



Mindframe: Quick reference guide for court reporting on mental illness

This guide has been developed to support media reporting on mental illness when mentioned in a court setting.

Journalists have a key role to play in the narrative the public receive when reporting on these stories. Studies reveal that the most problematic news coverage about mental illness results from information collected at court or from a police incident.

Consistent exposure to this type of media portrayal can contribute to stigma and

discrimination as people are likely to make generalisations because of the coverage.

It is recommended that media use language that is safe and non-stigmatising.

For more detail and context, access: [Guidelines on media reporting of severe mental illness in the context of violence and crime.](#)



Always consider the impact of language on the people that you are writing about and the people who will be reading or hearing your story:

Key guidance:

- Reporting the mental illness diagnosis of a person who has committed a crime can have negative implications for others with the same diagnosis, or their families. Report accurately about the role of mental illness in behaviour, violence or crime. Avoid speculating and rely on authoritative sources such as mental health professionals or court reports when reporting on a person's mental health status.
- Give context. There are many risk factors for violence, and most people with a mental illness are not violent. Where mental illness is a factor in violent behaviour, it is very rarely the sole factor. Avoid presenting mental illness as the sole cause of violence. Other factors should be considered such as lack of access to effective treatment, a history of violent behavior or the presence of alcohol or other drugs.
- Avoid sensationalising mental illness in the headline, especially if this has not been confirmed to be an integral part of the incident. Such portrayal is misleading and highly stigmatising, and can lead to negative attitudes and behaviours towards people living with mental illness.
- Be clear when mentioning mental illness, whether it is an official diagnosis confirmed by a qualified person such as a psychiatrist, or if it has been raised in another context, such as by a defence lawyer speculating about possible mental illness.
- Give context when reporting on 'not guilty by mental impairment' verdicts. This verdict is different in each state and territory so check the relevant legislation and explain the implications of this verdict in your story.
- Seek out further accurate information about the relevant mental illness and what can be done to prevent similar incidents.
- Be considerate in selecting images and footage and avoid using unrelated or sensationalist images. Use images only directly related to the story. For more guidance, access [Images matter: Mindframe guidelines for image use](#).
- Use appropriate and person-first language. For more guidance, access [Our words matter guidelines for language](#).
- Encourage help-seeking by providing details of appropriate [sources of support](#).

Consider the language you use when referring to mental health concerns

It is recommended that media choose language that reflects and empowers individual experiences, is not sensationalised, is understandable and is adapted to individual preferences or audiences:

Preferred

- ✓ A person 'living with' or 'has a diagnosis of' a mental illness
- ✓ A person being 'supported for', 'treated for' or 'someone experiencing mental health concerns'
- ✓ Has a 'diagnosis of' schizophrenia; being 'treated for' anorexia
- ✓ Their behaviour was 'unusual'
- ✓ 'Antidepressants'; 'psychiatrists'; 'psychologists'; 'support services'
- ✓ Discharged from hospital
- ✓ Psychiatric or medical terms used within the correct context

Problematic

- ✗ Mental patient; nutter; lunatic; psycho; schizo
- ✗ Victim; suffering; afflicted
- ✗ A schizophrenic; an anorexic
- ✗ Crazy; deranged; mad; psychotic
- ✗ Happy pills; shrinks; nuthouse
- ✗ Released from hospital
- ✗ Psychotic dog; schizophrenic economy; bipolar weather

