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SUBMISSION:

PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGNS TARGETING DRUG AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

16 JULY 2020

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21 Harris St, Pyrmont, NSW, 2009

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WHO WE ARE

Saatchi & Saatchi is a full service advertising agency. Our guiding spirit and attitude, driving everything we do from strategic consideration, to delivery, to our workflow management systems, is 'Nothing is Impossible'. This means no matter the size of the task, we will deliver timely and effective campaigns for our clients with a commitment to the highest level of creative quality.

We have extensive experience working with numerous Government Departments both within Federal and state governments and our focus is creating ideas and strategies that can connect with people on both large scale and local levels.

We were recognised as having created the "World's Most Effective Campaign" (WARC 100) for OPSM's "Penny the Pirate" behavioural change campaign and have been named Effie's Most Effective Australian Agency of the Year. Most recently we worked on the Border Patrol campaign for the Department of Home Affairs, the NSW Dept. of Education's 'Start Strong' Pre-School Initiative campaign and the Victorian Electoral Commission's 'Vote' campaign.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This submission is in response to the Parliamentary Joint Committee of Law Enforcement inquiry into the efficacy of public communications campaigns targeting demand for drug and substance abuse. The report aims to provide an informed perspective on elements of the request relevant to our expertise.

Marketing effectiveness in the commercial sector is influenced by the composite measure of media budget, duration and number of media channels applied to a creative campaign or initiative (Hurman, and Field, 2020). There are similarities in the public sector, however as advertising funded by the taxpayer there are some key differences in how we measure the impact on society. Poorta and Morgan (2008) examined a selection of IPA Effectiveness Awards papers for campaigns and organised a 'spectrum of effects' framework for measuring their success, which has been reference throughout to provide perspective on efficacy:

1. Intermediate measures – awareness, message communication, attitude.
2. Behavioural measures – responses, enquiries, compliance.
3. Return on investment (ROI).
4. Other effects – efficiency, human and societal impact.

While there are many campaigns that target drug and substance abuse, there are few available conclusive peer reviewed studies on the efficacy of mass media campaigns targeting the prevention of illicit drug use. International meta-analysis articles challenge the shock-based approach to illicit drug public health campaigns using mass media channels. It is argued by Douglass et al. (2017) the associated post-campaign evaluations have not captured an inclusive audience spectrum, i.e. non-users vs. previous or current users, with concluding observations these campaigns may have resulted in stigmatised messages being delivered to the general population causing damage to the drug using portion of the community.

There is evidence of different approaches to mass media campaigns, including how fear-based messaging is demonstrated, as well as campaigns that experiment with new theoretical models that mitigate the negative impacts on certain audience groups, both users and non-users.

In our response, we have answered the following questions:

a)   the efficacy of different approaches to such campaigns, including:

   i.   'shock advertising', information campaigns and the use of social marketing;
   iii.   International approaches

d)   the efficacy of the current and past National Drug Strategy in achieving demand reduction through public communications campaigns

Some final thoughts and considerations have been included.

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ITEM A

The efficacy of different approaches to such campaigns, including

    I. *'shock advertising', information campaigns and the use of social marketing*

Mass media campaigns in public health disseminate information about health, or threats to it, to persuade people to adopt a behaviour change (EMCDDA 2013). They are commonly used by authorities around the world due to their perceived ability to change the knowledge or attitude of a target audience, reaching large populations at a low cost per capita. This is done through multiple media components, or channels, which are commonly a combination of television, radio, billboards, newspaper and posters, and more recently integrating online media (social media, digital banners, text messages or emails).

Appendix A shows a table that summarises the main characteristics of mass media campaigns used for illicit drug intervention. Categorised into Information and Social Marketing, intervention campaigns are based on a number of theoretical models. Generally, around the world, this type of advertising is primarily focused on targeting adolescents, as well as their parents, as the initiation of the use of substances typically starts in this age group (UNDOC 2012).

Social marketing is a process of applying marketing principles, techniques and evidence-based approaches in "creating, communicating and providing value in order to influence the behaviours of the target audience that to benefit both the society and the target audience" (Savciuc and Timotin 2019). It is that intent to change the behaviour for the individual and society that makes social marketing distinguishable from information campaigns, that focus on simply raising awareness. Based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour Model (Ferri et al. 2013), a widely used strategic approach to frame these intervention communications are threatening health messages.

