

Increasing Health Care Utilization in New Orleans

Overview

The City of New Orleans and 504HealthNet (a non-profit member association of New Orleans health clinics) wanted to increase the number of low-income, uninsured people who utilize free check-ups through the Greater New Orleans Community Health Connection (GNOCHC), a Medicaid waiver program.

The aim of the following two trials was to encourage, via text message, 23,300 (then 15,732 in round two) covered individuals who have not seen a primary care physician in the past two years to set up an appointment¹. We tested four text message variations in two rounds. In the first round, three messages were tested against each other. The most successful message from round one was then tested against a new message in round two.

In both trials, the message that emphasized that the text recipient had been specially selected performed significantly better than the alternatives (see Appendix). These findings are particularly interesting in light of a sea of health messaging that emphasizes social responsibility; the results suggest that emphasizing other benefits may be more effective in increasing health care utilization.

Results

In the first trial (Figure 1), we randomized 21,442 people to receive one of three messages: simple, ego, and prosocial. Within a week, people who had received the “you have been selected” message were more likely to respond “yes” by 0.4 percentage points (pp) (a 40% increase) over the simple message. Interestingly, people who received the “take care of yourself” message were less likely to respond “yes” by 0.3pp (a 30% decrease) over the simple message. Compared to the prosocial message, 150 more people would have replied “yes” if the whole sample received the ego message.

In the second trial (Figure 2), we randomized 15,732 (those people that had successful SMS delivery and did not reply in round one) to receive either the best performing message (ego) or that had some success in the UK (which emphasized the cost of the visit)². With 1.3% responding “yes”, the ego message won again – this time by a 0.5pp margin. Encouragingly, the response rates for both rounds of the ego message were nearly identical, suggesting similar messages in the future would see similar response rates.

¹ We will be following up in September 2016 to see if these individuals actually did visit a clinic.

² Randomization in round 2 was stratified based on what individuals had received in round 1.

Figure 1: Percent responding "yes" to schedule
(n = 21,442)

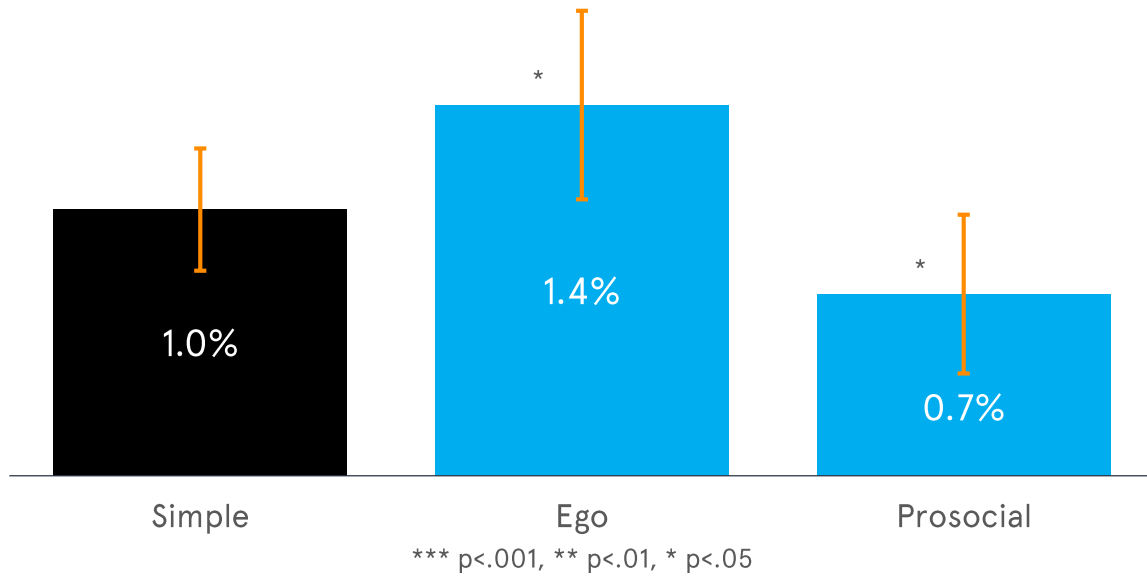
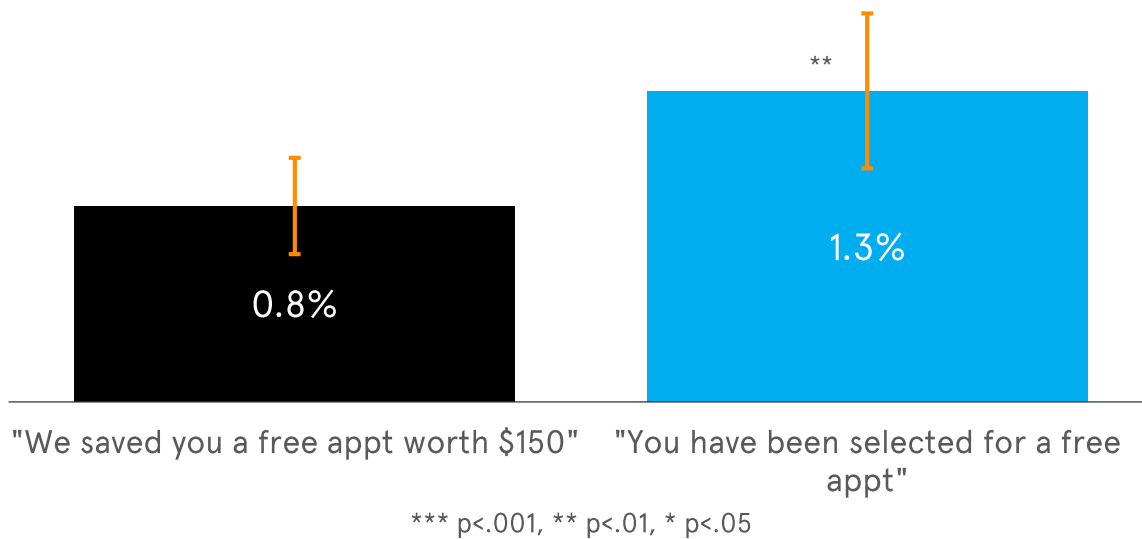


Figure 2: Percent responding "yes" to schedule
(n = 15,732)



Appendix

Round 1

Message	Wording
Treatment 1: Simplicity	Hi it's Chris from the Health Dept! Txt YES to be contacted to set up a FREE doctor's appt. Txt STOP to unsubscribe
Treatment 2: Ego	Hi it's Chris from the Health Dept! You have been selected for a FREE doctor's appt. Txt YES to set it up. Txt STOP to unsubscribe
Treatment 3: Social motivation	Hi it's Chris from the Health Dept! Take care of yourself so you can care for the ones you love. Txt YES to set up a FREE doctor's appt. Txt STOP to unsubscribe

Round 2

Message	Wording
Treatment 1: Reciprocity	Hello! It's Chris from the NOLA Health Dept! We saved you a free doctor's appt worth \$150. Reply YES to schedule it with us ASAP. Reply STOP to unsubscribe
Treatment 2: Ego	Hello! It's Chris from the NOLA Health Dept! You've been selected for a free doctor's appt. Reply YES to schedule it with us ASAP. Reply STOP to unsubscribe