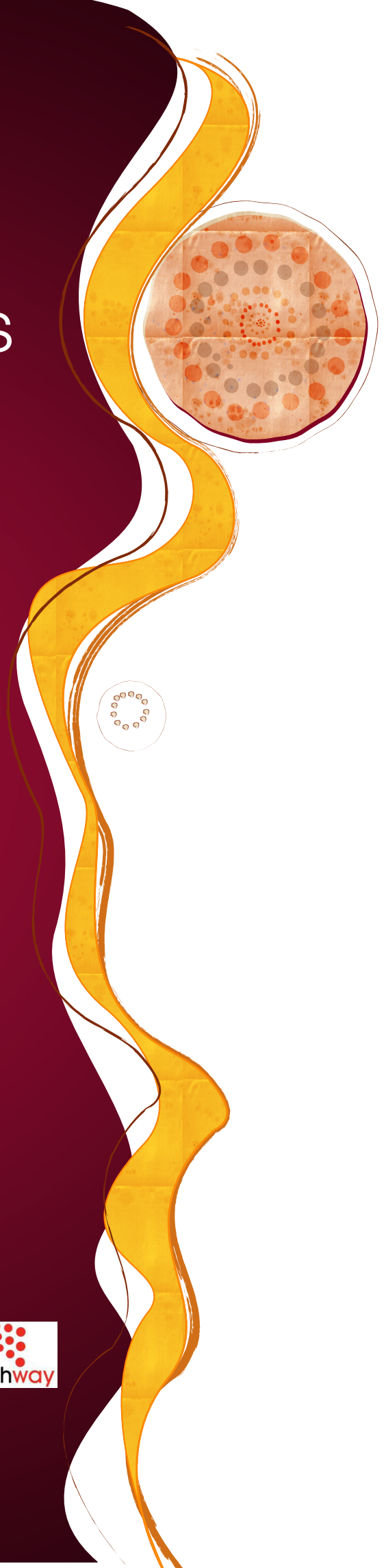


Changing the News

A media engagement toolkit for
Aboriginal health professionals



Changing the News

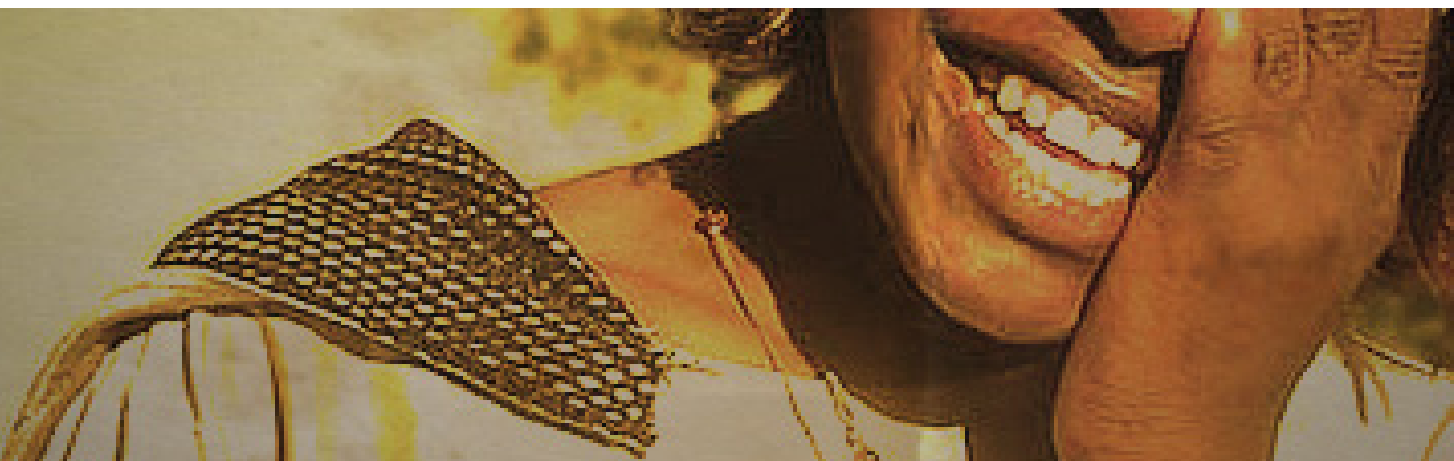
A media engagement toolkit for
Aboriginal health professionals



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Introduction

Professionals working at all levels in the Aboriginal health sector and the media have a complex relationship. Advocates for Aboriginal health look for opportunities to mobilise the media in support of health-related political, economic, policy and welfare reform. However, their concern about the misrepresentation of Aboriginal affairs in the news continues to stifle their engagement.

To change this, people working in the Aboriginal health sector in Western Australia formed the view that to strengthen the Aboriginal health profile and influence public opinion, it was critical to improve their media engagement skills.

Over the course of a year, 23 Aboriginal and 17 non-Aboriginal health and media professionals were interviewed at intervals for their views on how the mainstream news media could be used more effectively to increase awareness and understanding in the general population about Aboriginal people and their health. Information from the consultation interviews was used to develop a workshop and mentoring program in media management and advocacy skills training for Aboriginal professionals working in Aboriginal health and related areas.

Through exposure to journalists and other media professionals, the participating Aboriginal professionals working in the Aboriginal health and related sectors, improved their understanding of and interest in, the way the mainstream news media works, whilst developing their strategic media management skills.

The participation of Aboriginal health and media professionals throughout the **Aboriginal Health Communication Project (AHCP)** resulted in two practical toolkits being produced.

One is **Aboriginal Health and the Mainstream News Media – A toolkit for journalists**, and was developed to guide journalists as they navigate the Aboriginal health sector in the course of newsgathering and reporting. It provides practical advice from participating Aboriginal health professionals. Not addressed are topics that journalists will already be exposed to through in-house orientation and training, reporting style guidelines and engagement protocols, through adherence to the journalist's code of ethics, and through the self-regulating codes of practice administered through the Australian Press Council, the Australian Communications and Media Authority and the respective peak bodies for commercial television and radio.

The other (this handbook), **Changing the News – A Media Engagement Toolkit for Aboriginal Health Professionals**, was designed for Aboriginal professionals working in Aboriginal health and related sectors. It provides advice given by participating journalists to the Aboriginal health professionals and substantial information on managing media resources and developing strategies.

It is beyond the scope of this toolkit to offer extensive advice rather than general tips. If you or your organisation requires assistance on a difficult story, you are advised to seek support from NACCHO, AHCWA, OXFAM, Reconciliation Australia, or even the Australian Medical Association. If you have funding it would be advisable to find a public relations consultant, media strategist or media trainer for advice that is specific to your situation and needs. Similarly it is not the intention of this toolkit to address the use of online media such as internet sites, or social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

Why We Need This Toolkit

Increase effective coverage of Aboriginal health issues

Understand the media landscape, network and collaborate with journalists and provide a framework through which Aboriginal health issues can most effectively be represented.

Influence what makes the news

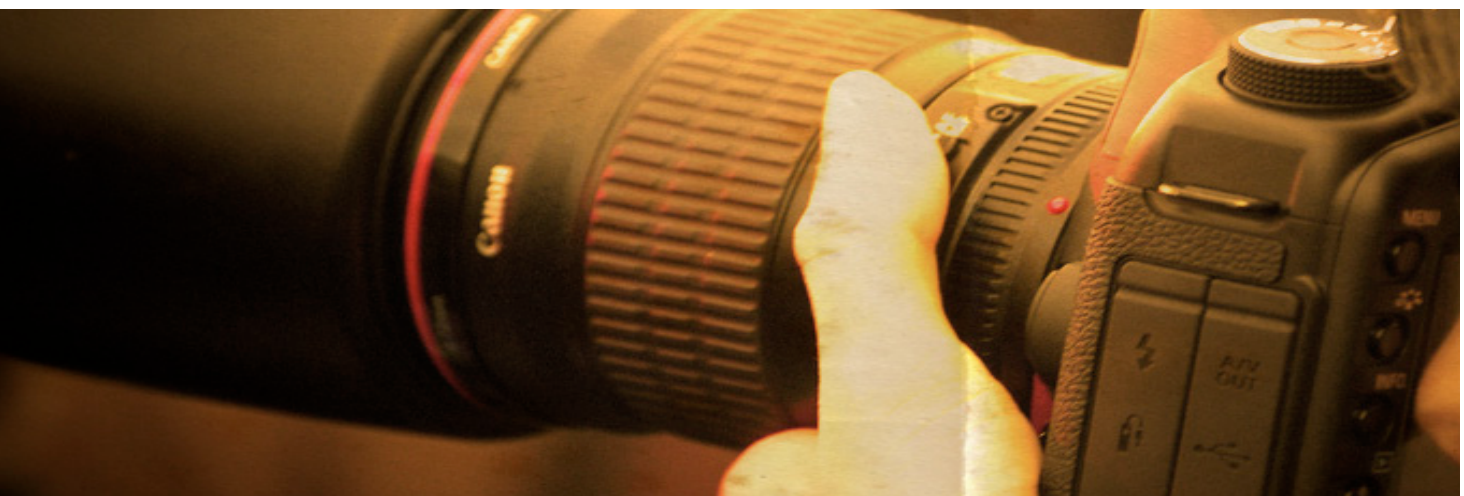
Tailor key messages for a broad, non-Aboriginal audience and increase proactive media engagement on Aboriginal health issues.

Be an authority on the issue

Take control of media interviews and ensure that you get your message across in an appropriate way.

Be prepared for crisis

Always have risk management strategies in place, including a communications strategy. The media can be your ally or your enemy.



Participants' Perceptions:

The representation of Aboriginal health issues in mainstream news media

The Aboriginal Health Communication Project (AHCP – see Introduction) study found that Aboriginal respondents' views and attitudes toward journalists and the mainstream news media were mostly based on general impressions rather than direct personal experience. The study also found that, as a result of the media management workshops, respondents developed more tolerant attitudes towards journalists. By meeting and talking to local journalists from Channel 7, the West Australian newspaper, local newspapers and local radio, respondents were able to discuss concerns and advise media representatives on appropriate ways of dealing with the Aboriginal community for news purposes. They also had the opportunity to hear journalists' challenges in reporting on Aboriginal affairs and their feedback on how to better prepare and manage for mainstream news media.

Below are some examples of views held by Aboriginal professionals in the Aboriginal health and related sectors and the media professionals interviewed.