The use of threatening health messages, referred to as shock or 'fear appeal' advertising, has been a controversial technique used in campaigns targeting public health reform and legal and illegal substance abuse. Ruiter et al. (2014) define a fear appeal as a persuasive communication that attempts to arouse fear in order to promote precautionary motivation and self-protective action. There is ongoing debate and research into the efficacy of this method, and its productive and counter-productivity in mass media advertising. The major variables to creating effective communications within this theory are:

- **Severity and susceptibility**: fear is increased by exhibiting a graphic threat which provokes a visceral reaction, causing the audience to believe they are susceptible to the threat and that the consequences are severe.
- **Response efficacy and self-efficacy**: a solution to alleviate fear should be presented. The solution needs to be attractive to the audience, they must believe it will alleviate the risk and that they can perform the solution.

It is argued by Ruiter et al. that there needs to be a balance of these variables to generate "the intent to adopt the communicators recommendation". Without a balance, campaigns can be counter-productive, with adverse effects and implications that render the advertising ineffective:

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- individuals alleviate their fear by rejecting credibility of the message
- the negative consequences seem unlikely—because they seem rare and/or they haven't previously happened when the behaviour has been performed
- individuals become desensitised to the message
- fear-appeals discount the prospective benefits, e.g. pleasure people receive from their actions
- the communications provide no new information or solutions.
- the depiction of the audience causes hatred and fear of the mass population toward the target audience

The 1987 Grim Reaper HIV/AIDs campaign pioneered the use of fear advertising for harm minimisation, due to its success capturing attention of large populations and raising awareness of this public health issue. While it was ground-breaking in terms of a mass media campaign's ability to raise awareness of an emergency public health crisis, there was a halo-effect of unintended negative consequences beyond those "intermediate measures" (Poorta and Morgan 2008). Mortlett et al. (1988) report the personification and dramatisation of death stirred panic and hysteria among the heterosexual population, creating discrimination against the homosexual community and those living with HIV, effects of which are still visible today. In Items A) III) and D) we discuss how this impact contributes to the efficacy of mass media public communications campaigns targeting demand reduction of illicit drugs.

Not all mass media illicit drug campaigns use theories that come to life as fear-based messaging to change behaviour, evident in the table in Appendix A. While the campaign results are not yet available, the '78% Don't Use' campaign (Appendix B) was launched on 18 August 2019 by Drug Aware, and ran on social media, online, radio and out-of-home media. Drug Aware is part of a state framework of educational strategies designed to address illicit drug use among young people in WA. The Social Norms Theory (Perkins 1986) states that "our behaviour is influenced by incorrect perceptions of how other members of our social groups think and act". Applied to this campaign, Drug Aware challenge the misconception among young people that most of their peers are using drugs, de-normalising usage to contribute to behaviour change and ultimately a drug demand reduction.

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ITEM A

The efficacy of different approaches to such campaigns, including:

III)   International approaches

In the U.S., the Montana Meth Project 'Not Even Once' campaign (2005-2007) used highly visceral shock-based messaging across high profile media with some 45,000 television ads, 35,000 radio ads, 10,000 print ads and 1,000 billboards over two years campaign period (Kemmik 2009). Compelling post-campaign research helped it to win a range of prestigious advertising industry effectiveness awards for reducing first time use among teenagers in an area of America facing an methamphetamine epidemic (WARC 2007). Later, an evidence-based evaluation of the campaign challenged the efficacy of such graphic advertisements, proposing the campaign evaluation was insufficient in proving the campaign had any effect reducing methamphetamine use among young people (it was noted it may have curbed use among some white school students). On his review of the campaign, doctoral student in clinical psychology at the University of Western Australia, David Erceg-Hurn, flatly questioned the effectiveness of the campaign, stating the project should have used standard experimental testing to gauge the impact of the ads, rather than relying on the use of focus groups.[1]

It has been advocated by Anderson et al. (2015) that the campaign sexualised, racialised and gendered through the creative and had the potential to "influence policy, increase stigma and prevent the implementation of harm reduction strategies". In their study, Douglass et al. (2013) interviewed individuals with the lived experience of meth dependency, who believed the campaign "demonised" them, and "exacerbated their experiences of judgement, shame and rejection". While the messaging certainly raised awareness and deterred non-users from starting, critics agree it stigmatised a section of the population and could have contributed to the sustained substance abuse among those individuals, which is counter-productive to the fundamental goal of reducing illicit drug abuse.

