



Chicago Department of Public Health billboard aimed at promoting flu shots: February 2015. Photo by Fernando De Maio. Printed with permission.

# Community Response to a Public Health Advertisement

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**W**hen does a population at risk become a risk population? This February 2015 billboard by the Chicago, Illinois, Department of Public Health is aimed at promoting flu shots. It features an African American infant beside the message: “I am an outbreak.” The billboard was part of a larger advertising campaign, with other billboards placed throughout the city. This particular billboard, placed on Ashland Avenue, a major north-south road, was visible for several weeks to commuters and residents of some of the most economically deprived communities of Chicago.<sup>1</sup>

The evocative term *outbreak* brings to mind Ebola, tuberculosis, and other feared conditions typically associated with external threats from poor countries.<sup>2,3</sup> By juxtaposing this message with the picture, the threat has been rebranded to be the community itself.

The potential adverse effects of public health interventions have become an important area of investigation in recent years, and much remains to be done to better understand and prevent unintended social harm, including stigmatization.<sup>4,5</sup> In this case, the billboard elicited a community response within days of being put up. Rather than accept the “I am an outbreak” message, the graffiti sprayed on top of the advertisement asserts a far more positive theme: “[I am] Beautiful.” *AJPH*

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## CONTRIBUTORS

F. De Maio took the photograph. Both authors contributed equally to writing the article.

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