

# Using Social Media in Health Promotion

This document is intended to provide you with an introductory overview to social media. Social media can be a helpful tool in sharing health messages, reaching out to new stakeholders, engaging in conversations with the public, and providing information about your organization.

## What is Social Media?

Social media refers to interactive digital platforms that allow users to share ideas and information with a network of contacts.

Public health organizations can use social media tools to interact with their community. They have the potential to improve reach, increase engagement, and provide tailored experiences for particular individuals and communities (1).

**Facebook** is a popular social media platform, where users create personal networks of friends, and can like and comment on other users' content, and post their own.

On **Twitter**, networks are created when users "follow" on another. Users share information and messages of up to 140 characters. Because of its short message length, Twitter is an instantaneous medium, known for its up-to-the-minute discussion of current events.

**Hashtags** are a means of organizing conversations on social media platforms. They can be general (e.g. #concussion) or specific (e.g. #SmartHockey). Hashtags provide context for comments, and also link comments together. They become hyperlinks, which, when clicked, display all posts tagged with that hashtag. That way, when a user clicks on #concussion, all posts tagged with #concussion appear.

Some hashtags are intuitive (e.g. #winter, #coffee, #music), but others may not be as obvious. If you're unsure, check out the profile of someone who you know is talking about that topic and see what they use. You can also search for the topic on Twitter or Facebook, which will usually reveal the most common hashtags.

## Building a Social Media Strategy

Practitioners can use the **POST Method** to help build a social media strategy for your organization, program, or campaign (2).

**P- People:** With whom do you want to communicate?

**O- Objectives:** What do you want to accomplish?

**S- Strategy:** How will you ensure your strategy will be successful?

**T- Technology:** Which tools will you try?



## How can I use social media to promote health topics?

Social media provides many options for sharing research, ideas and strategies concerning health promotion.

The easiest way to participate is to **share** articles you find informative or relevant on your own social media accounts. You can do this either by posting through your Facebook or Twitter account, or by sharing using the share icons on the article you like on Horizon.



If you can, try to tag your post with an appropriate hashtag.

Another easy option is to **interact** with people posting information you find valuable. Liking, favouriting, following, and friending are all ways to build your own network of people with similar interests.

Once you've mastered the basics of social media, you can move on to more advanced techniques. Do you have a campaign or topic that you'd like to promote on social media? **Post content** about it to Facebook and Twitter using a unique hashtag, and encourage your network to do the same.

## Questions about social media?

While some issues are best directed to Facebook and Twitter, we're always happy to help where we can. If you have questions about promoting injury prevention on social media, you can reach us at [socialmedia@parachutecanada.org](mailto:socialmedia@parachutecanada.org)

### References

1. Canada Health Infoway. <https://www.infoway-inforoute.ca/index.php>
2. Barwick, M., Bovard, S., McMillen, K. (2010). Knowledge Translation Professional Certificate. Ontario: Hospital for Sick Children.

Produced by Parachute  
150 Eglinton Ave. E., Suite 300  
Toronto, ON M4P 1E8  
P: 647-776-5100  
TF: 1-888-537-7777

[info@parachutecanada.org](mailto:info@parachutecanada.org)  
[www.parachutecanada.org](http://www.parachutecanada.org)

  
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