Anti-drug campaigns do not always use the shock factor / fear-based communications approach that has been used in the NDC. While the below examples do not have available campaign results, they have been included to offer a different perspective on how other public sector and NGO bodies are investing in different strategies for public communications campaigns that target drug and substance abuse.

South Dakota is dealing with its methamphetamine crisis with new campaign 'Meth. We're on it.' (pictured in Appendix D). Messaging on TV, billboards and posters leads people to the webpage OnMeth.com. The informational campaign did leave its audience feeling alarmed (see tweet reactions in Appendix D, ii), but from a slightly different perspective than traditional shock-vertising. One of the downfalls of traditional shock campaigns is its ability to stigmatise and shame drug users, which can lead them to continue to use and not seek help. While from a copywriting perspective it has left some people confused, the strategy aims to be more inclusive and balances the responsibility on the

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[1] https://billingsgazette.com/news/local/montana-meth-project-message-heard-results-debated/article_0a1c803a-6912-11de-8b1b-001cc4c002e0.html

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collective to be aware of the problem and take action to end drug abuse. It's so far received mixed reviews; however, it's created online conversation and garnered attention.[2]

FAD (Fundación de Ayuda Contra la Drogadicción – Foundation Against Drug Addiction) is an NGO in Spain. Their film 'Construye', direct English translation 'Build' (2015, see Appendix F) is an example of a social marketing campaign with the objective of setting positive role models or social norms for young people. Live action graininess with whimsical animation is used to inspire viewers with productive and constructive versions of what life can be like without drugs, i.e. "non-drug-use-related prototypes of lifestyles, behaviour and personality" (see Appendix A). Botticelli et al (2016) say language is a powerful communications tool; it is important and can be stigmatised. This campaign uses language to empower and inspire all young people away from drugs, rather than demonise them and fear monger, *"Create. Create an opinion. Create something that only you can do. Create a failure. Try. Create things to tell."*

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[2] https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-11-19/meth-were-on-it-south-dakota-drug-safety-campaign/11716944

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ITEM D

The efficacy of the current and past National Drug Strategy in achieving demand reduction through public communications campaigns

In Australia, the NDS (National Drug Strategy) is the Federal Government's principal policy framework to address the abuse of legal and illegal drugs. Running since 2000, the strategy is a "national commitment to harm minimisation through balanced adoption on effective demand, supply and harm reduction strategies".[3] The NDC (National Drug Campaign) is a component of the demand reduction pillar, which uses informational and social marketing mass media initiatives as part of a multi-faceted communications approach to the issue of demand reduction, specifically targeting young Australians and their parents about the harm and consequences of illicit drug use. Throughout its lifespan the NDC has relied on a range of shock-based advertising campaigns.

Phase 6 of the NDC was a single-stream campaign centred around one overarching concept to demonstrate harms and risks of the drug ice, the key message 'Ice Destroys Lives' in 2015 (pictured in Appendix X). The aim was to contribute to preventing uptake of illicit drugs among young Australians, by raising awareness of the harms associated with illicit drug use and encouraging and supporting decisions not to use illicit drugs.[4] Four fear-arousing film scenarios broadcast on TV and in cinemas dramatized the extremely negative behavioural consequences of using ice; acting out in extreme anger, committing violence toward family members, picking at arm skin and showing aggression to police and hospital staff while affected. It was accompanied by a website which included educational information and links to generalist support services.

