

09 August 2019

Everymind and SANE Australia call out political leaders and commentators for unsafe statements linking mental illness to violence

Following recent comments by President Trump regarding the tragic mass shootings in the USA, Everymind and SANE Australia have come together this week to jointly urge political representatives and commentators to avoid irresponsible commentary, including inaccurately linking mental illness to violence.

Both organisations are calling for political leaders and media commentators to take a responsible approach in commenting on tragedies such as those which occurred earlier this week in the United States.

Earlier this year SANE Australia and **Everymind** jointly called for Australian politicians to sign a [#StigmaPledge](#), promising to avoid unsafe and stigmatising language during the Federal Election campaign.

Everymind Program Manager, Suicide Prevention, Marc Bryant, said political representatives have a responsibility to practice safe communication in all engagement with their constituents and media at all times.

"It is important for all members of Parliament to lead by example in showing how everyone can play a role in reducing the proliferation of stigma including our international colleagues," Mr Bryant said.

"Research shows that less than four percent of mass shootings have any links to mental illness.

"Many violent people have no history of mental illness and most people with a mental illness have no history of violence."

SANE Australia CEO, Jack Heath, said President Trump's comments were inaccurate, irresponsible and deeply disturbing with their ramifications extending well beyond US borders.

"The language used by President Trump contributes towards ill-informed and negative community attitudes which stigmatise people living with a mental illness.

"SANE Australia's StigmaWatch program regularly receives feedback from people living with mental illness that when political leaders and commentators link violent behaviour to mental ill-health, it adversely affects their interaction with community members and generates feelings of isolation, discrimination and a lack of self-worth," added Mr Heath.

Mindframe, an initiative of **Everymind** issued a media alert earlier this week reminding Australian media to be cautious when referring to or repeating overseas media and unsafe commentary linking the recent mass shootings to mental illness.

"This reminder was issued to avoid further stigma and minimise distress among vulnerable individuals and those with lived experience," said Mr Bryant.

"However, despite this, there has been an alarming number of prominent media reports which have been repeated in Australian media, suggesting that mental illness is a key factor to manage in order to reducing mass shootings in the US.

"Certain language and stereotypes can contribute to negative community attitudes and stigmatise people living with a mental ill-health, as well as present inaccuracies about mental illness or mental health care.

“This can lead to many people, in particular men, not seeking help early for their mental health issues due to self-stigma being a barrier.

“It is important to note that whilst the media has a public interest duty to report on all areas relating to the conversation on restricting mass shootings, this kind of reporting has been done without checks or consultation with experts.

“Mental health experts, could have challenged this commentary and provided evidence to contradict this,” added Mr Bryant.

Mindframe tips to report accurately and sensitively on this story:

- Refrain from linking violent acts to mental ill-health. Making this link can result in stigma and is inaccurate.
- Refrain from speculation around the perpetrator’s state of mind or mental health until these have been officially confirmed by authorities.
- Avoid using colloquial language such as ‘crazed gunman’ and ‘psychopath’ as this can also contribute to stigma.
- Omit explicit details of method and location when describing how perpetrators of past shootings took their own life e.g. description of specific weapons.
- Include help-seeking: Include help-seeking information for potentially distressed viewer. See below for further information.
- In addition to this, **Everymind** and SANE Australia would like to take this opportunity to jointly acknowledge the grief and loss associated with the mass shootings in the United States and pass on our condolences to the victims, their families and communities.

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About Everymind – www.everymind.org.au

Everymind is a leading institute dedicated to the prevention of mental ill-health and suicide and to improving wellbeing for all Australians.

About Mindframe – www.mindframe.org.au

Mindframe is an initiative of **Everymind** and is a national program which supports safe media reporting, portrayal and communication about suicide, mental ill-health, alcohol and other drugs.

About SANE Australia

SANE Australia is a national mental health charity working to support four million Australians affected by complex mental illness including schizophrenia, bipolar, borderline personality disorder, eating disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder and severe depression and anxiety.

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