



Success Story

CHALLENGE

Reports of large numbers of Army service members misusing prescription drugs required a response from the U.S. Department of Defense.

SOLUTION

An interactive public awareness campaign designed to help soldiers and their families understand the risks.

RESULT

A highly researched and strategic campaign with promising impact for the decreased misuse of prescription drugs.

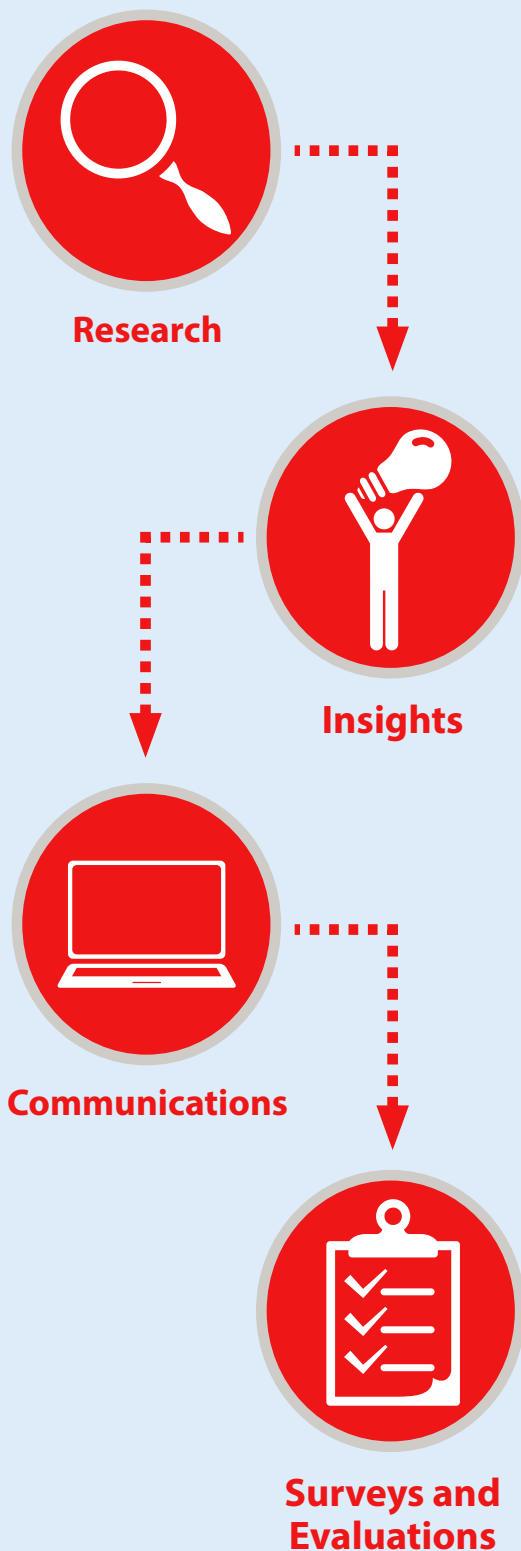
ICF Helps the Department of Defense Reduce Rx Drug Misuse and Abuse with *It's a Thin Line* Campaign

In 2008, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) conducted a *Survey of Health Related Behaviors Among Active Duty Military Personnel*, revealing an alarming increase in self-reported misuse of prescription drugs among Army service members. Among all armed forces service members, approximately 11 percent reported misusing prescription drugs within the previous 30 days—a sharp increase from 3.8 percent in 2005. In response to this disturbing trend, the DoD called on ICF International to implement a marketing and education campaign to address the issue and to facilitate proper use and handling of prescription drugs among Army personnel and to educate their families to support enlisted service members in these goals.

The resulting Prescription Drug Education and Communications Campaign (PDECC)—given the campaign brand *It's a Thin Line*—has been in effect since 2011 and encompasses significant campaign planning and research activities and project management activities, including sophisticated research-based messaging, a nuanced marketing approach, research-



It's a Thin Line Campaign Build Process



based evaluation, and partnership and outreach efforts to boost results. PDECC is a successful campaign that is helping the DoD to achieve its goals of reducing prescription drug abuse among military personnel.