Independent post-campaign evaluation was commissioned by the Department of Health, conducted via an internet-based survey among a sample group of youth and parent target audiences. Ice Destroys Lives appeared to meet set-out intermediate and behavioural measures, as it was successful in raising awareness of the harms and influencing negative attitudes toward ice among young people and their parents.[5] However in 2017, a study was conducted that investigated the perceptions and potential harms caused by Ice Destroys Lives as a mass media campaign that used shock-based messaging. Douglass et al. (2013) argue the commissioned evaluation lacked confirmation of whether any respondents had previously used ice (this may have influenced their responses), nor did it consider the implications this campaign might have on other audiences (i.e. those who might use drugs). Leading to the conclusion it may not have been as effective as we thought. While a smaller sample size, in-depth interviews with adults that use currently use methamphetamines mirrored that of the Montana Meth Project – they felt the scenarios were "worst case" and misrepresented them as "violent" and "crazy". Online surveys with youth found while it successfully delivered the prevention message, 84% said the campaign made them '*think people who use ice are dangerous'* and almost half don't believe the campaign encouraged help-seeking behaviours.

Phase 7 of the NDC had some key differences to Phase 6. It adopted a multi-stream approach to the film creative, due to the objective to target demand reduction of both party drugs (MDMA 'caps') and ice. Parent-specific film media was created with a quiz to engage and educate. The media investment

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[3] https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/national-drug-strategy-2017-2026_1.pdf
[4] Stancombe Research and Planning Pty Ltd. – NDC Phase Seven Evaluation Report, 2018
[5] Stancombe Research and Planning Pty Ltd. – NDC Phase Six Second Evaluation Research, 2016

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had a digital focus, which meant the audience targeting could be more specific. And finally, while the creative still dramatised the negative consequences and harms associated with drug use, it added in a help / support message "the sooner you get help, the sooner you can take your life back", and used a named protagonist and family members within the executions. Storytelling is recognised as an effective advertising tactic, as the familiar structure allows people to process it efficiently. This results in higher engagement, cut-through and emotional connection that lead to believability and persuasion – proving storytelling ads are more likely to be embedded in memory and create future behaviour change.[6] This approach also helps to humanises the users of illicit drugs.

The post-campaign commissioned evaluation results of the campaigns showed that for the Ice stream, perceptually youth and parents have sustained negative attitudes toward ice (96% of respondents to be '*very dangerous*', 84% of young people and 93% of parents agreed that '*ice can cause serious harm*'). It exceeded Ice Destroys Lives on its believability and its effectiveness on 'making me stop and think'. A more realistic approach to the creative recognised as more believable. The party drugs stream was not as convincing to youth as their parents whose negative sentiment rated higher, showing that more work is to be done communicating the negative consequences of the drug in years to come.[7]

While mass media campaigns are a powerful tool for delivering high-impact messages, they should be approached with care within this sphere. Mass reach and limited time to get across a message means that using shock-based messaging to effectively raise awareness and reduce uptake may come at a social cost, generating negative perceptions of users of drugs and delivering stigmatised messaging which could contribute to negative perceptions among the general population of young people as drug abusers.

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[6] https://www.warc.com/content/article/bestprac/what-we-know-about-storytelling-strategies/108614
[7] Stancombe Research and Planning Pty Ltd. – NDC Phase Seven Evaluation Report, 2018

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FINAL THOUGHTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

1. Consider the negative implications of fear-based key messaging that leaves vulnerable audiences open to being misrepresented and misunderstood. Could the Department of Health invest in evidence-based strategies that are informed by experts and high-risk groups that would ensure communications are more inclusive in nature to avoid the associated risk of stigmas and discrimination against drug users?

2. One of the downsides of traditional mass media is the inability to control who sees and interprets the message. Already evident in Phase 7 of the NDC is an effort toward more effective communication practices, i.e. segmenting audiences with bespoke creative executions, and shifting media spend away from 'traditional' mass media channels toward digital channels, particularly for targeting youth vs parents.

3. Consider the range of different social marketing tactics and theoretical frameworks on which to build the creative communications strategy, referenced in Appendix A.

4. Review who the audience are and how we talk to them:

   a. Consumer journey mapping
   b. Interrogating different audience segments (could we speak directly to drug users and high-risk non-users to develop the insights to be used in communications strategic development?)

