Dodge County resident

Acknowledgments

Participating Counties

Local public health staff from the following counties in southeast Minnesota partnered together on this project:

- Dodge County
- Fillmore County
- Freeborn County
- Goodhue County
- Houston County
- Mower County
- Olmsted County
- Rice County
- Steele County
- Wabasha County
- Winona County

Data Sources

The data included in this report came from the following sources:

- Regional surveillance data is from the 2025 Minnesota Student Survey.
- O'Rourke Media Group provided metrics on the paid digital media activities.
- PlaceBased Media provided metrics on the onsite media activities.
- Local public health staff provided data on county-led organic media and community outreach activities.
- PDA provided data from the community interviews and impact stories.

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