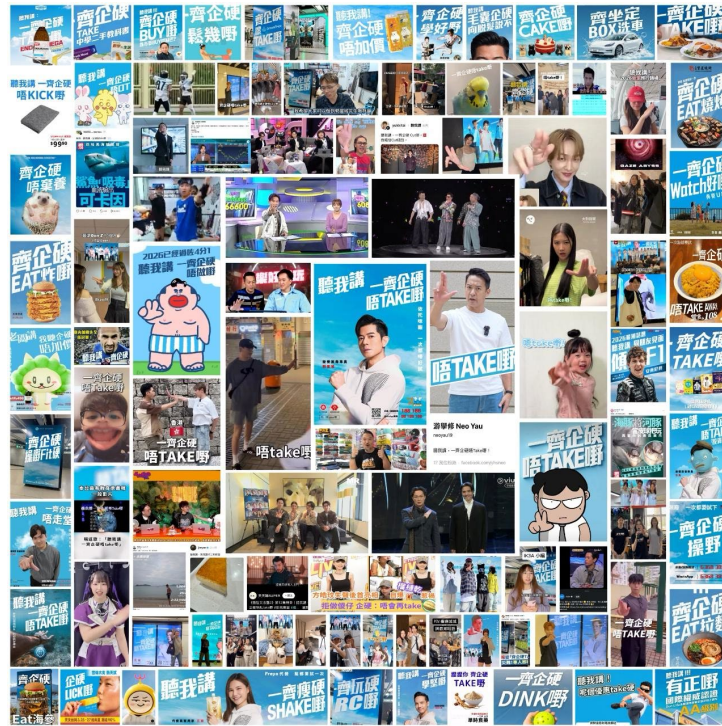


From ‘Listen to Me’ to Everyone Speaking Out: Turning Peer Pressure into Peer Power

“Listen to me: Let’s stand firm. Knock drugs out!”



ENTRANT

Security Bureau of the Hong Kong SAR Government

CAMPAIGN

Listen to me: Let’s stand firm. Knock drugs out!

CAMPAIGN PERIOD

March 2026 onward

THE CAMPAIGN IDEA

We did not just repeat “Drugs are harmful.”
We gave young people a refusal script — then made it a cultural trend the whole city wanted to join.

1. OBJECTIVE

The hardest part of saying no to drugs is sometimes simply saying “no.”

In 2025, Hong Kong faced a rapidly emerging public-health threat: etomidate, widely disguised under the street name “space oil”. It was colourless and odourless, could be mixed into e-cigarettes, and was increasingly presented to young people as fashionable, accessible and seemingly harmless. By the first quarter of 2025, it had become the most commonly abused drug among reported young drug abusers in Hong Kong, with cases involving children as young as seven or eight.

Our toughest challenge was the drug dealers already running their own marketing campaigns.

They had already done their own “branding”: giving a dangerous drug the fantasy-like, futuristic name “**space oil**” to spark curiosity among young people, disguising it in trendy-looking products, and selling the illusion that trying it was novel, harmless and even “cool”.

Government first responded at the policy level by formally replacing the glamorised “**space oil**” label with its real name, “**etomidate**” — stripping away the fantasy and false identity deliberately created around the drug.

But changing a name was easier than changing behaviour.

Traditional anti-drug communication often focuses on one essential message:
“Drugs are harmful. Don’t take them.”

Traditional anti-drug publicity often repeats one essential message: “Drugs are harmful. Don’t take them.” That message matters, but our research revealed a deeper barrier. More than 70% of young people identified peer pressure as a major driver of experimenting with etomidate. Many already knew drugs were harmful; the critical moment came when a friend offered them drugs. Saying “no” could feel awkward, uncool or socially isolating.

BREAKTHROUGH INSIGHT

Drug refusal was not simply a knowledge problem. It was a social problem.

Our breakthrough was to reshape the image of drug refusal itself. Instead of producing another message for young people to hear, we set out to give them something they could actually use: a line to

say no. Then we would make that line familiar, socially accepted and culturally visible enough for young people to use with conviction.

Peer Pressure → Peer Power

The strategy was to turn Peer Pressure into Peer Power. If peer pressure could push someone towards drugs, peer power could help them stand firm. One person saying no might feel awkward; if friends, families, creators, celebrities — and eventually an entire city — were visibly saying no together, refusal could stop feeling socially risky. It could become normal. It could even become cool.

A three-audience prevention ecosystem

Young people were the primary audience: empower them with the conviction and language to refuse drugs. The wider community formed the second audience: extend preventive education, reinforce a social norm that supports refusal, and encourage vigilance, reporting and help-seeking. Kindergarten children formed a pioneering early-childhood extension: build anti-drug awareness and resilience before curiosity and peer pressure begin.