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APPENDIX

A. MASS MEDIA CAMPAIGN APPROACHES, SUMMARY TABLE, FERRI ET AL. 2013.

Category	Objective	Target audience	Details
Information campaign	Warning	General or youth population	Information about the dangers and risks of a range of illicit substances
	Empowerment	General population, especially parents	Information about how to contribute to drug prevention through your own behaviour
			Information about where and how to seek support, counselling and treatment regarding illicit drug use, especially for your children
		Youth population	Information about where and how to seek support, counselling and treatment regarding illicit drug use
	Support	General population	Information about existing prevention interventions or programmes in communities, in schools or for families in order to strengthen community involvement and support for them
Social marketing	Correct erroneous normative beliefs	General or youth population	Declared purpose is to correct erroneous normative beliefs about the extent and acceptance of drug use in peer populations ("you're not weird if you don't use because 80% of your peers don't either")
	Setting or clarifying social and legal norms	General or youth population	Declared purpose is to de-glamorise and demystify drug use and related behaviour (e.g. drug driving) and to explain the rationale of community norms and control measures
	Setting positive role models or social norms	General or youth population	Declared purpose is to promote non-drug-use-related prototypes of lifestyles, behaviour and personality

B. '78% DON'T USE', DRUG AWARE, STATE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA, 2019.

View here

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C. 'NOT EVEN ONCE', THE METH PROJECT, STATE OF MONTANA, U.S.A, 2005-2007.

