



## Highway Safety Media Campaign Awareness and Attitudes

### Research Objectives

- Assess and improve upon the effectiveness of Wisconsin's traffic safety media campaigns
- Measure attitudes and perceptions regarding traffic safety messaging

### Research Benefits

- Development of a safety communications plan based on survey results
- Compile real-time data and feedback from Wisconsin drivers

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### Background

The vision of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation's Bureau of Transportation Safety is zero fatalities on Wisconsin roads. To achieve this, WisDOT and its safety partners have established high-visibility law enforcement efforts and public outreach including multiple statewide safety campaigns. WisDOT commissioned a study to assess the state's current safety media campaign communications by garnering feedback from the public with the goal of creating a more effective and strategic traffic safety communication plan.

### Methodology

In July 2023 an online survey with 45 questions was sent to a statewide sample of Wisconsin residents yielding over 1,500 responses. After an analysis of survey results showing descriptive-level findings, a communication plan was developed for testing in the field with seven focus groups in five different locations in the state. The communication plan included general recommendations for development of overarching goals for traffic safety communication and media objectives for attaining these goals.

A focus group discussion guide was also developed that included topics and questions from the online survey. Prompts helped explore thinking behind responses. PowerPoint visuals were used to present material, and participants were asked to engage in polling exercises to measure their feedback on existing media campaigns.

### Results

The statewide survey and series of focus group discussions revealed that the typical Wisconsinite is keenly aware of traffic safety issues in the state. High percentages of survey respondents and most focus group participants are familiar with major traffic safety campaigns and their messages. They favor strong and consistent enforcement of traffic laws intended to curb the most dangerous behaviors behind the wheel. They support proven countermeasures and welcome more public information and education, including effective media campaigns.

### Recommendations for implementation

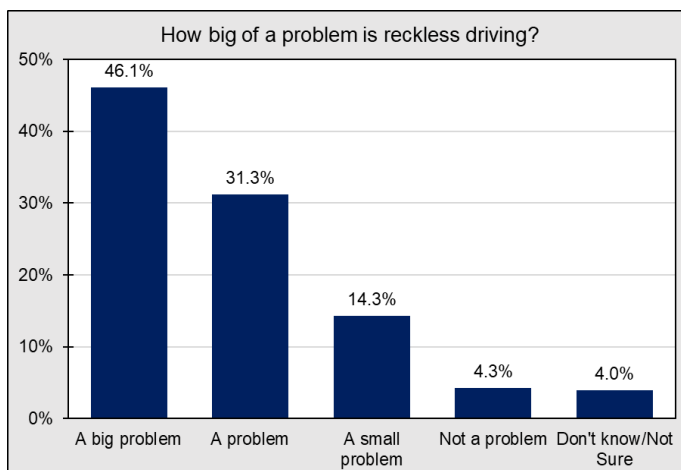
Results from the survey and focus groups led the research team to create a series of program goals and media objectives. Researchers also identified specific audiences at a higher risk of reckless behavior that safety campaigns should target, as well as a schedule for coordinating the release of campaigns to coincide with holidays and times of higher road use. The program goals include:

***“The Bureau of Transportation Safety will be implementing many of the recommendations in this report and apply what we learned in the survey to gauge the media’s impact on driver behavior and establish ways to keep current with data trends and public feedback.”***

***–Michael Schwendau,  
WisDOT***

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- **Reduce distracted driving:** Decrease instances of texting while driving and promote distraction-free behavior.
- **Address impaired driving:** Decrease instances of driving under the influence through awareness and education. This was one of the top issues discussed in focus groups.
- **Promote responsible driving:** Reduce speeding and reckless driving on local roads through awareness and enforcement.
- **Improve compliance with traffic laws among specific groups:** Increase compliance with specific traffic laws. Results from the survey show teens and young adults ages 18-21 self-report use of seat belts less than any other age group. 91% of Hispanic drivers and 92% of Black drivers self-report no seat belt use.



Over 91% of respondents agree that reckless driving is a problem in Wisconsin.

Media objectives include:

- **Create more effective and strategic communication initiatives for traffic safety messages in Wisconsin:** 61% of survey respondents agree that more traffic safety campaigns are needed in Wisconsin. 67% agree that they are more likely to be influenced by crash victim stories than a safety reminder.
- **Increase campaign recognition:** Heighten awareness of traffic safety media campaigns and achieve a pre-set percentage increase in campaign recognition over the next year.
- **Behavioral change:** Achieve a pre-set percent reduction in distracted driving, speeding and drinking and driving incidents within the target audience.

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This brief summarizes Project 0092-23-12,  
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