Aboriginal Health Professionals' Perceptions	Media Professionals Perceptions'
Media's representation of Aboriginal health and related issues	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Media representations are often inaccurate, display negative stereotypes and sensationalise issues;• Media coverage is discriminatory;• News reports lack context required to provide an accurate representation of the issues;• Aboriginal spokespeople are excluded from stories;• Media uses discriminatory and sensational language;• Media considers Aboriginal issues irrelevant;• There is a lack of responsibility for the impacts of misrepresentative coverage of Aboriginal affairs, i.e. on the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal audiences;• There is a lack of accountability for the impacts of misrepresentative coverage of Aboriginal affairs, i.e. on the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal audiences;• Journalists are untrustworthy;• Journalists are lazy;	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• News is generally negative – Aboriginal health is no exception;• Aboriginal health issues are 'too complex' to report on in the short news reporting styles;• Aboriginal health agencies are ignorant of media processes, in particular strict deadlines. This generates challenges for reporting Aboriginal affairs;• The Aboriginal health sector are not pro-active in engaging with the media, often good stories are just 'stumbled across';• Difficult to locate and access Aboriginal spokespeople;• Editors have the power to change a journalists' story, including the angle of the story, language used, photographs etc.);• A news report will go to print or broadcast with or without the Aboriginal health perspective – Aboriginal health spokespeople need to respond to our requests;• Journalists generally try to respect cultural protocols but find this challenging due to the variations between different Aboriginal language groups;

Cultural Understanding

- Journalists are ignorant of Aboriginal people and culture;
- Media always want an immediate response. Aboriginal agencies often require a consensus on an issue before going public;
- Inappropriate Aboriginal spokespeople are used to represent the issues;
- Only a small few Aboriginal people are considered good spokespeople. This removes the variation of perspectives.
- Aboriginal health professionals do not seem to respect media deadlines or understand news media process;
- Aboriginal health issues are 'too complex' to report on in the short news reporting styles;
- There are structural imbalances between the sectors, for the media it's about money and power, and there is limited-to-no infrastructure within the Aboriginal health sector to deal with this;
- Journalists generally try to respect community protocols. Sometimes these are unclear and hard to work with.

Conclusions

- Aboriginal affairs, including health, are not well understood by journalists and the wider Australian public. The impacts of this are negative and often inaccurate representations of Aboriginal people, culture and health issues. Ultimately, these representations perpetuate the negative stereotypes in the public domain;
 - Aboriginal health and related issues were not taken seriously by the news media as it was not considered 'high profile' or in the interests of the mainstream;
 - Journalists and mainstream news media institutions are deterred from spending time on Aboriginal affairs because:
 - Aboriginal stories are time consuming and constantly changing; sources are sometimes/often untrustworthy and hostile;
 - Mainstream news audiences are uninterested in Aboriginal affairs; and
 - There have been positive changes in mainstream news media's approach to reporting Aboriginal affairs.
- Journalists and mainstream news media institutions are deterred from spending time on Aboriginal affairs because:
- Aboriginal stories are time consuming, constantly changing, untrustworthy, and often hostile;
 - Mainstream news audiences were disinterested in Aboriginal affairs;
 - There have been positive changes in mainstream news media's approach to reporting Aboriginal affairs;
 - More visible in the print media;
 - Less racism;
 - Greater respect for cultural protocol.

Dealing with the Media on Aboriginal Health Issues

1

Getting Involved – Proactive media management

There is a demand on Aboriginal health professionals to engage with the news media to ensure adequate attention is given to Aboriginal health issues, in an informed and appropriate manner; and to ensure a responsible interpretation of the issues.

How can Aboriginal health organisations and professionals improve media coverage? The following advice was offered by health professionals and journalists:

- Embrace the existing broad support for change;
- Construct a media strategy;
- Improve media management and advocacy skills;
- Build cultural competence.

Embrace the Existing Broad Support

Aboriginal health professionals and journalists acknowledge there is a need for change. Comments below were made by journalists during the consultation and should provide encouragement.

- “Current mood in the country is open to change in this arena”;
- “There is a renewed sense of positivity and energy within the Perth Aboriginal community”;
- “Journos are generally interested in Aboriginal affairs”.

“If we don’t challenge those sort of views (negative/sensational media portrayals of Aboriginal people) and if we can’t convince the media that there’s a different way of reporting issues and getting fair-minded Australians to think about them, then, as I said, we’ve only got ourselves to blame and there are only limited opportunities to make the most of achieving real change.”

Aboriginal health professional (AHCP study)

Construct a Media Strategy

Develop a media strategy in your organisation in these ways:

- Establish procedures and protocols on how your institution and staff should respond to or work with the media: What are the key messages? Who can speak with the media? What views can be expressed? Are personal views permitted or are comments limited to explaining policy and giving background information;
- Identify credible spokespeople who can keep the discussion on track and avoid organisational politics;
- Work with key organisations like NACCHO to coordinate strategies;
- Identify key issues, write position papers to ensure spokespeople are advocating a consistent and accurate message;
- Appoint a media liaison person to be the 'go to' person for the media enquiring about Aboriginal health stories;
- Have a plan for lobbying journalists and media institutions;
- Organise a media information 'hub', i.e. for ease of storage and distribution of information;
- Establish links within the Aboriginal health, media and related sectors:
 - o Use local, state and national conferences as liaison points with other Aboriginal health organisations
 - o Discuss and share media strategies;
- Design ongoing training for staff: on the job coaching (learn while doing it) as well as simulated media engagement (such as for a TV or radio interview);
 - o Use local Aboriginal radio stations for practice and,
- Write media advocacy into job descriptions and performance indicators of relevant staff.

"It's all part of the power of lobbying. The more (good) media an organisation gets the more reliable it becomes. The more dollars will be made available to it."

Journalist (AHCP study)

"A big problem from the journalists' side is that there is a great deal of ignorance of Aboriginal culture and local issues. Many reporters come to Geraldton and other rural areas to do their 'time' in the community. Most can't wait to get back to Sydney or Perth."

Aboriginal professional (AHCP study)

Improve Media Management and Advocacy Skills

A journalist said: *"It seems that a lot of Aboriginal organisations are not media savvy."*

It's important to understand how the mainstream news media work, in order to get the most out of it (see more in Section 2). Aboriginal health professionals could:

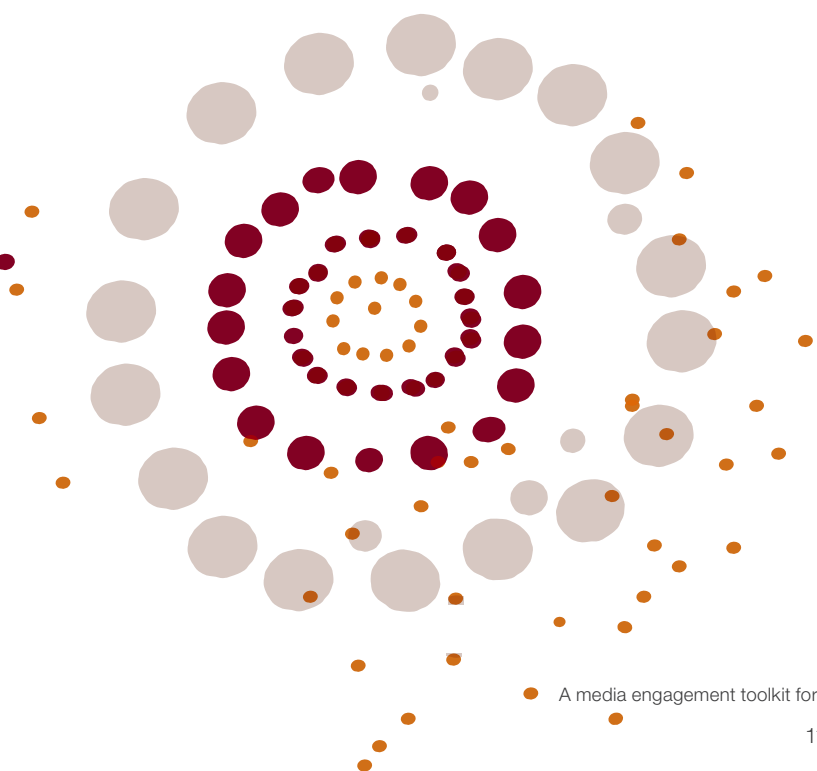
- Develop media engagement skills;
- Prepare media releases;
- Frame messages in ways that journalists can use them (such as the 30 second grab);
- Move quickly, work fast;
- Be more proactive in establishing links with the media; call a journalist with a good news story!
- Be accessible ("Pick up your mobile phone", pleaded a journalist);
- Network with journalists even when you don't have a story;
- Invite journalists to local, state and national events and conferences.

"Keep the media informed about contact numbers, including after-hours numbers, for someone who can make media comment. We can't help you get the media coverage you deserve or let you have your say in a story if we can't reach you when needed."

Journalist (AHCP study)

"Media advocacy is the key to influencing policy... If you're not out occupying the public space, someone else will be."

Journalist (www.crikey.com)



Build Cultural Competence in Media Culture

“Media culture is opposite of how you need to engage with Aboriginal people – begs the question.... How do you bring the two very different and contradictory cultures together?”

Journalist (AHCP study)

Cultural competence has two aspects of consideration for Aboriginal professionals.

The **first aspect of cultural competence** for Aboriginal professionals working in Aboriginal health is to be familiar with **mainstream news media culture**, that is, understanding how media institutions and journalists function.

Aboriginal professionals and health organisations can take the lead to develop **media competence** in the following ways:

- Build relationships with media organisations and journalists; Ask questions!
- Build trust and understanding;
- Negotiate the expectations each party has of the other;
- Understand and work to the media’s requirements for access, timeliness, accuracy, newsworthy stories;
- Facilitate the media’s understanding of how it can better engage the Aboriginal health sector and contribute to change, such as improved understanding of the context of stories and reporting these with adequate recognition, accuracy and awareness;
- Invite journalists on community outreach programs, organise photo opportunities, community spokespeople etc.

A **second aspect of cultural competence** is for Aboriginal professionals or media spokespeople to have a good understanding, and effective articulation of Aboriginal health and related issues and the context of those issues in broader society. The Aboriginal spokespersons’ competency to do this facilitates journalists to effectively interpret the information which is subsequently reflected in their reports to the broader, non-Aboriginal, Australian public.

2

Understanding how Mainstream News Media Works

The mainstream news media publish stories that will attract people to listen, read or watch their news. The news media will not be interested in educational messages alone, they want to use stories that make news: ratings/readership = advertising = cash (which is king!). The story ultimately has to attract the interest of mainstream audiences. Maximising the chances of this happening requires an investment by the Aboriginal spokesperson, so take the time to get it right. A process to help you turn a potential story into a published story is to:


- Understand what makes news;
- Know how to respond when the media needs you;
- Mobilise your resources effectively when you need the media;
- Know which media will best meet your communicational needs;
- Adjust your message to what specific media can use – different news media (newspapers, radio and television) report the news in different ways and to audiences with different demographic profiles;
- Develop skills for the specific requirements of each of these;
- Know which journalist to approach.

What Makes News?