Young people learn how to refuse → Society makes refusal socially supported → Children build resilience before exposure begins

2. STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION

We did not just tell young people to say no. We gave them the words.

A refusal line designed for real life

The campaign created:

「聽我講：一齊企硬唔 take 嘢！」
Officially: “Listen to me: Let’s stand firm. Knock drugs out!”

The original Cantonese phrase carries the intervention. 「聽我講」 means “Listen to me.” 「一齊企硬」 literally means “stand firm together”, while 「企硬」 in everyday Hong Kong Cantonese means holding your ground, refusing to give in and standing confidently by your decision. 「唔 take 嘢」 mixes Cantonese with the English word “take”, mirroring the code-switching young Hongkongers naturally use. In plain terms: “Listen to me. Let’s stand firm together. Don’t take drugs.”

In plain terms: “Listen to me. Let’s stand firm together. Don’t take drugs.”

This was deliberate. We did not want young people to speak the language of government; we made government speak the language of young people. The rhythmic, hyper-local slogan sounded like something friends might actually say to one another, not a conventional public service announcement.

From a slogan to a refusal script — then a cultural trend

The creative breakthrough was not simply a catchy line. 「聽我講：一齊企硬唔 take 嘢！」 was designed as a practical social script for drug refusal. But giving young people the line was only half the solution. To make it easier to use, the line had to become familiar, socially endorsed and something people genuinely wanted to repeat.

Breaking away from traditional public service announcements, the campaign paired the rhythmic Cantonese slogan with a dynamic dance routine choreographed by pop icon Aaron Kwok. Inspired by his classic hits and viral global trends, the choreography made the idea sayable, danceable, filmable, postable, memeable and remixable — a “master key” that could move from a one-way health message into participatory culture.

Anti-drug message → Refusal script → Catchphrase → Trend → Culture

Participation was the media strategy

A slogan spoken only by government is still just a government message. A slogan spoken by the whole city becomes culture. So we moved away from a fixed “launch, buy media, repeat, stop” formula and treated the campaign as a living cultural platform: watching public response, amplifying emerging behaviours and continually creating new ways for people to participate.

Government initiates → Citizens participate → Citizens create → The whole city amplifies

When momentum grew, 28 government departments joined through their mascots on the same day, making “standing firm” visibly collective. Coordinating 28 departments meant 28 approval flows; common creative guardrails and flexible coordination kept the activation consistent and timely. When social-media users began reimagining the slogan and gestures, government faced another choice: control the message or celebrate the creativity. We chose the second.

The “Listen to Me” Creative Awards Ceremony honoured contributions from netizens, artists, athletes and entertainers, turning public creativity into an officially recognised part of the campaign. People were no longer passive recipients; they became co-creators.

From a refusal script to a household catchphrase

Social media quickly amplified the idea. Hongkongers reimagined the slogan and signature gestures as memes, tributes, jokes, videos, greetings and even a new shared language among friends. Organic celebrity endorsements and influencer participation propelled the initiative into mainstream

prominence, while the phrase travelled through television, radio, online programmes, concert stages and the Hong Kong Film Awards.

At the Hong Kong Film Awards, top celebrities Eason Chan and Stephen Fung spontaneously performed the campaign's signature hand gesture and adapted the phrase to "Listen to me: Let's stand firm. Support Hong Kong films." They were neither paid nor scripted. The moment went viral — a clear sign that the slogan was no longer behaving like advertising. It was behaving like pop culture.

By 2026, the line had become one of Hong Kong's most recognisable catchphrases — a household phrase embedded in social posts, television, radio, online programmes, concert stages and the Hong Kong Film Awards.

The more often society repeated the same refusal line, the less awkward it became for a young person to use it when it mattered. What started as a government message was becoming a citywide culture in which drug refusal was a visible, shared and socially endorsed gesture.

Mainstream prominence — earned, not bought

0	0	0
paid influencers	paid celebrities	paid social-media boosting

Aaron Kwok contributed his support freely, motivated by the campaign's cause itself. More than 100 influencers and creators, together with superstars, media organisations, brands and ordinary Hongkongers, embraced the campaign organically. The Government did not pay people to make the campaign look popular. The campaign became popular enough that people wanted to join it.

The public did not simply receive the health message. They became its media channel — turning a refusal script into a shared cultural language.

