

2026 Health Messaging Student Competition: *Promoting Social Justice and Behavior Change to Advance Public Health for All*

Aim: To showcase the work of Mailman students and highlight how health communications can be used as a powerful tool to change behavior, promote health and enhance social and environmental justice in domestic or global settings.

Hosted by: Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion

Eligibility: Any Mailman student

Project: Students (1-4 students per submission) will be asked to create a health communication product (e.g. video, GIS mapping, data visualizations, social media posts, podcast, poster, etc) and campaign designed to promote social justice and/or behavior change that advances public health for all. To share campaign details, students will create nine slides that answer specific questions (see below).

Health communication products *may include:* video, data visualizations, social media posts, education/workshop materials, digital stories, [podcasts](#), posters, books, [games](#), magazines, [GIS mapping](#), brochures, websites and more...

Competition Theme: *Promoting Social Justice and Behavior Change to Advance Public Health for All*
Topics may include: nutrition and food security, physical activity, tobacco cessation, sleep, maternal health, disease prevention, mental health, reproductive health, social determinants of health, environmental health, injury prevention and MORE.

[Past project submissions](#) have included topics such as: immigrant rights, [tobacco/vaping](#), labor protections, abortion access, [misinformation](#), infrastructure inequities, maternal health, mental health, [racial justice](#) and chronic disease prevention (diabetes, obesity).

Criteria for Selection of Finalists: A diverse committee of public health communication scholars and experts will review student materials and slides. Finalists will be chosen using the following seven judging categories: effective messaging, creativity/innovation, design/aesthetics, public health impact and relevance, dissemination, project guidelines and potential to promote healthy behaviors and/or enhance social justice. Each of the seven categories will be scored on a scale from 1-5.

Three submissions (1st, 2nd and 3rd place) will be selected and asked to deliver a ten-minute presentation (guided by their slides) at an Award Ceremony in April. 1st place team: \$1,000; 2nd place team: \$750; and 3rd place team: \$500.

Finalists will also be entered into a multi-school, “*Lerner Centers Health Messaging Student Competition*,” in which their submissions will be judged alongside finalist submissions from Syracuse University and Johns Hopkins University. Students will be invited to an online award ceremony in May, and additional monetary prizes will be awarded to top winners.

Required Slides:

Slide 1: Title slide [include student name(s), department(s)]

Slide 2: Goal of the health communications message and call to action (e.g. reduce stigma among a certain population)

Slide 3: Information about target population: location, demographics and other relevant characteristics

Slide 4: Epidemiologic, social, behavioral and/or theoretical justification (details about the public health issue)

Slide 5: Rationale for use of the health communication channel (e.g. data visualization, podcast, digital story, video, social media, poster)

Slide 6: Storytelling: What story/narrative are you telling with your public health message? How does your message promote behavior change?

Slide 7: Proposed dissemination (e.g. audience, placement, campaign promotion)

Slide 8: Societal Impact: Why you feel your health communication message will be efficacious? How does it advance public health for all? How does your message enhance advocacy?

Slide 9: Citations

Note: You may include additional slides (e.g. to spread out text/include other important info), but please make sure that your presentation includes, and centers around, the 9 prescribed slides. **This is the information that the judges are expecting to see.**

Finalist Awards: 1st place team: \$1,000; 2nd place team: \$750; and 3rd place team: \$500. Team members will be compensated equally. Finalist materials will be posted on the Lerner Center website and featured in Center communications. Finalists will have a chance to win *additional* monetary prizes in the multi-school, “Lerner Centers Health Messaging Student Competition.”

Registration: Please email the name(s)/department(s) of your group members to ohc2103@cumc.columbia.edu by January 21st.

Submissions (product and slides) due: Tuesday, March 31st at 5pm; Please email slides and HC product to Azure Nowara (aen2129@columbia.edu).

Finalist Presentations & Award Ceremony: TBD (April/May 2026)