Journalists tell us stories that present a new perspective and are relevant to the lives of their readers, viewers or listeners. An interesting exercise is to look at the 'Most Viewed Articles' on internet news sites. The 'best' type of news to reach a broad audience is quickly apparent - align your angle or focus with stories making the headlines.

Publishable stories are those that fit into categories such as:

- Awards, events, anniversaries;
- Fame and power (who it is about makes a difference);
- Something unusual, something new;
- Controversy;
- Landmarks and issues or implications arising from those landmarks, local news (proximity to the audience);
- Relevant news (how will it affect the audience?);
- In the public interest, "good news" that is heart-warming or inspirational, human interest stories that touch people's compassion such as, disaster, crime, conflict and, fear (we worry about what's going to happen).



“With things like Close the Gap, it is inherently controversial, you know that. It doesn’t come to the space as a neutral thing. People already have an opinion on Aboriginal health: on how things should be, must be, could be. They come to the story with a preconditioned judgment on the story.” Channel 7 News Producer.

There are three specific and critical attributes required for a story to gain traction:

1. It must have **good audio (for radio) and visuals (for television and print media)**. An average story with a good picture might get a run whereas a good story with a bad photo might not get a run unless it’s controversial;
2. Timing is everything. If **the issue is current**, there are more opportunities to get coverage. Watch for **“running issues”** that are **“happening now”** and consider how you can contribute to those. Take advantage of the current interest level before the media moves on to something else. For example if talkback radio is covering alcohol and drink driving it would be a good time to pitch a related story, such as ‘It’s a tough issue that faces all parts of society, however, we are having positive impact through our project’ and so on;
3. The **angle/hook/focus** for the story make the story “newsworthy”.

“What they’re not telling is the tales of the communities themselves, who are assuming responsibility and taking ownership of the problem and working out culturally specific and culturally appropriate mechanisms and strategies to affect change.”

Aboriginal professional (AHCP study)

“I could be wrong but I don’t see many press releases coming out from the AMS’.”

Journalist (AHCP study)

The ‘angle’ is short for ‘news angle,’ it is the focus of the news story that is highlighted and developed by the journalist. It is also commonly called the ‘hook’ or the ‘peg’. (<http://www.thenewsmanual.net/Resources/glossary.html>)

For example, your organisation might want to demonstrate how it is doing so much with limited resources in a housing shelter. What is the angle here? Is it funding? (This shelter will close if it doesn’t get more money). Is it achievement? (Be inspired by how we just get on with it against all the odds). Is it a personal story of sacrifice and commitment? (Mrs Jones has dedicated her life to this shelter and the homeless people. Despite being 84 years of age she catches a bus every Monday to go there and wash the laundry).

Can you see how the angle, the hook, the focus changes the story?

Health professionals have an advantage in that they can relate anecdotes with appropriate levels of privacy and confidentiality.

Stories that have touched you for a reason will touch the audience if you can pitch it the right way at the right time to the right people.

Sometimes you might need to do very little to get the news editor and journalist interested in your story because they have decided they need you.

When reacting to a news report on Aboriginal health, it is important you completely understand the report you are responding to. [“Appendix 1: Critiquing Media Representation of Aboriginal Health Issues”](#) developed by AHCP participants to assist with critically understanding a news report before responding to it. The tool facilitates critical reflection on what has and has not been reported, who has been sourced, the knowledge gaps etc., and provides a good grounding for reacting effectively to set the public record straight.



When the Media Needs You

The media will contact you for a range of reasons.

- Perhaps they have been tipped off about a problem or crisis that your organisation is facing (see the Section 9 – Handling a Crisis);
- They want a quote or background information for a news story or for a feature on an issue;
- They might have been following a lead on a current story and your name was recommended by another contact as being able to contribute.

What can you do when a journalist contacts you? If your organisation does not have a media engagement protocol, consider:

- Identifying the person/people authorised to speak to the media;
- Avoiding personal views and emotional responses;
- Confining comments to an explanation of organisational policy;
- Only providing factual, explanatory and background material relevant to the question;
- Politely declining to respond to something if you do not have the answer. Do not speculate; tell them you will get back to them on that.

Journalists suggest you:

- Always assume that you are “on the record”. Unless you are prepared to be quoted about an issue, make no comment at all other than “I’m sorry, I’m unable to be of any help just at the moment.”;
- Ask how the journalist found out about your organisation;
- Try to find out why the journalist chose you or your organisation;
- Ask which television or radio program or newspaper feature page will carry the story;
- Try to find out what the angle of focus will be for the story.

If you are authorised to speak and are sure of your facts then go ahead and respond to the journalist’s questions. It is still advisable to take a few minutes to gather your thoughts and information that could strengthen your message. But if you ask for a few minutes to gather your thoughts, make it a few minutes. Not 30 minutes, nor 60 minutes. You could lose your opportunity if the journalist can’t wait. If the journalist’s phone is engaged when you call back, leave a message.

If you feel any comment or interview would be unwise or unnecessary, explain your reason for declining the request. Then offer to help in other ways, such as by providing background details or other sources.

When You Need the Media

Why would you want to engage with the media? Your reasons might include:

- Your organisation wants to present a particular point of view on an issue in the news;
- Your organisation wants to mobilise public opinion or action on a particular issue;
- Your organisation has evidence of positive impact because of successful projects or activities;
- Your organisation wants to increase its media profile;
- An event needs to be publicised;
- To generate interest in your organisation and its activities;
- You want to overcome negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people depicted in the news by showing an alternative scenario.

Another reason might be to respond to a news story, particularly if the story challenges the interests of your organisation. Before responding, critique the news reports to-date, which will enable an informed response and preparedness for a journalist's questions.

Which Media?

As Marshall McLuhan famously said, “the medium is the message”.

Decide which medium, or media, will best reach your audience. This will depend on the issue and key audience, what media your audience uses, and how that media organisation would typically deal with a story or issue you want covered.

Be clear who your key audiences are, remembering that any news medium will usually have a mixed audience, and your message will need to have an ‘angle’ that has the broadest audience appeal. A specific health promotion or health education message would demand media that are accessed by particular targeted communities. However, a health advocacy message should access the medium and media with the broadest possible audience. This is where a strategy for news media becomes important.

Map out the newspapers, radio and television stations that target either the audience and/or the region. Increase your efficiency in dealing with news media by taking the time to read, listen and watch these news media, as familiarity will strengthen the efficiency with which you can engage with them. Ask yourself:

- Who is likely to read (watch or listen to) this?
- What stories do they run that are relevant to my organisation's interests?
- What is the typical angle or focus of stories?
- Which feature pages (or radio or television programs) might be interested in my organisation's activities or opinions?

It is possible that mainstream news media is not the best way to get your message across. Don't forget the smaller non-news niche media, with dedicated audiences that would welcome your contributions. For example, many Aboriginal people access Aboriginal community radio and newspapers, and a surprisingly high number of non-Aboriginal people do so as well.



How much information do mainstream news media want?

Different news media report the news in different ways. A Channel 7 news producer advised Aboriginal health professionals to become acquainted with what, and how much content different media typically use. For example:

- The average TV news story will be 70-90 seconds in length with one or two grabs of 5-10 seconds each;
- A current affairs story will be 2-5 minutes in length and use up to four grabs of up to 20 seconds each;
- A grab for radio news will be 10-20 seconds;
- A newspaper news story might use a couple of quotes, each 1 or 2 sentences in length;
- A newspaper feature article will provide longer and more in-depth coverage.

Helpful Tips¹

Specific media have specific requirements. Journalists who attended the AHCP workshops provided tips for the media enterprises they worked with.

THE WEST AUSTRALIAN

- Don't call after 3:00 pm. Call prior to 9:00 am (before the editorial meeting);
- Watch for "running issues" that are "happening now" and how you can contribute to those;
- Before you write a media release, ring the journalist(s) to ask if it is a potential story;
- Timing is EVERYTHING. If the issue is topical, there are opportunities to get coverage.

THE SUNDAY TIMES

- Contact them on Tuesday. Tuesday is 'consultation day' where journalists follow up on the last week's stories and consider what and how to cover them in the coming edition. Tuesday is generally a pretty slow day, Wednesday builds up and Friday is full on;
- The Sunday Times looks for inspirational stories but getting good news stories into the papers is all about pictures. If you think of a story, you must think about what images are going to go with it;
- Editors look for reasons to use good photos; "If there's a great photo, we'll develop a story".

¹ These 'Tips' are correct at time of publication; procedures may have changed

COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER GROUP

- Interested in positive stories but it comes down to how you pitch your story;
- Community Newspaper Group has 17 newspapers (each with a different editor) that have a broad reach;
- What individual editors are looking for is:
 - o a local person
 - o a local theme
 - o photo opportunities
 - o events happening locally
 - o a 'champion' or well-known person;
- A story can be placed in more than one of the papers but you need to change things around to give it the 'local' feel to get that wider coverage;
- The readership is generally an older demographic.

NOONGAR RADIO

- Make the stories interesting, local and appealing to a mostly Aboriginal audience;
- Don't just provide a pamphlet; a radio station needs something to make the story stand out and that something is a person telling a personal story;
- "We are your voice";
- "Bring news to us; practice your skills and refine your story for mainstream media" (Producer, Noongar Radio).

CHANNEL SEVEN NEWS

- Contact television news in the morning;
- Mid-afternoon is the busiest time for TV;
- Late afternoon journalists will be preparing for evening news.

Journalists are generally committed to filing stories by 3:00-3:30 pm, and are unable to leave the office. Strictly avoid contacting them at or after this time, except in response to their calls.

CURRENT AFFAIRS or NEWS?

Television current affairs shows such as, Today Tonight rate very highly. The formula for tabloid TV has been described as:

- Fat;
- Fear (such as, health risks);
- Finance (i.e. how to lose 3 cents off...);
- Freaks (i.e. strange people doing strange things...).

IMPORTANT:

Health issues, including Aboriginal health fall into the 'fear' category.

Journalists advised Aboriginal organisations to be selective in whom they accept interviews with and to avoid programs that are known to sensationalise issues for ratings. Seek professional advice if accepting an offer for coverage by a current affair or documentary program.

Which Journalist?

Which journalist should you approach? Journalists themselves say, *“It all depends on the medium and the focus of the story.”*

Try to identify a journalist whose track record demonstrates familiarity with your cause or issue. Wherever possible, monitor coverage of similar issues in the media and identify who is covering these issues. Talk to counterparts from other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal health and community groups about journalists they find helpful and can be trusted to deal fairly with the issues of interest to you. Often, journalists themselves will advise you on the best contact. It is advisable to keep a list of media contacts for quick access. Make sure it stays up to date.