A RESEARCH-BASED CAMPAIGN FOR NUANCED MESSAGING AND IMPACTFUL RESULTS

Sophisticated research and planning activities made for a solid foundation for the development and implementation of a campaign grounded in scientific research—research that would help inform impactful messaging and appropriate communication channels—all leading to campaign credibility and increasing the likelihood of successful results.

A multifaceted approach to research included:

Literature Review

An extensive and thorough scientific literature review provided ICF with a base level of information about the current scientific findings surrounding prescription drug use, misuse, and abuse. The ICF team monitored peer-reviewed research publications related to prescription drug misuse and tracked public sentiment on misuse in the military through a monthly media analysis.

SME Interviews

In-depth interviews with 13 subject matter experts (SMEs) from the DoD gave ICF trusted information about prescription drug misuse and abuse in the Army and military. The interview questions aimed to address key areas identified in the literature review, such as commonly misused prescription drugs, sources of the drugs, high-risk populations, motivation for misuse, and perceptions on misuse.

Audience Survey Research

A survey protocol was implemented to track campaign performance and measure its outcome. An online survey tool assessed baseline data on prescription drug misuse knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors among active-duty soldiers. These results were instrumental in campaign planning, including messaging and strategies to reach the target audience. Participants were solicited through email and postcard invitations, and response to the online survey, launched in January 2013, was exceptionally high: Out of 716 hits, ICF received more than 600 responses.

*More than **600** visitors
(out of 716 total hits) completed
the “It’s a Thin Line” website
survey when it launched in
January 2013.*



Focus Groups

Two rounds of focus groups guided campaign planning by gathering insights from the Army community and testing potential messaging. Discussions in the focus groups centered around identifying soldiers' core values that can be threatened by prescription drug misuse. Potential loss of money, family, and career were concerns for all participants, and they also showed a strong preference for messaging that was serious, straightforward, and realistic. Four proposed campaign themes were tested as well as concepts and messaging with ad-like devices. Participants appreciated realistic, attention-grabbing, thought-provoking images and emphasized the need for nuanced information about misuse versus abuse and resources for help.

A STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS APPROACH FOR PREVENTING DRUG ABUSE

ICF's thorough research set the foundation for highly nuanced messaging and communications mechanisms that would make for an impactful campaign. A strategy of using multiple media channels and types of deliverables was employed to give the campaign broad exposure to the target audience.

The communications home of the campaign, the *It's a Thin Line* website, features a responsive design to provide optimal user experiences across multiple devices. Relying again on the campaign's key research findings, ICF considered the target audience's frequent use of both desktop and mobile devices, creating a site with the flexibility to accommodate multiple types of

devices. The responsive design also boosts search engine optimization (SEO) and is a cost-effective choice for ICF's client.

The messaging and information included on the site has been carefully crafted based on the team's research, offering prescription drug misuse and abuse facts and interactive features and downloadable materials, including:

- Education information
- Most frequently abused medications
- Medication disposal information
- Army regulations
- Self-assessments ("What's Your Drug IQ?")
- Tips for family and friends
- Soldier resources
- Provider resources



- Downloadable and customizable campaign materials such as posters, brochures, and educational aids
- Interactive service locator that allows users to search for prescription drug misuse-related services and receive mapped results

BOOSTING SUCCESS THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS AND OUTREACH EFFORTS

In addition to the website and communications deliverables, the *It's a Thin Line* campaign has had a key presence at special events, including the Army's "Take Back Day" (an opportunity for soldiers to return unused prescription drugs). Installation visits within military units has helped to spread the word about the campaign, along with efforts to integrate communications with existing social media networks and Army channels.

LOOKING AHEAD: MEASURING SUCCESS

The highly researched and strategic campaign is well-positioned for a successful outcome. ICF awaits metrics showing new Army prescription drug use statistics—expected to provide an indication of the campaign's likely positive impact—by late 2014.

ICF's Achievements for the *It's a Thin Line* Campaign

- Highly strategic campaign backed by scientific research
- Nuanced messaging based on real-life Army insights
- Responsive website with downloadable materials and interactive features
- Built-in plans for media monitoring and campaign tracking

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