

Information and advice on talking to the media

Media coverage can be a cheap and effective way to create public awareness about your organisation's services, products, events or launches. This Factsheet includes tips and techniques you can use to help achieve media coverage.

Groundwork

Do some research before contacting a journalist. Start by identifying your audience and, from there, establish which media outlets will most effectively target them. The ideal way to establish who to contact for what story is to evaluate media outlets in your area. By doing this, you can create a list of possible contacts and the issues that interest them. Normally the best points of contact (unless you've developed a rapport with a particular journalist) are:

- ⌚ Metropolitan newspapers: reporter or journalist
- ⌚ Suburban or regional papers: reporter or Chief of Staff
- ⌚ Television: Chief of Staff or producer
- ⌚ Radio news: the newsroom
- ⌚ Radio talkback: producer

See Factsheet *Media Contacts* for definitions of media roles.

Sending a media release

- ⌚ A media release is crucial when contacting media.
- ⌚ Most media outlets prefer to receive media releases by email.
- ⌚ Ensure the media release is in the body of the email or, if an attachment, is in a format they can easily open, such as a PDF. Also ensure the file size is small – nothing is more likely to alienate a journalist than crashing their mail system!
- ⌚ Include a photograph as an attachment – ensure the file size is no larger than 1 MB.

See Factsheet *How to write a media release*, and Factsheet *Media policy* which suggests standard operating procedures for media liaison.

Pitching a story idea

If contacting media individually, it can be most effective to provide additional information, or the 'pitch', via email or a phone call, to guide the journalist with suggestions on how to run the story.

Media outlets are happy to receive pitches as long as they are relevant, researched and newsworthy. The pitch should briefly summarise the media release and highlight why the story is relevant to the media outlet's readers, viewers, or listeners. The pitch should offer additional resources and suggest how they may be used. These could include:

- ⌚ a spokesperson to be interviewed (if the spokesperson has particular relevance for the audience, such as being a local, it is highly recommended that this is emphasised). See Factsheet *Supporting spokespeople with a mental illness*
- ⌚ background information sheets which provide more detail about the issue or event
- ⌚ recent research, facts and statistics to support your story
- ⌚ images for reproduction (even stock images may be of interest to media)
- ⌚ gratis review copies of publications.

more . . .

Information and advice on talking to the media

Timing

The timing of when you send your media release can affect whether the story is run. This is due to peak times and deadlines:

- ⌚ *Newspaper*: a story or interview needs to be finalised by about 4 PM local time
- ⌚ *Television*: a story or interview needs to be finalised by 2-3 PM local time
- ⌚ *Radio*: stations run news spots every hour, so just before or just after the hour is not the best time to suggest a story idea
- ⌚ *Talkback radio*: shows are usually classified as breakfast, morning, afternoon, drive and evenings – check with the particular station for exact program times.

Once a journalist is interested

If a media outlet is interested in your story idea:

- ⌚ make sure you have a clear understanding of what they're after; if unclear feel free to clarify with them
- ⌚ respect a journalist's deadlines and respond to journalists when you say you will
- ⌚ keep journalists updated if they are on a tight timeframe, even if it's to tell them that you still can't provide them with anything
- ⌚ ensure your spokesperson is fully briefed see *Factsheet Media interviews* and *Factsheet Supporting spokespeople with a mental illness*
- ⌚ ensure you are familiar with *Factsheet Media enquiries about mental illness* and *Factsheet Media enquiries about suicide* for more guidance on issues associated with working with the media.

Developing the relationship

- ⌚ Build a relationship with individual journalists. Treat them as stakeholders and get to know them, their deadlines, the best way to contact them, and which issues and topics they cover.
- ⌚ Also remember a relationship works both ways: responding promptly to any requests for information will build the relationship and can help future media releases or events obtain coverage.

And remember . . .

There are no guarantees in life, and there are no guarantees in the media. You can prepare for a media event, write a media release, promote the issue to outlets, get spokespeople ready for interviews and then . . . nothing happens. It's important to remember that space is at a premium. All you can do is prepare the best you can, and if another story squeezes you out – accept it, and keep talking to the media and working on other ideas.