Available here

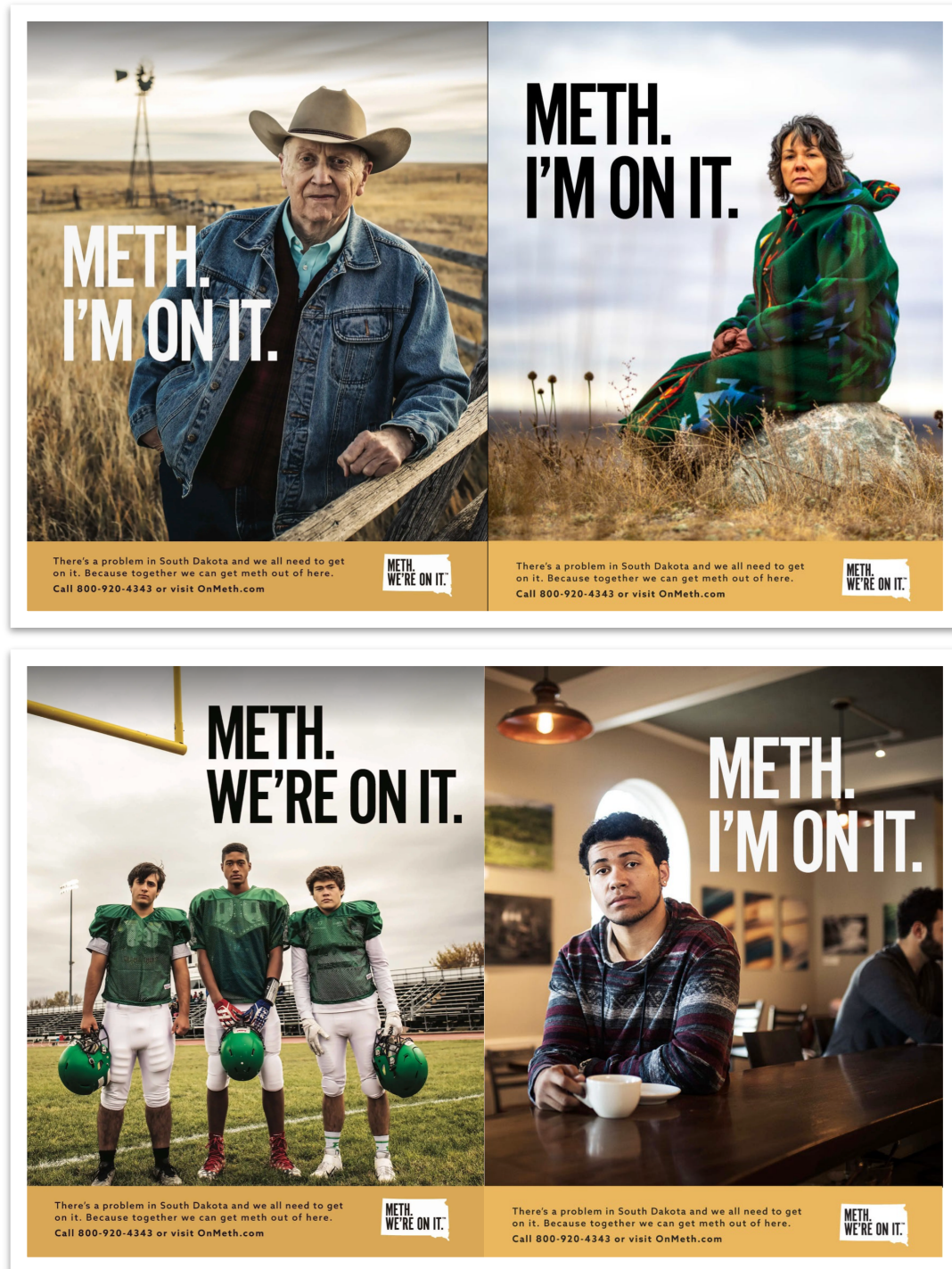Available here

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D. 'METH. WE'RE ON IT' CAMPAIGN, STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA, U.S.A., 2019.
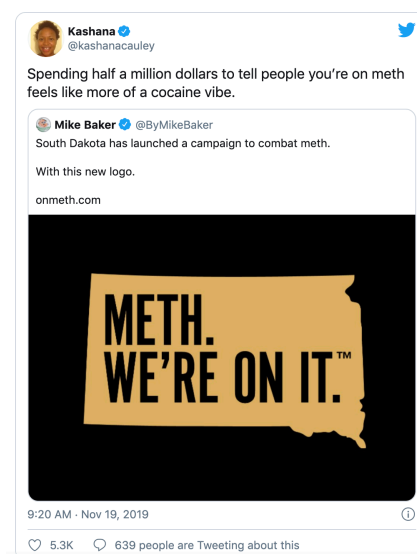
   i)   **Film and Poster Assets**

View the film here

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ii) **Responses to campaign**

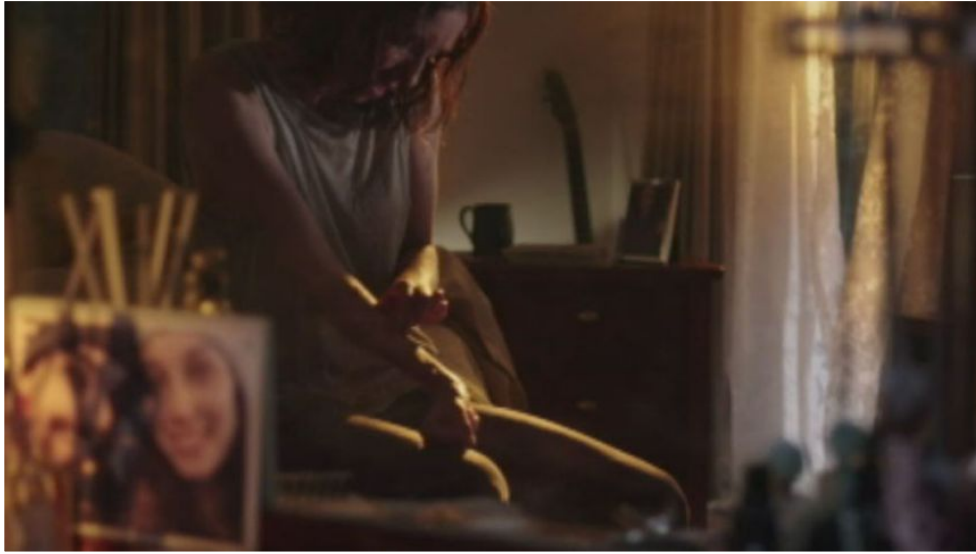## E. 'ICE DESTROYS LIVES' CAMPAIGN, AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, 2015.

Video 1 – Watch here

Video 2 (pictured below), 3 and 4 unavailable online.

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**F. 'CONSTRUYE' (BUILD) FILM CAMPAIGN, FEDERATION AGAINST DRUG
ADDICTION, SPAIN, 2015.**

Video unavailable. Read more here.