



The White House's New Anti-Opioid Ad Campaign's Scare Tactics

Critics say the ads are reminiscent of the now-infamous “This Is Your Brain on Drugs” campaign from the 1980s.

June 12, 2018 By [Casey Halter](#)

Last week, the White House launched a new series of public service announcements (PSAs) aimed at educating adults ages 18 to 24 about the perils of opioid use and addiction. So far, responses to the ads have been mixed. Supporters say the commercials bring a powerful narrative to the crisis, while critics liken them to the scary “This Is Your Brain on Drugs” ads from the 1980s, [STAT News reports](#).

Either way, the ads are certainly alarming. One PSA ends with a young woman in a car unbuckling her seat belt, stepping on the gas pedal and ramming her car into a dumpster. In another ad, a young man slams his hand with a hammer on purpose. Announced by White House adviser Kellyanne Conway on Thursday, the campaign uses four so-called “hyperrealistic” narratives about addiction based on real stories from young adults across the United States.

Two former “drug czars” — one Democratic and one Republican — have spoken out in support of the new campaign, arguing that the ads inspire an emotional reaction and do not stray from the grim realities of the U.S. opioid crisis.

However, opponents are wary of the ads, citing numerous studies that have found that antidrug ad campaigns that aim to elicit an emotional reaction, rather than spark a change in behavior or educate their intended audience, often fail to achieve their desired effect.

The PSAs were produced in collaboration with two nonprofit organizations: Truth Initiative, known for similar efforts advocating against tobacco use, and the Ad Council, which first worked with former first lady Nancy Reagan on the “Just Say No” campaign.

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