

Reporting mental illness: a quick guide for the media



This resource provides quick advice to support media professionals when reporting on mental illness.

Recommendations for reporting about a person with a mental illness

Consider whether mental illness is relevant to the story. Confirm a diagnosis through official sources. Speculation about mental illness contributes to stigma and discrimination. Follow media codes relating to discrimination, privacy, grief, and trauma.

Check the representation is fair and balanced. Ensure your story does not exaggerate a person's illness or the effect this has on their behaviour or life. Seek expert advice about the specific illness being discussed.

Report from police incidents and courts with care. Confirm mental illness is relevant to the story and ensure not to perpetuate myths about links between mental illness and violence as these stories relate to specific and relatively rare circumstances.

Take care interviewing a person with a mental illness. While many people are happy to speak to the media, it can be difficult to talk publicly about a deeply personal issue. Where possible, source someone who is supported to speak to the media and ensure there are no legal considerations.

Consider how celebrity stories are framed. Before reporting, consider the reliability of your source, and the language and images you use. Presenting a story as entertainment or gossip trivialises mental illness, but respectful coverage can break down stigma and encourage others to seek help.

Promote help-seeking

Add general support information to stories:

- 'Talk to a GP or health professional'
- **SANE Australia Helpline 1800 18 SANE (7263)**
www.sane.org
- **beyondblue support service line 1300 22 46 36**
- **Lifeline 13 11 14** www.lifeline.org.au
- **MensLine Australia 1300 78 99 78** www.mensline.org.au

Young people

- **Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800** www.kidshelpline.com.au
- **headspace 1800 650 890** www.headspace.org.au
- **ReachOut.com** www.reachout.com.au

- ✓ Add one crisis service to any story about mental illness.
- ✓ Match service information (e.g. age, gender, illness).
- ✓ Provide direct links to services in online content.

Self-care for journalists: If reporting on mental illness causes you distress seek advice from senior staff or a support service. For more information visit the *Mindframe* website.



Recommendations for any story about mental illness

Consider the language used. Choose accurate and respectful language that separates a person from their diagnosis (e.g. a person is 'living with' or 'has a diagnosis of' mental illness). Take care not to stigmatise mental illness by use of colloquialisms or terminology out of context.

Seek expert advice. Health experts or community leaders can assist stories by providing accurate interpretation of statistics and placing situations or campaigns in context. A list of national contacts is available from the *Mindframe* website.

Be mindful of reinforcing stereotypes. Balanced and accurate reporting can increase understanding, but stereotypes can contribute to negative community attitudes and stigma.

Myths 	Facts 
People who are mentally ill are violent	People with a mental illness are much more likely to be the victims of violence
People are unable to recover from mental illness	Most people will recover completely and go on to live full and productive lives
Mental illnesses are all the same	There are many types of mental illnesses and related symptoms



www.mindframe-media.info

Apply cultural considerations. Be aware of differences in language and communication styles for Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

Use recommendations for online content. Consider implementing procedures to manage message boards for posts that may be harmful or from people in crisis.

Present information about mental illness in ways that are helpful:

- Covering mental illness accurately and sensitively.
- Sharing stories of people with lived experience of mental illness.
- Emphasising the importance of seeking help.
- Providing information about specific illnesses, policy implications, and debates on mental health care delivery.

For expert advice on reporting suicide and mental illness contact:

Mindframe

02 4924 6900

www.mindframe-media.info

 @MindframeMedia

SANE Media Centre

03 9682 5933

www.sane.org

 @SANEAustralia

This quick guide is supported by more detailed information online.