

# Colorectal Cancer Screening Messages for Targeted Populations

The most effective screening promotion messages resonate with the priority audience, both rationally and emotionally, and include a call-to-action that motivates. The American Cancer Society (ACS) and the National Colorectal Cancer Roundtable Public Awareness Task Group (NCCRT) have developed messages and strategies for targeting unscreened audiences in a 2016 Communication Guidebook and Companion Guide:

[Recommended Messaging to Reach the Unscreened: 2016 Communications Guidebook Hispanic/Latinos and Colorectal Cancer Companion Guide](#)

Below, based on the ACS and NCCRT research, are messages that can be utilized with each target audience, along with key characteristics about each of the targeted unscreened populations. If your time allows, the full Guidebook and Companion Guide provide a more in-depth look at each of these messages and populations.

## Tested Screening Messages

1. There are several colorectal cancer screening options available, including simple take home options that don't require time off of work. Talk to your doctor about getting screened.
2. Colorectal cancer screening tests don't have to be expensive. There are simple, affordable tests available. Get screened! Call your doctor today.
3. Most health insurance plans cover lifesaving preventive tests. Use the health benefits you are paying for to get screened for colon cancer. Call your doctor today.
4. Colon cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in the U.S. when men and women are combined, yet it can often be prevented or detected at an early stage.

## Target Populations for Screening Messages

### Newly Insured (Insured for less than 1 year)

Many of these individuals may be disenfranchised workers, non-working, or self-employed. They may not have carried health insurance coverage in the past, but are benefiting from new access to coverage. Motivating messages should focus on educating these patients about their screening options, while encouraging them to take full advantage of new insurance plans to detect or prevent colorectal cancer. They may require additional education on what insurance offers, including preventive health coverage.

In message testing, the following messages tested the highest among this group:

1. There are several colorectal cancer screening options available, including simple take home options that don't require time off of work. Talk to your doctor about getting screened.
2. Most health insurance plans cover lifesaving preventive tests. Use the health benefits you are paying for to get screened for colon cancer. Call your doctor today.

**Financially Challenged** (Not insured or has an annual income of less than \$30,000)

Motivating messages should focus on screening affordability, as healthcare costs are a major concern among these patients. Messages that promote alternative, less expensive options are best received. Health care providers, physicians in particular, are a trusted source of information for this audience. Also, it is important to discuss screening with these patients during each and every doctor visit (even sick visits) as this population tends to schedule appointments infrequently. Office practices such as flagging the records of patients in need of screening or setting a protocol to briefly discuss preventive health at every visit can help to reach this population.

In message testing, the following messages tested the highest among this group:

1. There are several colorectal cancer screening options available, including simple take home options that don't require time off of work. Talk to your doctor about getting screened.
2. Colorectal cancer screening tests don't have to be expensive. There are simple, affordable tests available. Get screened! Call your doctor today.

**Insured Procrastinator** (Insured or has an annual income of \$50,000 or more and insured)

While this audience may care about maintaining their health and exercising regularly, they may not understand that colorectal cancer screening is something you do when you do not have symptoms. With many competing priorities, they may not consider it enough of a top priority to get screened. This audience also reports not being screened because they have a fear of the unknown or have heard negative testimonials related to the test and its preparation. Physicians providing information on options that are more comfortable and private will help motivate them to be screened. Utilizing testimonials will help to relieve fear of the test, while instilling the urgency to get tested.

In message testing, the following messages tested the highest among this group:

1. There are several colorectal cancer screening options available, including simple take home options. Talk to your doctor about getting screened.
2. Colon cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in the U.S. when men and women are combined, yet it can often be prevented or detected at an early stage.

**Fearful Procrastinator** (Have not been screened because they heard the test or preparation was unpleasant or embarrassing, afraid to be screened, or have been procrastinating)

Despite the fact that nearly one quarter of this group has served as a caregiver to someone with cancer, they are pushing off being screened. Their procrastination seems to be driven by fear of the test or test preparation, so alternative solutions outside of colonoscopies will appeal to this group.

In message testing, the following messages tested the highest among this group:

1. There are several colorectal cancer screening options available, including simple take home options. Talk to your doctor about getting screened.
2. Colorectal cancer can often be prevented or detected at an early stage through screening. Call your doctor today to talk about getting screened.

## **Black/African Americans**

Messages should focus on taking steps to have a positive impact on one's health, while stressing the fact that regardless of a lack of symptoms, screening is important now. Additionally, messages for the males in this population should be sensitive to cultural perceptions regarding various screening methods. This can be achieved through education on screening options and utilizing testimonials from the African American community. Unscreened African Americans cite no doctor recommendation as being their number one reason for not being screened.

In message testing, the following messages tested the highest among this group:

1. Colon cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in the U.S. when men and women are combined, yet it can often be prevented or detected at an early stage.
2. Preventing colon cancer, or finding it early, doesn't have to be expensive. There are simple, affordable tests available. Get screened! Call your doctor today.

## **Hispanic/Latinos**

Successful messaging to Hispanic/Latino audiences should be intentionally bold and direct because the most effective campaigns convey risk and urgency clearly and directly. There are also cultural nuances in language that makes subtle messaging less effective. In general, the Hispanic/Latino population has a high trust in their physicians and views them as a top source for information. Unscreened Hispanics/Latinos cite no doctor recommendation as being one of the most influential reasons for not being screened. Unfortunately, only a small percent of Hispanic/Latinos visit their physicians regularly. Whenever possible, systems should be in place to flag patients in need of screening so conversations can take place even at sick visits.

In message testing, the following messages tested the highest among this group:

1. Many people with colon cancer or polyps don't have symptoms, and the risk of getting colon cancer goes up with age. That's why men and women need to get screened for colon cancer starting at age 50 even if they feel healthy.  
*Muchas personas con cáncer de colon o con pólipos no tienen síntomas, y el riesgo de llegar a tener cáncer de colon es mayor con la edad. Por esta razón los hombres y las mujeres necesitan hacerse las pruebas de detección del cáncer de colon a partir de los 50 años de edad, incluso si tienen un buen estado de salud*
2. Screening can help find and prevent colon cancer. In fact, if your doctor sees polyps that look like they can turn into cancer, they will remove them. When you have polyps like these removed, you may be preventing cancer!  
*Hacer las pruebas de detección puede ayudar a encontrar y a prevenir el cáncer de colon. De hecho, si su doctor encuentra pólipos que lucen como que podrían convertirse en cáncer, éstos tendrán que ser extraídos. ¡Puede que usted esté previniendo el cáncer al extraer sus pólipos!*
3. You're so important to your family. Don't let them down. Get screened for colon cancer today! It could help save your life.  
*Usted es demasiado importante para los miembros de su familia. No les falle. ¡Hágase los exámenes para la detección del cáncer de colon ya! Esto puede salvar su vida.*

*This information is brought to you by the Maryland Colorectal Cancer Control Program. For technical assistance and resources regarding colorectal cancer screening promotion, please call us at 1-800-477-9774.*