Building early resilience beyond the trend

The campaign was never designed to end when the trend faded. Through "Listen to Me: Let's Stand Firm BB Class", preventive education was extended into kindergartens for the first time. BOBO, alongside anti-drug ambassadors Agent Don't and Agent Hope, used stories, interactive games and dance to establish one simple, age-appropriate idea: "Drugs are dangerous. Never try them." This underscored a long-term commitment to instilling resilience from an early age.

Trends can capture attention today. Early resilience must last beyond them.

3. RESULTS

Reach was impressive. But for public health, reach was not the answer.

From online phenomenon to mainstream culture

50M+ online reach	1M+ interactions	4.83% IG engagement	HK\$250M+ earned media value	25.5 ROI
-----------------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------------	---	--------------------

The campaign achieved 50M+ online reach and 1M+ interactions. On Instagram — one of the most popular platforms among young people — engagement reached 4.83%, far above the industry benchmark of roughly 0.5%. This showed the campaign did more than generate exposure; it resonated deeply with its core audience.

Independent social-media analysis ranked it the highest-engagement Hong Kong Government campaign since 2019. These results are rarely attainable in the Hong Kong market, whether public or private — let alone under the conditions of three zeros: no paid influencers, no paid celebrities, and no paid social-media boosting. Even so, the campaign generated approximately HK\$250 million in earned media value and an ROI of 25.5. Cultural influence was earned, not purchased.

But did it change the social meaning of saying no?

For a public-health campaign, reach was not the answer. The more important question was whether the work strengthened awareness, confidence and refusal behaviour. Independent third-party youth research found:

90%+ campaign awareness	88.8% better understanding of etomidate	93.3% stronger anti-drug awareness	97%+ more determined to reject etomidate	~70% found the campaign language easier to use when refusing a friend
--------------------------------------	---	---	--	---

Most importantly, 97%+ said the campaign made them more determined to reject etomidate, while nearly 70% said the campaign language made it easier to refuse a friend because it felt more natural, humorous and even cool. That directly answered the barrier we set out to solve: not simply knowing drugs are harmful, but having the confidence and words to say no.

When a campaign line becomes shared language

Frontline anti-drug social workers told us the phrase had travelled beyond social media and into real conversations. Some young people began asking friends with drug problems: “Have you stood firm today?” A difficult conversation about drug use could suddenly begin in a lighter, less confrontational way.

The best copy in the campaign was no longer copy written by government. It was language young people had taken ownership of themselves.

At that point, “Listen to me” had moved beyond advertising. It had become usable language for prevention and intervention — a household catchphrase young people could own and apply.

Help-seeking, early-childhood uptake and a positive health signal

Searches for Hong Kong’s anti-drug enquiry hotline “186 186” rose nearly threefold alongside campaign-related search activity, providing another signal that cultural awareness was translating into practical help-seeking behaviour.

The kindergarten extension also gained momentum. After the first BB Class workshops, more than 50 kindergartens proactively approached the Security Bureau to participate, reinforcing the value of pioneering anti-drug awareness and resilience from an early age.

Changing How Public Health Communication Is Perceived

The campaign also changed perceptions of what government public-health communication could look and feel like. Nearly 70% considered it the most memorable anti-drug campaign in recent years, demonstrating that the campaign broke through the clutter of conventional public-service messaging and created unusually strong recall.

This matters because the challenge was never simply to deliver another “drugs are harmful” message. It was to overcome young people’s resistance to conventional, didactic public communication and make drug refusal something they would willingly engage with, adopt and share.

The impact therefore extends beyond one campaign. “Listen to Me” established a new model for Hong Kong Government communication: from one-way broadcasting, to two-way interaction, to public co-creation. It demonstrated that behavioural insight, culturally relevant language and genuine participation can turn an official health message into something people voluntarily carry into everyday culture.

4. PUBLIC-HEALTH IMPACT

Traditional anti-drug publicity tells young people: “Drugs are harmful.” “Listen to me” went one step further. It created a line young people could use to refuse, turned that line into a trend, and then let social media, music, dance and organic celebrity participation carry it into everyday Hong Kong culture — making drug refusal a cool, socially endorsed gesture within contemporary life.

Government message → Refusal script → Youth catchphrase → Public co-creation → Pop-culture phenomenon → Drug-refusal culture

Innovative marketing and cultural integration can do more than deliver public-health information. They can reshape the social environment in which a health decision is made.

The campaign demonstrated how innovative marketing and cultural integration can revolutionise public-health messaging and create lasting social impact. When one young person says no, they may feel alone. When the whole city is standing firm with them, Peer Pressure becomes Peer Power.

OUR GOAL FROM DAY ONE

**One fewer young person taking etomidate.
One fewer person harmed by drugs.**