A newspaper is more likely than the electronic media to have specific people assigned to a specific area of reporting. At the time of writing, this toolkit the West Australian newspaper had an indigenous affairs journalist, but it also had a health journalist. Your choice of journalist to approach might depend on the focus of your story. If it tends toward the political, the indigenous affairs journalist might be your first contact. If the story leans toward health or community development or social welfare issues, the health journalist might be interested. If your story can be related to any “running issue”, that would influence the decision about the optimal journalist to contact.

Commercial television or radio news and current affairs programs are less likely to assign specific reporters to Aboriginal health. It is more likely that a news editor will assign any available journalist to the story, or assign it to a journalist who might have more familiarity or interest in Aboriginal health. Producers and presenters of talk programs will generally deal with all current issues irrespective of familiarity with them.

Before you do anything, especially before you write a media release (see Section 4), ring the journalist to ask if there is a potential story in what you have to offer. It’s a good idea to have prepared yourself to pitch the story before you speak to them. The next part of this section provides some tips you could use even before making the first phone call.



Is it a Potential Story?

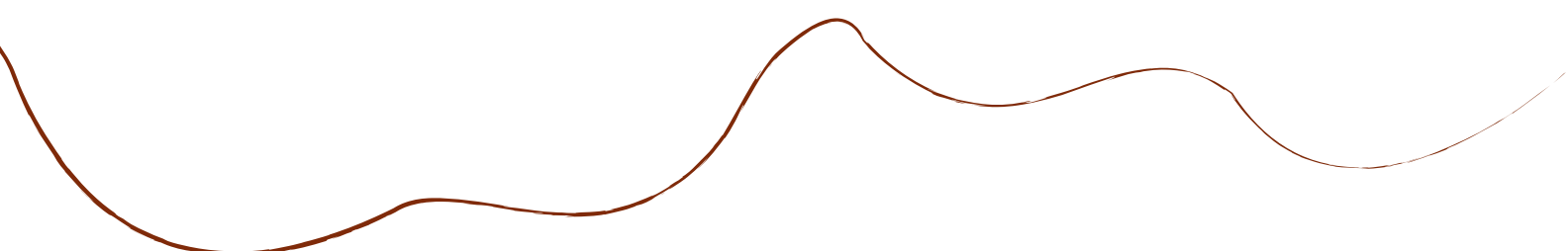
Journalists are busy but want story ideas. Some Perth-based journalists get about 80 emails a day, each with a potential story that is new, or that could be used to follow up a “running issue”, so timing your email is critical.

Email the journalist to alert them to the issue and/or activity and establish whether they are interested. However, don’t contact a journalist at the time of their deadline. See below for good and bad times to contact journalists.

	BAD TIME to contact a journalist	GOOD TIME to contact a journalist
Radio News	On the hour	15 minutes after the hour
TV News	Mid afternoon	Early morning: 8 - 9am
Daily Newspaper i.e. The West Australian	Evening	Early morning: 8 - 9am
Weekly Newspaper, i.e. The Sunday Times	Deadline day/publication day (i.e. Sunday in this case)	Two days after the paper goes out (i.e. Tuesday)

Find out what the various deadlines are and keep a record. Using alerts or reminders in your computer calendar or wall calendar is one good way. If a journalist is interested in your story, provide a media release/media alert, with information similar to that below but tailored to your situation (for more detailed information see Section 4):

- The story focus (If it is based on a “running issue” suggest a new angle if it is based on a running issue);
- Why you think it is important;
- How unique is the event, issue, person, trend, outcome, research finding?
- Interesting facts, people involved;
- What are the opportunities for visuals (photos or footage for print or television) or audio (radio)? You might like to attached a couple of sample digital photos;
- Your contact details: work and after hours phone number for the next two weeks;
- Do you see it as their exclusive story or do you plan to distribute the idea more widely?



Follow-up

After sending the media release, telephone the journalist (but not around deadline time) and check whether further information would be helpful. Make it a short phone call. Be brief. Never call after 3pm unless returning their call.

Not every story idea will be accepted. But don't give up. Many factors contribute to whether a story is accepted or rejected. Those factors won't necessarily facilitate or hinder your story every time.

You can call to ask why your story wasn't used, but be polite. Ask for advice to improve your media releases and suggestions on future stories that might be useful to the journalist. Use it as an opportunity to develop a relationship with the journalist.



3

Working with Journalists

To use the media effectively it is necessary to understand the context of the journalist's working environment.

Who's In Charge?

Journalists are performance-managed, and media culture is competitive and has its own processes, expectations and protocols. It is important to understand the processes, as well as who manages the "performance" and who's "in charge".

The following structure is typical of mainstream media organisations. Smaller newsrooms have a similar structure, although one person may play several roles.

"... I accept that my particular organisation has not had a great deal of positive stories about Aboriginal people in the past but that was partly to do with the editor at the time."

Journalist (AHCP study)

Editor or Chief of Staff

- Has overall control of policy and content.

News Editor

- Decides what news will be selected for each edition;
- Provisionally identifies issues/stories for publication at beginning of day, but these may later be replaced by other stories.

Producer (TV, radio)

- Prioritises stories;
- Resources the journalists who will chase the stories.

Sub-editor (Newspapers)

- Edits and shapes the angle of the story to interest readers and meet editorial guidelines;
- Often responsible for the headlines/by-lines.

Journalist

- Researches the story;
- Accesses and interviews the sources;
- Writes the story.

Imagine what it is like for a television journalist who is given a story at 9:00 am with a deadline of 3:00 pm to be back in the studio to prepare the story package for the evening bulletin, and often has to deal with more than one story that day.

What the Journalist Needs

The work of journalists is to seek out the facts of a story, in a balanced, objective and accurate way for the public interest. The journalist will:

- Interview people with different perspectives on a story;
- Sometimes ask what seem to be confrontational questions and may not appear at all sympathetic with the cause you are promoting;
- Follow current, breaking news stories (“old news is not news”);
- Look for an angle or a hook; and
- Always have an eye to the “deadline” for filing the story.

The relationship between you and the journalist is co-dependent. Journalists can only report what they are told about an issue, so it’s important that they get accurate and timely information if your organisation’s issue is to be covered, and in that case they need sources who:

- meet deadlines;
- are available;
- are trusted (reliable sources of information);

“Different Aboriginal groups are notoriously bad at answering their mobile phones and this is renowned through the media.”

Newspaper
Journalist (AHCP
study)

Meeting Deadlines

Journalists are driven by the tyranny of the deadline. It is particularly pressing in this age of multimedia access, and reporting where, for example, a newspaper journalist might be expected to attend an event and file reports for both the website (possibly with images and audio), and the next newspaper edition.

Ask a journalist for the deadline and work to it, or you may lose the opportunity and the credibility as a good source.

Be Available

- Know who is best able to speak about the issue and who has the authority to do so;
- Keep up to date records of all authorised Aboriginal spokespeople, especially after-hours contact details, and of alternative contacts in case the designated spokesperson cannot be contacted. Make yourself available while a story is being prepared in case the journalist needs to check a detail, or to get more information or help.

Be Trustworthy - Reliable and Responsible

Effective media management is based on developing mutual trust between the journalist and you as an Aboriginal person or organisational representative.

Be reliable with background information for newsworthy stories:

- Be available;
- Be clear and concise with your message;
- Don't back away from the "hard issues" – if you don't know how to respond to a difficult question, then say so, and find someone who does and who has authority to speak on the issue.

Be Flexible

"Our paper is read by a lot of non-Aboriginal people so often we have to display it in a way that will either attract the empathy of the non-Aboriginal people or attract the interest of non-Aboriginal people."

Newspaper
Journalist (AHCP
study)

A journalist will come to your story looking for an angle, a hook, a storyline: a focus for the story that will make it "newsworthy". Specifically:

- If a journalist agrees to show you a story before it is published be sure you check it for accuracy but do not interfere with the angle or hook; don't get out the red pen and change the entire story;
- Don't take out colloquial language;
- Don't insist on your professional jargon;
- In the course of following a story, a journalist may need to adjust the story focus. Don't be disappointed if you are "dropped" from the story or are contacted again to respond to the new focus;
- If you are uncomfortable with a particular angle or focus you will need to address that as part of the media strategy that is developed for your agency or topic.

Be Collaborative - But Careful

The newsroom is fraught with competing priorities and pressures. You help yourself when you help journalists in whatever way you can.

- Relate to them as professionals who do a job with accountability structures just as you do – even if privately you sometimes don't really believe this;
- Look for journalists that you believe have integrity;
- Any time you talk to a journalist, everything you say is regarded as “on the record” and the journalist can use what you have told them and quote you. Use your discretion at all times even when talking “off the record” to give background or context which you assume will not be used and that you will not be quoted.

I'll ring someone on a Monday because there'll be an issue to do with Aboriginal health within the newspapers and someone won't get back to me till Wednesday and it'll be the wrong person and you just think by that stage the debate's moved on. . . . We're a daily newspaper, we work to strict deadlines.”

Newspaper Journalist (AHCP study)

4

Writing Media Releases That Get Read

A media release is a document that informs a journalist and/or news editor of the story you would like them to investigate or report on.

The media release is written to catch the attention of the journalist. However, always write your media release with the audience (listener, reader or viewer) in mind.

Media releases are a common and accepted way to engage a journalists' attention to your issue or story.

Whilst media releases are important, if you do not have the time, or find this a challenging prospect use a **Media Alert** instead (described below).

Before You Write

Before you even start writing the media release, it is worth putting in the effort and time to ask yourself five key questions—

- 1) What is the story about?
 - 2) What's the key message?
 - 3) Where would it be best placed – press, radio, TV - to reach the target audience?
 - 4) What's the newsworthy angle?
 - 5) Will the journalist want it?
- And act on the answers.

Question 1: What's the story?

Define what is happening and who will be affected. Is your story:

- About a new product or service or about changes to existing services and procedures?
- Education about desirable changes in behaviour, or to increase or maintain awareness and knowledge of healthy behaviours?
- A human interest story that illustrates the difference your service or intervention has made to the life of a person, a family or community?
- Promotional, to inform people about a special event or service, to invite them to attend?
- To release the results of research findings of importance to your audience?
- To advise your audience about issues in your organisation or changes in staff?
- To celebrate achievements or milestones reached by the agency or personnel?
- In response to a controversy or crisis?
- To remind people about existing services and facilities?
- To establish credibility or authority?
- To build the organisation's profile or image (branding)?
- In response to community concerns?

Question 2: What's the key message?

Three important considerations for deciding on a key message are:

- What do you have to say that is new/different/important?
- Who needs to know about it?
- Why would people be interested and, what is in it for them?

Brainstorm with colleagues to determine the one piece of information you need to get across – the key message for the audience you want to reach. What is it that you want the audience to remember and react to? Your key message should lead and prompt readers to ask questions and get involved in your issue.

