



CareMessage Health Education Text Message Programming:

Learning and Feedback from Participant Focus Groups

Overview

Hearing a community request for virtual/digital learning and responding to dynamic pandemic challenges and opportunities, ACCFB began to explore programming to offer nutrition and health education by text message. Our participation in the [Diabetes Prevention Project \(DPP\)](#) paved a path to build flexible learning options for the communities we serve. With this in mind, Alameda County Community Food Bank began a collaboration with CareMessage, a nonprofit health technology platform that designs mobile health tools for underserved patient populations, delivering health promotion education via text message.

During the summer of 2021, the research team surveyed 100 community members to ask about their interest in receiving health-related educational text messages. Their responses guided us to increase the number of health topics offered from 3 to 8 health programs to meet the needs of community members' health concerns. The CareMessage health education SMS program became available for free to Alameda County residents during the spring of 2022 - allowing us to build on our work of connecting individuals to health education, while expanding accessibility via digital options.

Background

CareMessage offers its partners a variety of SMS/text-based health education programs created and reviewed by a clinical team. CareMessage was founded in 2012 as a nonprofit technology organization with a mission to help safety net organizations fill essential gaps in underserved populations. Alameda County Community Food Bank (ACCFB) has been working with CareMessage since 2017 and renewed our contract to offer free access to 8 of their programs to our network partners and neighbors.

In the first year, 78 agency partners and community organizations distributed flyers and ACCFB staff attended over 102 outreach events and food distributions to share the CareMessage program with community members. Since the launch of CareMessage Health programs, 125 individuals have received free health-related text messages to promote their well-being on a variety of health topics. The program was offered in two languages, 80 participants were English speakers and the other 45 participants received messages in Spanish. CareMessage has had positive patient engagement with the enrollment of 125 individual participants and re-enrollment into other health programs by some participants, making it a total of 147 programs initiated during the first year.

Objective

To learn firsthand experiences on what improvements were needed to ensure participants were getting the most out of the SMS health programs, two focus groups were held to obtain feedback.

Participation in Focus Groups

At the end of May 2023, 113 outreach messages were sent to identify individuals interested in taking part in a paid focus group conversation to discuss the CareMessage health education text message programs. Of 113 participants, 29 individuals expressed interest in taking part in the focus group discussions. Two focus groups, one in English and one in Spanish, were scheduled in June of 2023. The findings and quotes are responses from 9 individuals who attended the discussions via Zoom. In addition to the focus group participants, responses from another 10 individuals who opted out of CareMessage and supplied feedback after ending their enrollment in the program are also included in these findings.

“The messages would come daily, and I would read them. The messages were positive. It is like a clock and constant daily reminder. I like the idea of videos, but I do enjoy the messages. If in person classes were offered, they would be harder to attend because things come up with the kids and the messages allow me to read them when I have time.”

-- CareMessage Program Participant



Participant Feedback

Most of the feedback about the program was positive. In sharing ideas on how to improve the CareMessage programs, we heard a unanimous interest in videos/recordings to be included in future messaging. Participants expressed interest in short and practical video links that could provide easy recipes and workout videos. Focus group participants also expressed having limited time trying to juggle various needs such as childcare and work, therefore - anything they can view or listen to while they multitask would be preferred. Others expressed the need for more motivational messages vs. messages requesting a response. Individuals who had ended their program early by opting out expressed the need to add a feature within the platform to evaluate knowledge at the start of or prior to each program to help tailor messages for various knowledge, thereby supporting both early and advanced health learners within each program. The expansion of education past basic health knowledge for all topics was expressed by individuals who completed a program and attended the focus groups.

Recommendations relating to language accessibility included the need for additional language options for all programs and enabling the ability for participants to change the language of the messages after enrollment. Participants from both focus groups and some of the opt-out participants expressed an interest in reconnecting and learning from others who participated in a health text message program. Individuals expressed an interest in in-person classes or a space to share with others in a virtual space. Participants expressed seeking connection after being isolated during the pandemic.

Program Enrollment: The scanning of a QR code was used to enroll into one of the eight programs. About 80% of participants found the enrollment process easy. A couple of participants received help with the sign-up process from someone from a partner agency or ACCFB staff member.


Reason for enrollment: Many participants were looking for something to aid them in making health changes and signed up to help keep themselves accountable.

Timing: Participants shared that the delivery of messages was consistent. Individuals looked forward to them and knew what time to expect the messages as they were sent out around the same time. Messages were mostly delivered in the morning and individuals shared it was an effective way to start the day. The messages also provided flexibility for those with busy schedules because the participants could read the messages when they had time.

Would you recommend the Health Text Message Program: All participants in the focus groups said they would recommend the program to a friend or family member.

Findings Summary

Focus group participants expressed CareMessage had an overwhelming positive impact on them. Many of the individuals expressed gratitude for the messages. The messages were described as 'motivational,' 'informative' and 'a good support.' Most of the participants learned about the health text message program through a partner agency or text message campaign. Everyone self-selected 1 of the 8 health topics offered through the CareMessage platform. Two of the nine individuals participated in more than one program, while others did not recall other program topics being available. All participants were sent outreach messages offering enrollment into other program topics after the completion of the first program, but it is unclear why some did not recall receiving the outreach message while others enrolled in multiple programs.



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CareMessage Program Participant

QUOTES

“When you are constantly reminded, you can help yourself and then others. People may say they are okay but when reminded of taking care of yourself, you realize that you are not doing things for yourself like breathing, I have not thought of myself, I have not gone out. Those tiny gestures. Thank you for the messages.” -Stress Management Participant

“I completed the exercise program. I would recommend it as a door opener to help get fit, but I would enhance the messages by assigning a specific exercise for the day and include links for free workouts.” -Physical Activity Program Participant

“I enjoyed the zoom. I would have been in bed if it were not for this meeting. I liked hearing about the other programs and being in the community and learning from others.

I hope you can set up another call for us to talk as a group in the future, once a month.” -CareMessage Participant

“I am a visual learner and sometimes the messages were long and wordy. I would also like to receive a recording or YouTube videos.” -CareMessage Participant

“I had to find a solution since I was dealing with depression. Phone messages felt more comfortable. I felt a lot of support and would like to connect more with others. I was able to pick what information was of benefit to me.” -Depression Program Participant

“I sometimes read the messages over again especially when I needed more motivation.” -CareMessage Participant

“I didn’t see the person on the other line, but the messages cheered me up.” -CareMessage Participant

“The messages were extremely helpful. After giving birth, I was having a tough time getting back to my normal weight. The messages motivated me and served as a reminder to keep a routine after pregnancy.” -Nutrition Program Participant

Next Steps

The changes we hope to make in the upcoming year are to edit the program messages and incorporate more links to quick educational videos, include additional outreach messages to inform participants of community events happening in their area and we hope to make the programs available in other languages once the feature is available on the CareMessage platform. We also plan to analyze baseline and follow-up survey results to determine behavioral impact.

[1\) Edit program messages](#)

[2\) Add additional community outreach messages](#)

[3\) Increase language access](#)

[4\) Analyze Baseline and Post Surveys](#)

Contact

For feedback, partnerships, or further information, please contact us at health@accfb.org.