



Mindframe: Quick reference guide for reducing stigma in the media

This quick reference guide has been created in partnership by Everymind and SANE to assist media and public communication professionals in understanding stigma, its impact, and ways to ensure their stories help reduce stigma associated with mental health concerns, mental illness and suicide.

Media content that provides accurate, balanced and informative coverage of these issues can play a positive role in reducing harm and increasing help-seeking.

We recommend using this resource in conjunction with the *Mindframe* guidelines

for safely communicating about suicide and self-harm.

This quick reference guide includes:

- An outline of the role that media professionals play in stigma reduction
- Examples of ways to reduce stigma including a comprehensive checklist
- Additional resources and links for further advice to support specific stories.

The full suite of *Mindframe* guidelines and other supporting resources specifically for media can be accessed [here](#).

Stigma around mental health concerns and suicide

Stigma refers to negative and harmful attitudes, beliefs and stereotypes and is a pervasive problem that negatively impacts people and communities.

“
Internalized stigma is where those perceptions and misconceptions around what it means to have a mental health issue might actually prevent you from getting help.
”

Rachel Green
Chief Executive Officer, SANE

People living with mental health concerns experience high rates of stigma and discrimination in many areas of their life. A national survey conducted in 2020 ([Our turn to speak](#)) found that the impact of stigma on interpersonal relationships was participants' greatest concern. Negative experiences were reported as frequent and impactful, and regularly led to withdrawal from social interaction. More than 80% of survey respondents agreed that they expected others would not want to be friends with them because of the stigma about their mental health concerns.

In the context of suicide, stigma refers to the negative attitudes and beliefs that society holds about people who experience suicidal thoughts, or who attempt or die by suicide. Stigma can take many forms, including shaming or blaming. It can prevent people from seeking help and may increase the risk of suicide.

Media's role in stigma

Stigma can be perpetuated through various mediums including, but not limited to, print and broadcast news, social media, online platforms, and fictional portrayals on stage or screen.

“
Unless a person's health is a part of the story then it doesn't belong there.
”

Osher Günsberg
Patron, SANE

The news media is a trusted source of information and knowledge for the public. People take the information as factual and informed. Therefore, unbalanced or inaccurate representations of mental health concerns and suicide will often be believed by the public, and influence societal attitudes.

When mental illness and suicide are reported in a sensationalised or stigmatising manner, it reinforces negative stereotypes, perpetuates ignorance, and contributes to the marginalisation of people with lived and living experience.

“
Australia's media sector is one of the best in the world at covering these issues, but it also means we're ready for different types of stories. Media has an opportunity to have a more positive impact because these are issues that people are living and grappling with every day.
”

Dr Jaelea Skehan
Director, Everymind

Checklist for reducing stigma in media reporting

Media plays a pivotal role in perpetuating or diminishing stigma. Use the checklist below to ensure the stories you tell are safe and reduce harm

Use person first language when talking about a person's experience

Person-first language recognises that a person is much more than a diagnosis. Use terms like 'a person with depression', 'he has a diagnosis of schizophrenia', 'someone who experiences anxiety' unless the person prefers to use something else.

Showcase stories of hope, recovery or living well

Including positive and hopeful stories in the media can help to reduce stigma while increasing public understanding and support for those experiencing mental health concerns.

People living with thoughts of suicide have their own unique experience. Many live full lives, make valuable contributions to society and manage symptoms of suicidal ideation through treatment.

Actively encourage help-seeking and offering of support

Provide a list of specific support services relevant to your audience.

In addition, consider if the article overall highlights the importance and benefits of seeking help or if there are parts of the article that could discourage help-seeking.

Use images that are empowering or that reflect hope and support

Images can play a powerful role in promoting a more accurate and compassionate understanding of mental health concerns. They can show people with mental health concerns as active, contributing members of society, and highlight their strengths and abilities.

Balance more negative depictions of mental health concerns (such as images of people clutching their heads, in darkness, in isolation) with images of hope and support. This can help to reduce stereotypes about what it's like to live with mental health concerns, and encourage people to seek or offer help when it's needed.

When communicating about suicide, refrain from using images that depict or imply the method or location of a suicide and consider whether the image has a prevention focus. This also includes removing any details about problematic websites where people can access information about method.

Balance stories by including both clinical or sector expertise as well as lived experience expertise

This ensures you provide a well-rounded, inclusive and accurate representation of these complex and sensitive issues.

Contact *Mindframe* prior to publication for advice on how to balance your story to reduce stigma and promote help-seeking.





Additional resources

Where there is potential for stigma or harm in news reporting, *Mindframe* can assist journalists to make stories safer prior to publication. Additional resources and detailed guidance to support safe reporting of specific issues can be accessed via the following links:

- [Reporting suicide and mental ill-health](#)
- [Reporting on Mental Illness in the Context of Violence and Crime](#)
- [Communicating about Alcohol and Other Drugs](#)
- [Images matter: Mindframe guidelines for image use](#)
- [Our Words Matter: Guidelines for language use](#)

SANE Stigmawatch

Established in 1997, SANE's StigmaWatch program promotes responsible reporting of mental ill-health, suicide and alcohol and other drugs (AOD) in the Australian media. StigmaWatch responds to community concern about media coverage and provide constructive feedback and advice to media professionals on how to responsibly report stories about mental health concerns, suicide and AOD.

Learn more about StigmaWatch [here](#).

Self-care

It is essential for media professionals to receive ongoing professional development and support to prepare for potentially traumatic assignments, as there is often little time to do this prior to covering a specific story. Everymind, in consultation with the Dart Centre Asia Pacific, has developed a tip sheet with information on the welfare of journalists when reporting suicide, mental illness and other traumatic incidents. Access this helpful resource [here](#).

Mindframe support

For further expert advice on media reporting of suicide and mental illness, contact *Mindframe*:

☎ (02) 4924 6900

✉ mindframe@health.nsw.gov.au

🌐 www.mindframe.org.au