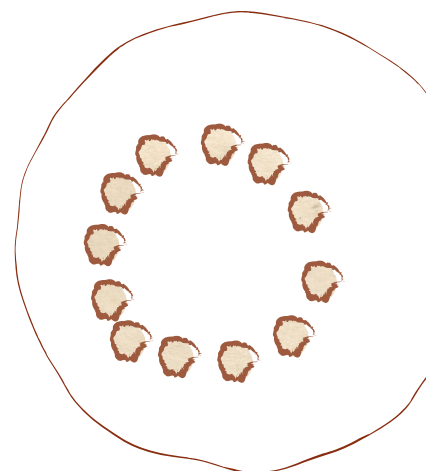
Too frequently, health professionals write a media release that reflects their own interests rather than what will be of interest to the public. For example, a media release announcing the completion of a research study into obesity doesn't attract attention, whereas if the release focuses on important health outcomes, it becomes a useful and engaging story.

For example, if a study has been carried out in Town X on community health, do you think a journalist who is looking for a good news story will be more interested in a media release headed, 'A study was carried out...' or in one titled, 'Community obese with no access to healthy food...' etc. What do you think?

See **Media Release Example** below.

Question 3: Which medium should I use?

Choosing the news medium (TV, Radio, Print or electronic) best suited to your needs is guided by your decision about the audience you want to influence as well as by the desired focus or angle of the story. It is important to understand the specific needs of the chosen medium (see Section 2. Understanding the Mainstream News Media).



Question 4: What's the angle of my story?

The 'angle' or story focus is often what determines the interest given to it. It is the 'angle' of the story that makes it unique and appeals to journalists and specific audiences. Often a good photo will help sell the story.

Question 5: Does the journalist want it?

Email or telephone the journalist or editor when they are not rushing to meet their deadlines and ask if there is a potential story (see Section 2).

Be sure to tell the journalist basic details associated with your story, such as the person or people available to be interviewed (often referred to by the media as "the talent") and when and where any event associated with the story is happening. They will also want to know if the story can be released immediately or if there is an embargo (i.e. when the story must be held for release until a specific date and time) and whether or not you are offering the story as an exclusive.

NOTE: In order to reinforce or strengthen the case for publication of your story, you will often need to provide additional details. Choose information that bolsters your key and supporting messages. Such information might include statistics, anecdotes, quotes from those involved or additional facts.

After glancing at your media release, a journalist will decide whether or not to use it. The journalist may contact you to ask for an interview in order to obtain a quote (print media), or to be broadcast, either live-to-air or pre-recorded (television or radio). You are being interviewed to contribute content of interest to the journalist's audience, which, presumably, is the audience you also want to reach.



Follow-up

Follow up with a phone call (avoiding the deadline rush of course!). Assume they've received the emailed media release and structure your conversation along these lines:

"I hope you've seen the media release on.... We've really been seeing some good results... We've got some great photos of ...and spokesperson X will be available to comment."

Or something similar, based on your situation.

How to Structure a Media Release

Media releases have a standardised structure or sequence for information, to help the journalist know how to deal with it. In this section we explain that structure, and emphasise things you must work hard to get right, and things to avoid.

The media release should be a maximum of one page in length, on your organisation's letterhead. It should include:

Headings

- A heading to attract the journalist's attention? (No more than five or six words).

Day and date

- Date the media release with the date it is being sent out;
- Indicate when the information can be published at the top of the release;
- If it can be used immediately, simply write "For Immediate Release";
- If there is an embargo until a future date, write: "Embargoed until (time) on (day/date)".

First paragraph

- In one or two short sentences summarise the angle you have chosen with the, 'who' and 'what' of the story –the key message.

Following paragraphs

- Use short one or two-sentence paragraphs for easy scanning;
- Stick to hard facts and minimise unnecessary adjectives;
- Avoid the 'passive voice' [Example: write "The organisation will act on the recommendations immediately." not "The organisation has decided to act on the recommendations immediately."];
- Expand on the key message with your supporting messages. Expand on the 'who', 'what' and 'why' of the story introduced in the first two sentences. State the 'when' and 'where' (and maybe the 'how' if relevant);
- Use information to support your messages including quotes or a brief anecdote or example;
- Leave less essential information until the end;
- To give authority to the story, make attributions clear for the story and any quotes: Who is the spokesperson? What is his/her comment or opinion? (Use one direct quote or two at most).

Opportunities

- Briefly state the opportunities for photos, footage, interviews (an attachment can give further information; see Section 5 – Photos).

Close

- Close the release with "END".

Contact

- Provide the name and contact details for the journalist to follow up.

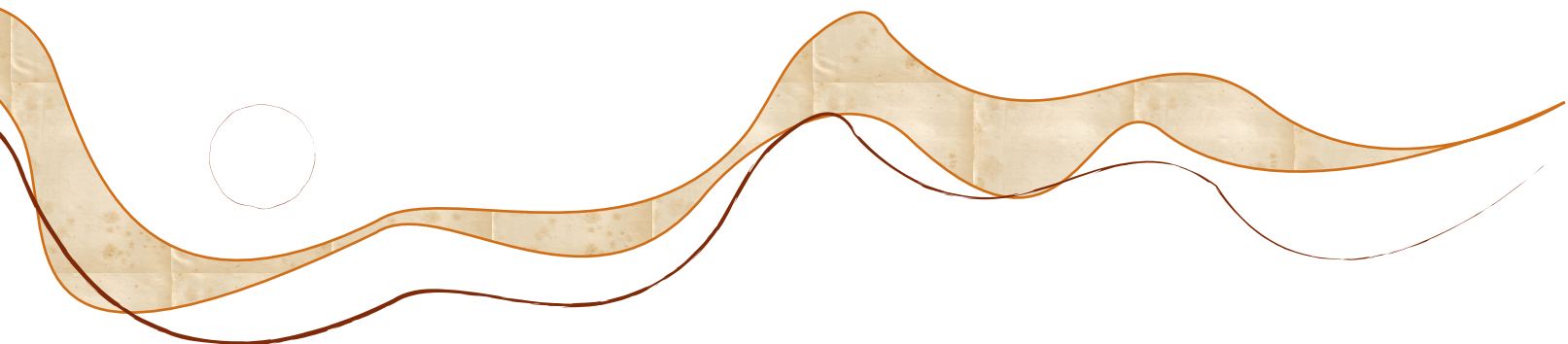
Give attention to these aspects of a media release:

- One page in length, on your organisation's letterhead;
- Spell names of organisations and people correctly in your media release. Give the correct titles for the people being quoted;
- Get someone to proofread it for fact, relevance, grammar and spelling;
- Get appropriate authorisation to send media release;
- Write the headline of your media release into the subject line of your email;
- Work on the first two lines of the email. They need to grab the journalist's attention; journalists often say the first two lines will decide whether or not the story goes through.

The contact person on the bottom of your media release ought to monitor their mobile at all times and return calls. Journalists are working to a deadline; help them to help you.

Avoid these in your media release:

- Avoid jargon and abbreviations. Most people reading the media release have no health training. If you must use an abbreviation, explain it at first usage (some journalists may not know that AMS means Aboriginal Medical Service, for example);
- Don't attach lengthy documents such as your grant application paper or large annual report with the media release. The journalist won't read it at this time, but may ask for it at a later time if the story is used;
- Don't send media releases in PDF format. Attach the media release to the email in a format that will allow the journalist to modify it if desired, e.g. a Word document.



Media Release Example

The following example illustrates how a media release becomes clear by blending the story with the angle, key message and supporting messages.

The resulting newspaper article is shown below.

HEADING

The original heading is written from the health professional's point of view about the research. Avoid writing a media release that reflects your professional interests. The revised version is more likely to capture the attention of the average reader because it addresses an issue of immediate personal relevance ("This could be me!"). And the heading is likely to grab the attention of the news editor or journalist.

Original Text: Research Helps Build a Healthy Town

Revised Text: Weight a BIG problem for X (Name of town)

FIRST PARAGRAPH

The revised text does exactly what the guidelines above suggest: in one or two short sentences summarise the angle with the who and what of the story. It is the key message that reports the presenting facts. And it has active voice. The original text takes four sentences to present four messages: research results are out, there'll be a workshop on a given date, all will be invited, it's a celebration, it's a workshop for future action.

Original Text: Research results are out on how the town's community can improve healthy eating and activity levels. A community workshop will be held on Tuesday 5 June 2.00pm-5.30pm at the community centre to progress the results into action. All stakeholders and community groups involved in the research process will be receiving an invitation. It will be a celebration of the progress as well as working towards change on the ground.

Revised Text: Nearly 4 out of 5 adults and 1 out of 5 children are overweight or obese in (the town).

FOLLOWING PARAGRAPHS

In the revised version, the story builds on previous ideas. It starts with the key message and supporting information, flowing naturally into the first supporting message and information that point to future outcomes (the paragraphs marked with one asterisk (*)). The flow of the media release then moves easily into the second supporting message for future action (paragraphs marked with a double asterisk). The story in the original text is less clear and does not flow as easily from idea to idea.

Original Text: Mary Jones, Health Promotion Officer, would like to invite interested community members to the workshop. So far 27 recommendations have been made from the research. These recommendations will be revised and progressed into an action plan. "This is a great opportunity to have your say and/or get involved in making these changes" stated Mary.

The research also outlined a need to improvement the number of healthy food options available at local cafes, restaurants and take away outlets. "The majority of food outlets have foods very high in fat, sugar or salt and limited healthy options. I found only one restaurant that offers more healthy foods options than unhealthy options" stated Mary.

Consultation with community also found a lack of understanding that healthy food options generally are cheaper compared to less healthy foods that are packaged and processed. Mary commonly heard the comment “healthy food is expensive”. The results outline the need to work with food stores to alter this misconception in the community and deliver education sessions to seniors.

To hear more about the research and discuss the recommendations attend the stakeholder and community workshop.

Revised Text: The research also revealed the majority of food outlets have foods very high in fat, sugar or salt and limited healthy options.

Mary Jones, the Health Promotion Officer who led the research said: “I found only one restaurant that offers more healthy food options than unhealthy options.”

Mary frequently heard people comment “healthy food is expensive”.

*“Community education strategies and food stores could alter this misconception” Mary said.

*The consultation with community members found 27 ways for the community to improve healthy eating and activity levels.

**A community workshop will be held on Monday 5th September 5.00pm-8.30pm at the Community Centre for the community to progress the results into action.

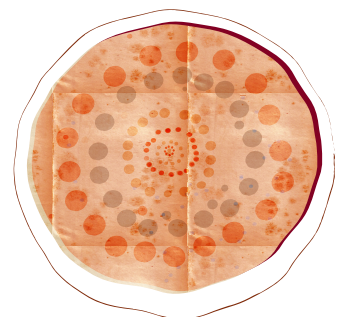
**Mary stated: “The workshop is a great opportunity for people to have their say and get involved in making these changes.”

