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Research Category

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Abstract Title

Recruiting Teens at Risk for Type 2 Diabetes: Lessons Learned from the DIRECTION Trial

Authors

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Background

Recruiting adolescents with obesity into a demanding, multi-month behavioural intervention remains a

persistent challenge in pediatric trials. Since 2022, the Winnipeg site for the DIRECTION trial has recruited a pre-pilot cohort and three subsequent randomized controlled trial cohorts combining Dialectical Behaviour Therapy skills training with lifestyle intervention, iteratively adapting recruitment strategy across cohorts.

Objective

We compared recruitment channels to identify the most effective strategy.

Methods

Recruitment data (455 inquiries) were tracked prospectively across the pre-pilot cohort (2022) and three subsequent cohorts (2024-2026), documenting recruitment source, screening, eligibility, and enrollment outcomes. Recruitment sources were categorized as Facebook, Instagram, radio, other, or unknown. Conversion rates (inquiry-to-enrolled and eligible-to-enrolled), with 95% confidence intervals (CI), were calculated by source; advertising costs per channel were compared to estimate cost per enrollment.

Results

Recruitment strategy shifted across cohorts: radio predominated in cohorts 1 and 2 (33 and 55 inquiries, respectively), whereas cohort 3 saw a marked increase in social media recruitment, with Facebook inquiries rising from 10 (cohort 2) to 72 and Instagram, previously negligible, generating 32 inquiries. This increased inquiries without a proportional enrollment rise: of 455 inquiries, 29% did not complete screening, and of those who did, 55% had a BMI below threshold, alone or with other exclusions. Facebook had the highest inquiry-to-enrollment rate (15.0%), though radio (12.0%) and other sources (10.3%) followed closely. Downstream, radio and Facebook showed comparable eligible-to-enrollment conversion (69.2% and 62.5%, respectively; 95% CI 50-84% and 45-77%, overlapping substantially), yet radio's cost per enrollment was roughly 8-fold higher than social media's.

Conclusion

Radio and Facebook had comparable eligible-to-enrollment conversion, but radio's substantially higher cost per enrollment suggests social media may be the more efficient recruitment strategy going forward. A BMI below the study threshold was the leading factor in ineligibility, indicating an opportunity to refine pre-screening messaging and eligibility communication for future cohorts.