

## Case Study 4A: Developing a Communication Project in Suicide Prevention

### Student notes

This case study is designed to give students some practice in considering issues associated with reporting and communicating about mental illness or suicide, so that they will be better prepared to deal with such situations should they arise, when they are working as a journalist or public relations practitioner. Mental illness and suicide are sensitive and complex issues and it is natural that some people may feel uncomfortable talking about them. Usually, these feelings are temporary and do not cause serious distress. However, if students do become distressed as a result of using these materials or because of other problems, and these feelings continue, they should talk to someone they trust such as a lecturer, tutor, or counsellor at their university. Students can also talk to a GP, health professional or call a crisis counselling service such as:

- Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 (5-25 years)
- Lifeline 13 11 14
- Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467

For online information visit: [www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au) and [www.reachout.com](http://www.reachout.com)

### Background

LIFE Communications is a National Project, funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing as part of the National Suicide Prevention Strategy (NSPS). The project is managed by Crisis Support Services Inc., a leading professional telephone counselling and training provider.

LIFE Communications aims to improve communication between suicide and self-harm prevention stakeholders in Australia. The project achieves this by providing access to a range of resources and research, including the latest information from national projects in prevention, intervention and postvention. These projects are informed by the *Living Is For Everyone (LIFE)* Framework to shape and guide suicide prevention activity in Australia.

LIFE Communications builds networks in suicide prevention between key stakeholders through a range of strategic and targeted communication activities. The LIFE website is the primary medium of communication. It provides the latest research on suicide, news on developments, as well as opportunities to discuss issues and share knowledge, resources and information. The project team also promotes stakeholder use of the LIFE Framework and its accompanying research and evidence document, and set of fact sheets, making it easy for them to access relevant information and apply it to their self-harm and suicide prevention work.

The aims of the LIFE Communications Project are to:

1. Provide stakeholders with access to the Living Is For Everyone suite of resources
2. Provide stakeholders with access to the latest information, activities and resources in suicide prevention.
3. Provide stakeholders with a vehicle to contribute their learnings and draw on each other's expertise.



4. Facilitate clear and effective communication channels across a broad range of suicide prevention stakeholders in Australia.

## The Task

The following Questions provide a guide for developing a plan for how you might manage this communication project. Your lecturer or tutor may ask you to look at all of these questions or a selection only. In considering the scenario and questions, you should refer to *Issues and Impact: Communicating mental illness and suicide* for an overview of key ethical and public relations issues involved in managing communication about suicide. This resources, and further reference materials, are available on the *Mindframe* for Universities website ([www.mindframe-media.info](http://www.mindframe-media.info)).

### Research

1. Write a situation analysis and develop measurable objectives for the project.
2. Develop a list of people and professionals who may be among the broad target group to receive and use the LIFE Framework resource.
3. How/where might you access these target groups?
4. List the types of research you would need to conduct before developing your communication strategy.
5. Develop an evaluation plan, outlining how you will measure the success of your strategy.

### Communication Strategy

6. Design a communication strategy for the above brief.
7. List the important aspects regarding communication about suicide that you would need to consider.
8. Develop some key messages for your communication strategy.
9. Develop a list of tactics you might employ to achieve your objectives.
10. Consider how you may adapt your approach to target a specific audience (for example, Indigenous health worker, school teachers, GPs etc).

### Using the media

11. In what circumstances might you engage the media during this project?
12. How might you use the media as part of your communication strategy?
13. What issues will you need to consider if using the media as part of your communication strategy?

## Case Study 4B: Analysing a Communication Project in Suicide Prevention

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A summary of the Life Communications Project is provided as HANDOUT 4, with other supporting documents. Review this material and then work through the discussion questions below. Your lecturer or tutor may ask you to do this in a group or individually.



## Discussion Questions

### Research

- Is there evidence of adequate formal or informal research?
- Did research identify who the key publics or audiences would be?
- Would you have used any other research methods?
- Was there evidence that the need of the client, the challenges they faced and the social, political, legal, cultural and ethical environment were taken into consideration?

### Planning

- Were the goals and objectives clearly stated?
- How measurable and achievable are the objectives?
- Was the strategy for engaging with key audiences clearly articulated?
- How were the strategies directed to specific publics?
- Did the strategy promote mutual benefit for both the client and the key publics?
- Could more effective strategies have been used?
- Did the strategies overlook key interests of some of the targeted publics?
- Were the timing and available resources adequate for this project?

### Media

- In what circumstances did the project use the mass media?
- Would you have engaged the mass media differently? Why or why not?
- Was there evidence that media strategies incorporated understanding of the sensitivities involved in discussing suicide in the media?

### Ethics

- Were the strategies used consistent with ethical practice?
- Were the tactics and messages employed consistent with responsible and appropriate communication about suicide?

### Evaluation

- How was success or failure evaluated?
- Was evaluation considered in the initial plan?
- What lessons were learned?
- Do the results suggest further actions?