After glancing at your media release a journalist will make a decision: use your story or not use it. The journalist may contact you to ask for an interview in order to be quoted (print media), or to be broadcast on television or radio (either live to air or pre-recorded). You are being interviewed to contribute content of interest to the journalist’s audience which, presumably, is the audience you also want to reach.

See [“Appendix 2: Media Release Worksheet”](#) on page 49, to help you develop and structure your story into a media release.

Permission to include the example of a media release in this toolkit has been granted by the Wheatbelt Aboriginal Health Service in Northam, Western Australia.

Below are 1) an example of a media release written by the Wheatbelt Aboriginal Health Service to the local community newspaper the Avon Valley Advocate and, 2) the resulting newspaper article.



Distributed Media Release



Government of Western Australia
Department of Health
WA Country Health Service

MEDIA RELEASE

Avon Valley Advocate

For immediate submission

Friday 4th February 2011

NYUMREE'S ARE KILLING OUR PEOPLE AND OUR CULTURE

Jodi Davis and Greg Bentley, Health Promotion Officers at Wheatbelt Aboriginal Health Service (WAHS), are working across the Wheatbelt to help Noongars give up nyumree's (smokes).

Jodi said "As a Noongar person I encourage Noongars wanting to give up, either call Quitline or WAHS. Smokes are killing our people and our culture."

Quitline is a free service for smokers and is a good starting point, even for people who are just thinking about giving up. "Smokers need to know there is a real person at the end of the line who can help them at every stage of giving up. Quitline staff are professionally trained counsellors who have helped thousands of people to stop smoking. They understand that giving up can be difficult and provide encouragement", said Jodi.

"Even if you have tried to give up in the past, it's never too late to try again. Nicotine is a drug and is highly addictive. The important thing to remember, is to not give up giving up, it can take many attempts to overcome your nicotine dependency", said Greg.

If you want to talk to Jodi or Greg, they can explain the different options to help you give up. These options include support as well as free nicotine replacement therapy such as patches, gum etc and other smoking cessation medications.

You can call Jodi and Greg at Wheatbelt Aboriginal Health Service on 9690 2888. Alternatively call Quitline 13 7848, which is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for the cost of a local call from anywhere in Western Australia (normal charges apply for mobile phones).

ENDS

A photo opportunity is available with Jodi and Greg outside of Wheatbelt Aboriginal Health Service or a photo could be provided.

Media contact:

Greg Bentley or Jody Davis
Aboriginal Health Promotion Officers
Wheatbelt Aboriginal Health Service
Ph: (08) 9690 2888

Help for Nyungar people to give up smoking



Help available: Wheatbelt Aboriginal Health Service (WAHS) health promotion officers Greg Bentley and Jodi Davis.

SMOKING, or nyumrees, is one of the most highly addictive and expensive habits today.

It kills more than 18,000 Australians a year and leaves 50 per cent of smokers suffering the effects of cancer.

Smoking rates among indigenous Australians are considerably higher than those of the non-indigenous community.

Wheatbelt Aboriginal Health Service (WAHS) health promotion officers Jodi Davis and Greg

Bentley are working across the Wheatbelt helping Nyungar people to give up nyumrees.

As a Nyungar, Jodi said she did not want to see her heritage and culture being ruined by such an addiction.

Jodi encouraged Nyungar people that help was available if they were willing to quit.

"Smokers need to know that there is a real person at the end of the line who can help at every stage of giving up," Jodi said.

Quitline staff are professionally trained counsellors who have helped thousands of people to stop smoking.

Other options available that Jodi and Greg can help with include replacement therapy patches, gum and other smoking cessation medications.

Greg said it took many attempts to give up a nicotine dependency.

"Even if you have tried to give up in the past, it's never too late

to try again," Greg said.

"The important thing is to remember, is not give up giving up."

Greg and Jodi are available to talk and explain the different options to help smokers quit.

They can be contacted at the Wheatbelt Aboriginal Health Service on 9690 2888.

Alternatively call Quitline on 13 74 48, which is available any time.

Sending the Media Release

Subject line: Media release: [5-6 word headline]

Email text:

- 1 Please find enclosed and attached a media release from Person X of Organisation;
- 2 Copy and paste the entire media release into the email. Make sure the heading is in **bold**;
- 3 Attach the email as a word document.

If you find the media release too challenging or time-consuming to prepare, use the alternative, a Media Alert.

Media Alert

A Media Alert is an alternative to a media release. In fact, it can be the journalist's preferred mode of receiving information because the news value in the story can be identified at a glance. Remember, saving a journalist's time is always appreciated.

A Media Alert has the same information as a media release. However, it places less emphasis on the construction of well written prose and instead uses a format where headings draw attention to the specific detail of the story. Responses are brief and to the point.

A Media Alert is sent in the same way as in Sending the Media Release (above).

In an email, write these questions in bold font and the answers in 'normal' font. Be as succinct with your answers as you can. It is critical you provide an eye-catching title in your email 'subject' box. The title of your Media Alert may be the same thing. Also important is your story idea. Attempt to appeal to a feeling, e.g. fear, sadness, or elation, and where possible put a face to the story. Remember, this story needs to appeal to a wide audience.

Closing the email, you may choose to make a personal appeal to the journalist of what you want to achieve with the story, such as motivating the local council to examine the cause of pollution in the area, or to raise awareness of an event, etc.

- Subject/Title
- Story idea
- Story angle
- Who is the 'talent'?
- Results so far
- Interesting acts
- Photo concepts (add own sample/idea for a photo)
- Contacts (Provide work and after hours phone number for 'talent')

5

Photos – Add value to the story

Photos carry a lot of weight when it comes to deciding if your story will be selected or not. Photo journalists will often say that pictures make the news and in some ways dictate the news.

Attach one or two photos with your media release, even if they are samples to indicate the potential photo opportunities. If you attach a photograph with the release make sure you:

- Describe what is happening in the photograph;
- Provide full names of the people involved, ages (if relevant) and what organisation they represent (if relevant);
- Make sure you get their written permission for the photo to be published.

If you have no photos but want to inform the journalist of the photo opportunities:

- Firstly, contact those whom you envision could be involved in a photo opportunity, to obtain their permission and confirm their availability;
- Append to the Media Release, in a few sentences, who/what there might be to photograph;
- Add to your email the names and contacts of people agreeing to the photo opportunity, for the journalist to arrange the photo shoot;
- Add their names and contacts to your email for the journalist to arrange the photo shoot.

Tips for the amateur photographer

A detailed “how to take photos” is not the intention of this toolkit. There are many online resources you can access for more detail but here are a couple of tips to remember when taking a photo for the press:

- Don’t crowd the photo. Limit the photo to about three people;
- Do not crop the photo. Leave that to the newspaper or online editors;
- Sun: make sure the sun is behind you (the photographer);
- Fill the frame with what is important.

The bottom line is: there are no rules. If an image works, it works; if it doesn’t, it doesn’t.”²

² Ken Duncan’s Top 10 Photography Tips, http://www.youbethedifference.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/6980/kens_tips.pdf

6

Managing Interviews

Before proceeding with an interview, review the principles of Understanding the Media (Section 2) and Working with Journalists (Section 3).

Whilst we hope the suggestions here will help you to feel more comfortable when being interviewed, managing an interview well comes with experience. However, there is one preparatory exercise you can do regularly in the comfort of your own home. Watch interviews on television or listen to radio interviews and note the different ways journalists conduct the interviews.

What interviewees impress you and influence you? What character do they display that you appreciate? Is it honesty, humility, enthusiasm, passion for the topic, useful information, being authoritative, illustrating their point with stories, or use of everyday language? Learn from them.

How about interviewees that do not impress you? What character do they display? If your list includes arrogance, argumentativeness, poorly informed, lacked confidence or spoken in rambling or abstract terms or lots of jargon, learn from them!

Generally you are being asked for an interview so that you can provide something that is newsworthy or of interest to readers, listeners or viewers.

Improve your performance and effectiveness by:

- Being confident in your understanding of journalism ethics (see below);
- Preparing before the interview;
- Projecting yourself well;
- Managing those occasions when you can't answer a question (e.g., by using the QAP (Question Answer Point) tactic discussed further below).

Knowing your rights

Australian journalists are bound by a 12-point Professional *Code of Ethics* which is publicly available at <http://www.alliance.org.au/code-of-ethics.html>. Some useful points to remember include:

- All journalists must identify themselves as a journalist, and from that moment this happens you are “on the record”;
- Personal privacy is protected;
- Journalists can't do anything on private property without consent;
- It is illegal for journalists to conceal a microphone or interview you without your consent;
- Individuals having a conversation in a public place who can be overheard by others can be reported on.



Before the Interview

The most successful interview comes from good preparation. Here are some hints on how to prepare yourself.

Build a profile in the media

Elsewhere in this toolkit we suggested that you map your media environment to learn as much as you can about the local media: how they deal with issues, how the various journalists work and so on. If you haven't done this, best to start now (See Section 2).

Decide who can be interviewed about what in your organisation

When a journalist contacts you, don't feel pressured. Assert yourself and take control. Make sure you know the duration of the interview, the angle being pursued by the producer and journalist. Why have they contacted you? Find out as much background information as you can (See Section 2).

Follow your organisation's media protocol on authorisation to speak with the media. It is always a good idea to ask the journalist to call you back in five or ten minutes to allow you to gather information or ideas to strengthen your message, or to consider if another person is more appropriate for the interview. Don't waste time or you could lose the opportunity. Be clear about your audience and what they will relate to.

- What words, concepts and ideas will be grasped by the audience?
- If you must use statistics, describe them in concrete terms. "one out of every three people" can be "seen" whereas 33% is an abstract idea to a viewer, listener and even a reader;
- What jargon will confuse or annoy them?
- Simplify your thoughts: encapsulate the issue in a single sentence if possible. What do you need to do or say to demonstrate that you and your message are believable and trustworthy? (Especially if they are hostile to your organisation);
- What stories or information can motivate and inspire your audience? What will make them go, 'WOW!'?

Prepare your message

- Know your topic well – be clear about your one key message and two supporting messages so that you get them across clearly during the interview. Obviously, you also need to have the data, stories and examples and arguments to strengthen and reinforce those messages if required;
- The type of medium or program will determine the length and character of your interview. A radio or television news interview will use "grabs" of mere seconds. A radio talkback program will give you more time to go into things more deeply. An interview for a newspaper story or feature will allow you a reasonable time to answer and make your point, but may then limit direct quotation from you to a few sentences. Even if you are not quoted at all, the journalist will often construct the story with information you have provided;

Prepare your message (cont)

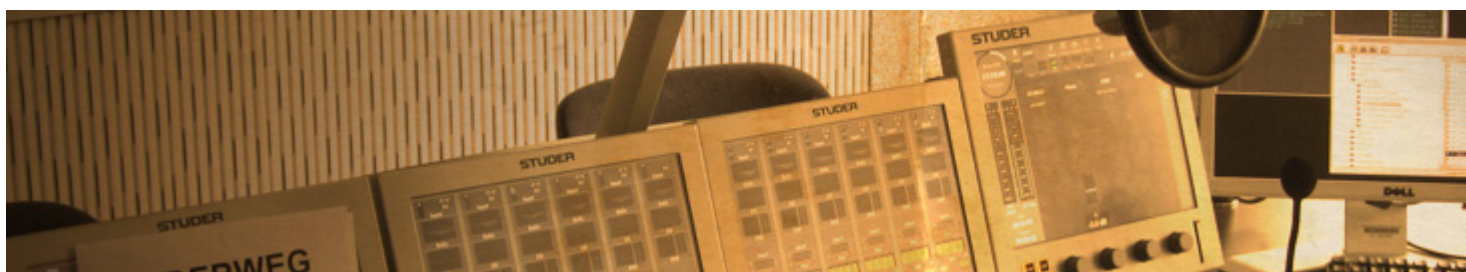
- Anticipate questions. Brainstorm with others in your organisation beforehand to identify questions a particular journalist might ask or anticipate the issues the journalist is likely to pursue. Anticipate, especially, how you will deal with awkward or tricky questions. We consider this situation further below;
- Be prepared to present the key messages 'off the cuff'. Write down your key messages in advance using key words only. Don't write them as a narrative in sentence form as you will be tempted to read them, and that will harm your performance and the image that you project;
- What will reach their heart of the audience, their emotions, and cause them to respond with compassion?
- It's likely you'll have a broad, mixed audience. Adjust your message accordingly but keep it at a personal level;
- If you say anything passionately or strongly it is more than likely that that's what will make it to the news. So if you are using strong or passionate language, make sure it is delivering the right message and not coming across as angry or aggressive.

Projecting Yourself

In the sections above, we have suggested ways to identify your key messages, and to frame messages in ways that your audience will relate to. In the following section, we provide advice from journalists on how to manage the process of the interview. Again, these suggestions are generic - specific tips will be given for newspaper, radio and television further below.

The important point is how you project yourself. What you say is important but how you say it is just as important:

- Be approachable;
- Embrace all questions. Don't avoid or evade any question. Especially, be prepared to respond to critical or hostile questions without being defensive;
- Practice delivering your answers as "grabs": under 20 seconds (for news), under 30 seconds for short interviews, under 45 seconds for talkback or feature interviews. Don't waffle – get your key message out clearly and quickly;
- Try not to begin your answer with a "thought" pause. Do you use any of the following at the beginning of your responses, when you are taking time to think about a question or comment? If you do, then consciously begin to remove them from your speech patterns!
 - o "Well, yes ..."
 - o "So, ..."
 - o "Yes ... er ... no" or
 - o The increasingly common "Well, look ..." or even "Look, ..."



When You Can't Answer a Question

How do you manage questions you can't answer?

The "I don't know" Answer

If you haven't got the detail needed, say that you "don't have that level of detail on hand at the moment" but that you "will provide it to (the journalist) by (specify a time)" Make sure that you deliver the promised information on time.

The "I'm not allowed to" Answer

Be prepared for the interviewer who steers the interaction into sensitive areas. Your job is to answer the questions within the limits of your own authority to represent your organisation, your project and your clients.

Never say: "No comment."

Rehearse polite responses/statements to deflect questions you can't answer because organisational protocol prevents you from answering or because the matter is outside of your knowledge, responsibility or authority.

Stock phrases might include the following:

- "Sorry, I'm unable to respond to that, you will need to direct that question to [an appropriate person with the authority to comment]"
- "I can't talk about that at the moment because:
 - o the person/family hasn't given me the OK ..."
 - o it breaches confidentiality ..."
 - o other people are involved and I'm unable to speak about that specifically ..."

The "journalist won't let me answer"

A journalist may ask questions that don't allow you to state your message directly. Don't let the journalist set the agenda, take control of the interview.

Use the Question, Answer, Point (QAP) tactic to make sure that you get those messages across in an appropriate way during the interview.

QAP is when the journalist asks a Question, you give an Answer, a brief answer but then switch to the Point, using a control phrase to bring the interview back to the central message. A control phrase might be:

- But what I want to reinforce here is... .
- But what I am here today to talk about is... .
- What we need to focus in on here is... .
- The point that needs to be made is... .
- However the message that your audience will want to know is... .

Some journalists have a habit of asking, at the end of an interview, "Do you have any final words before you leave us?" or "Is there anything else that you would like to say?" or "How would you like to summarise the issue for our audience?" Revert back to your key message and the supporting messages. If you have time, mention the name of your organisation and give a contact mechanism to allow people to get in touch with you. If your interview is live to air on radio or television it is more convenient to tell the audience to contact the program producer for your contact details.

The Briefing Sheet (preparing for the interview)

Once you've been granted an interview, drop everything else, devote as much time as possible to preparation, and seek help from a media-savvy colleague if available.

A media release might lead to your interview but it is always helpful to provide the 'talent' or interviewee with a sheet that outlines pertinent details for the interview. The purpose of the briefing sheet in this context is to provide information for both the Aboriginal spokesperson and the journalist.

The Briefing Sheet will draw the journalist's attention to:

- Story detail in bullet points;
- Explain why the issue is relevant to the audience;
- Draw attention to potential misconceptions;
- Summarise any recommended actions;
- Give background to the organisation;
- Provide updated contact information;

Any supporting documentation or resources should be attached in an email.

A written Briefing Sheet doesn't have any particular structure or format. Keep it simple and use bullet points rather than narrative form.

For the Aboriginal spokesperson, the purpose of the Briefing sheet is to provide 'at a glance' information and notes to refer to during the interview. This may include:

- A one sentence heading that summarises the key message of the interview;
- Specific terms/language you want to use in association with your message;
- The key facts and figures;
- Any misconceptions that you need to address.

Although this section provides a range of suggestions for managing an interview, they are general suggestions that will apply to all types of interview situations. Different media, however, require different approaches. The next section provides tips for doing interviews specifically with newspapers, radio and television.



7

Top Tips for Newspapers, Radio & Television Interviews

This section provides tips recommended by journalists for doing interviews with different media. So make sure you are familiar with the more general information in the sections on interviewing (Section 3 and 7).

Newspaper Interviews

There is less pressure with newspaper interviews than with electronic media because they are not live-to-air, and there is more time to think before you answer, and for your answers to be given in more depth.

Journalists will start with general questions about the story, then ask further questions to get more detail and, hopefully, good quotes.

You may be asked to repeat information if journalists write slowly (or have poor shorthand skills). Journalists want to be accurate with the facts or quotes. Print journalists are increasingly multi-tasking so don't be surprised if a newspaper journalist arrives with a recorder, and perhaps a camera, to record the interview for an audio feature on the newspaper's website.

In general:

- Don't waffle. Respond to questions concisely because the more you say the more will be edited out;
- Don't elaborate on a question unless the journalist asks you to or unless you can make a new powerful point by doing so;
- If you are authorised but unable to answer the question at the time, find out what information is required and get it back to the journalist;
- If you are unauthorised to speak with the journalist, explain that fact;
- See earlier cautions about talking "off the record". Be certain you can trust a journalist before you offer information "off the record";
- It's always good for morale to place a copy of the published article on your notice board and put a hyperlink from your website to the news story on the newspaper's website;
- Archive the published article for future reference in annual reports or other situations;
- Make sure any coverage is sent out to major stakeholders, boards etc.

IMPORTANT:

Ask the journalist if you can see and comment on the article before it is published. Journalists are not required to do so but may consider it.

Radio Interviews

Radio interviews can take place in varied settings and locations. Each has some positive and some negative considerations. In all cases, you need to be proactive in minimising extraneous noise. This includes refraining from rustling papers or moving around in your chair during the interview, and prior removal of any jangling bracelets or jewellery.

Live: In the studio with the journalist or program presenter

On the positive side:

- You can have eye contact with the journalist;
- You can develop a rapport with the journalist and production staff;
- You can observe what is going on in the studio and can “read” non-verbal cues;
- During breaks you can reconfigure the direction of the interview before resuming live-to-air;
- You’ll be offered a cup of tea or coffee!

On the negative side:

- You may be overawed by the equipment;
- You may be distracted by the movement of production staff in the studio while you are on air;
- You need to be more alert because you can’t afford to make a mistake when live-to-air;
- You need to treat every microphone as live. If you don’t want it broadcast, don’t say it;
- You might not be allowed to take the tea or coffee into the on-air studio!

Live: On the telephone

On the positive side:

- You can remain in familiar surroundings and be comfortably settled, surrounded by information resources that you might need;
- You can be more focussed, not distracted by unfamiliar equipment, people or studio activity.

On the negative side:

- You’ll need to turn off your radio set and take your other phones off the hook;
- If you share office space, the interview may disrupt and/or be disrupted by others – it is advisable to seek prior permission to use a quiet room with no other occupants and a closable door if available;
- You might have poor reception on a mobile phone;
- Be aware of other background noise, e.g. passing traffic, dogs barking;
- You may be less focused because you are distracted by other things going on around you;
- Eye contact with the journalist isn’t possible, so will be hard to establish a rapport;
- You don’t know what is going on in the studio and can’t “read” non-verbal cues;
- You need to be more alert because you can’t afford to make a mistake when live to air. If you don’t want it broadcast, don’t say it.

Pre-recorded: At an event or in your office

On the positive side:

- You can discuss the direction of the interview before recording;
- The process is more relaxed;
- If the interview is conducted in your own office, you can remain in familiar surroundings and be comfortably settled, surrounded by information resources that you might need, and not distracted by unfamiliar equipment, people or studio activity;
- Journalists may allow editing of the interview to delete mistakes before going to air. In this case, you may be able to say “Sorry, I’ll repeat that” and start again from the beginning of the sentence. However, this cannot be guaranteed, and you shouldn’t be ‘lulled into a false sense of security’. As with any interview, think carefully before speaking!

On the negative side:

- Background noise might be disturbing;
- You may be less focused because you are distracted by other things going on around you;
- If you can’t trust a journalist you can’t be sure how your recording will be used or treated. Treat the microphone as live all the time. If you don’t want it broadcast, don’t say it.

On-air interview with listener telephone response/talkback

On the positive side:

- Listeners can be very interesting;
- It provides opportunities to ‘personalise’ the story;
- A variety of topics will be raised;
- Production staff will assist you.

On the negative side:

- The content of questions from the public is highly unpredictable. You need to have full grasp of your topic, be quick with responses, and concise with your answers;
- You need to remember the name of the caller, and address him/her by name in your response; Remember to take a pen and paper to the interview so you can write down details such as a caller’s name;
- Some listeners raise questions which show ignorance of well-accepted facts or are tangential to the topic, and can divert the conversation in a direction you don’t want to go. Bring the conversation back to the point YOU want to make. The interviewer may or may not provide assistance in this situation;
- In some situations, listeners may be hostile. It is critically important to remain polite and to address hostile questions with concise responses;
- You need to be alert because you can’t afford to make a mistake when live- to-air.

Radio has characteristics that need to be managed during an interview. They include the following techniques to manage the nature of the medium and the way information is presented.

Be Personal

Radio is a personal relationship with a listener, so avoid phrases like “all of you listeners with diabetes”, “people out there with diabetes”. Try “if you have diabetes”, “the person with diabetes” etc.

Explain Your Action

Because people cannot see you (as they can on television) you need to verbalise what you are doing. So at the time of closing the interview, say ‘Thanks for speaking with me’, or “Thank you for your time” or some other appropriate way to bring about closure.

Use Key Words

Radio is a spoken medium so never read from a script during interviews. Listeners will know. And when they know, your credibility decreases. If you need reminders, write key words on cards. Never answer a question by reading a written sentence. If you must read from a brochure, read just two sentences, maximum, and summarise the rest in your own words.

Use Audio Cues

People can’t see you, so you need to avoid a boring monotone, and use as many audio cues as you can to transfer your personality to the listener. You want to convey sincerity, warmth and passion through audio cues to make a point or convey your meaning. Audio cues are:

- Volume: how you use loudness and softness;
- Speed: speaking faster or slower to make a point (includes pausing or lingering on a word or syllable in a word);
- Inflection: emphasising words or syllables in a word;
- Pitch: speaking more deeply or higher;
- Silence: used carefully, at the right time, a short pause before or after a word or sentence can have a powerful effect.

Believe it or not you can accentuate audio cues by smiling as you speak. Try it. The act of smiling has an effect on physiology and muscular structures used in the process of creating speech.

Show an idea

Speak to your listener’s imagination and emotion with word-pictures. Use an idea to *illustrate* a fact, avoid just telling them a fact.

Telling a fact: Research results are out on how the town’s community can improve healthy eating and activity levels.

Showing **an idea**: Monica (not her real name) is an example of the one out of every five children who is overweight or obese in (the town). She is 10 years old, can’t join the other kids playing in the school playground because she is physically incapable of running. She sits alone while others run around.

TV Interviews

Television interviews can be daunting because all of you will be on display – your facial expressions, body gestures and clothing. They all combine with your words to create a total communication package.

Appearance

Clothing should draw viewers' attention to you in a natural way, not distract them. Notice what other people wear for interviews. Dress comfortably and simply in clothing that doesn't make a noise when you move. And your dress style should be sympathetic to the tone of the program: more formal in a serious interview, probably more casual at other times. Avoid lots of jewellery or other accessories as they will only distract (especially if they clank or jingle). If unsure ask the producer for suggestions.

Viewers need to see your eyes - that's how they "read" your personality. Avoid sunglasses or light-sensitive spectacles unless they are necessary for medical or disability reasons.

Don't overdo makeup because it is likely that the studio will have a procedure for making up guests to disguise any sweating caused by hot lights. Ask the program producer for advice.

Body language

Viewers will make up their mind about you just by the way you present yourself – your credibility will be judged by a nervous smile, a head nod, a quick frown at a question, a grimace of frustration, wandering eyes, or a grin or smile at an inappropriate moment. Non-verbal messages are sent, and received, by the body and face. Slouching in a chair could suggest you are bored, have a negative image of yourself or are trying to hide from the interviewer, rather than that you are merely comfortable and "being you". Crossing your arms makes you appeared closed off to the public. And slight fidgeting could mean you are not telling the truth or are nervous. Everyone gets nervous before an interview but try to relax and take control of the interview to make sure you get your message across.

Practice standing and sitting for an interview and remember to avoid tapping your fingers or fiddling with a pen or piece of clothing. Cameramen love "cutaways" to a hand or finger movements in an attempt to send viewers a visual message of how you are feeling despite what you are saying. Try to sit or stand calmly, arms at your sides or placed shoulder width apart in your lap (except if sitting behind a table), or placed on a desk or table - depending on where your interview is taking place.

If you like to talk with your hands, keep the movements to a minimum, as viewers are easily distracted.

For the same reasons, avoid consulting notes. Practise and memorise your key messages and supporting information such as statistics.

"What you say is pretty important
How you say it is important
How you look is VERY IMPORTANT
If you look confident, certain,
positive about what you're saying,
it gives you leeway... the way you
present is crucial."

(Channel 7 News Producer)

In the studio

Journalists insist you:

Treat the camera as ALWAYS on
Treat a microphone as ALWAYS on
Treat a journalist as ALWAYS on record

Be prepared for:

- The equipment and technology such as lighting, snaking cables, cameras. It can be a bit overwhelming at first;
- Having makeup applied. Usually this is done to disguise sweating from the hot lights (or nervousness!).

At home or office

Being interviewed at your home or your office has its advantages. Prepare the environment beforehand. Do you really want viewers to see used coffee cups or untidy stacks of paper on your desk? Will the dog and the kids, and the next door neighbour with his lawnmower, keep quiet during the interview? Is the phone off the hook or your mobile on silent mode? Is your internet social networking application switched off?

Where to look

Follow the instruction of the interviewer or cameraman at the time of the interview. Journalists are usually very clear on their advice for what you do with your eyes.

- Keep your eye line consistent. You may look like you're not telling the truth if your eyes dart around;
- In most situations fix your eyes on the journalist (not the camera). Usually you will look slightly off camera to the journalist;
- Sometimes, however, you may be asked to look "down the barrel" of the camera in a live interview.

Self-confidence and acting skills are also important in other television scenarios. For example, you might be one of a panel of invited guests on cameras, either together or in different locations. Even when another guest is being addressed, your image may intermittently and unpredictably be displayed on the viewers' television screens. Whether or not you are being directly addressed, remain engaged and expressive toward the discussion with an appropriate smile or nod. In this situation you are directing comments to a panel, unlike one-on-one interviews, in which you address the viewers.



8

Handling a Workplace Crisis

A variety of crises can occur within organisations and the Aboriginal health sector. Some of these can attract scrutiny or unwanted attention from the media. This section does not deal with the complexity of a crisis and how to manage a media response, but provides suggestions on how your organisation should be ready to manage a crisis or the risks associated with an event or issue.

- Anticipate a crisis, whether big or small (What's the worst thing that could happen?);
- Formulate a media management plan (How do we deal with it? And who speaks for us).

Note. Crisis management plans will vary depending on the size and structure of your organisation. If your organisation has a media strategy already in place, handling a crisis will be more manageable.

A good management plan incorporates the following elements:

- Timeliness: the ability to act quickly;
- Identification of stakeholders: the capacity to quickly identify which stakeholders or networks need to be involved, alerted and consulted;
- Accountability: procedures and resources in place that demonstrate your organisation's accountability, integrity and sincerity;
- Media relationships: a maintenance plan that establishes trusting relationships with journalists, editors and media enterprises before a crisis erupts, before you need to rely on their trust.

Other points to remember

- Ensure that the delivery of media responses by all spokespeople in your organisation is consistent, not contradictory;
- If an interview goes badly, don't be hostile toward the journalist. That's not an interview, and although it can be great entertainment you may well find it alienates the audience against you, your message, and your organisation;
- Come back to your key messages (remember the QAP technique);
- Always return journalists' calls, and be prepared to follow-up or refer to a more appropriate spokesperson any insistent questions that you cannot answer at the time. If you don't return journalists' calls or neglect their unanswered questions, they may rely on information they get elsewhere, information that may not help your cause;
- "No comment" is usually perceived as implying: "We are avoiding this because we have something to hide." Hold off the need to comment by saying a media release is forthcoming (make sure you do it) or explaining that a comment is not possible for legal reasons, or because an investigation is still underway;
- Journalists sometimes will misquote you. Assess the degree to which the misquote is damaging. Call the journalist and point out the problem that the misquote is likely to cause. If the misquote will harm your organisation's reputation, mobilise resources to obtain a retraction or apology. You may need to resort to complaints procedures through regulatory bodies or legal means to achieve this.



Appendix 1: Critiquing Media Representation of Aboriginal Health Issues

Analysing mainstream news media reports:

A tool developed by participants in the Aboriginal Health Communication Project workshops

The news media's representation of Aboriginal health issues often requires a response from the Aboriginal health sector, whether it be one of praise, a critique or a rebuttal. Below are a few questions you should ask yourself before deciding if and how to respond. They will help you to critically understand what you are responding to, address knowledge gaps and provide the ammunition you need to fire back at the media, the government etc. and set the public record straight.

Media institution and audience

- Which media outlet was involved? (Does it have a known political inclination e.g., Left or Right of politics? Does this impact on the story?);
- Who is the journalist? (e.g., Left or Right of politics);
- Who is the audience?

The Story

- What does the headline suggest? Does it tie into the article? Does it express a 'positive' or a 'negative' story? – What interpretations does it give?
- What graphic/picture has been used?
- What is the key message of the story? What is it trying to convey?
- Is there context provided?
- Is the language used appropriate?
- Is the story balanced?
- Is there bias?

Importance

- What page of the newspaper is it on?
- What type of story is it? Is it a feature/news item/comments.

Sources

- What sources have been used? Are they credible? Do they show a balance of views?
- Whose 'voices' are NOT represented in the story?
- Where did the story come from? I.e. a media release, an interview, a journal article?

Impact

- How might the story impact on the community – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal?

Responding – What do we do about it?

- How could the media representation of the issue be improved?
- What form/s of response to this story would be optimal (e.g., letter to the editor, phone call to the journalist, radio response, letter to politicians...)?
- What additional opportunities does the media story provide?
 - o Take journalists out to communities;
 - o Give journalists the opportunity to see the positive stories;
 - o Offer journalists stories, photo opportunities, interviews, quotes etc.

Appendix 2: Media Release Worksheet

Once you have decided you want news coverage of a story you are ready to develop your media release. Firstly, decide on the key message of the story, the medium you think is most suited to the story (TV, radio or print), the angle of the story and, the most appropriate journalist to send it to. Now, complete the worksheet below to develop and structure your media release.

<p>Question 1: What's the story?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is happening? • Who will be affected? 	
<p>Question 2: What's the key message? (The presenting situation)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the supporting messages: • Supporting message 1: future outcomes • Supporting message 2: action to be taken by the audience • Further information to reinforce or strengthen the story 	
<p>Question 3: What's the medium?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TV • Radio • Newspaper 	
<p>Question 4: What's the angle?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why would this interest the audience profile? 	
<p>Question 5: Does the journalist want it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When and where is the event happening? • Who is "the talent"? • The date the story can be used (is there an embargo?) • Is the story an exclusive? 	

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