Mindframe

Media alert

Please cascade to all media staff

30 April 2020

Mindframe advice for safe reporting on issues related to COVID-19

Please cascade to all media staff covering Covid-19

Mindframe recognises reporting of localised outbreaks of COVID-19 are of notable public interest and will continue to receive heightened and ongoing media coverage.

While provision of up to date information is vitally important, so too is sensitive and responsible reporting of details.

Mindframe acknowledges that contact tracing is an essential component of recovering from a pandemic and that the release of some demographic and geographic details are necessary.

Mindframe however, urges media to refrain from reporting that may cause further distress for specific individuals or group of individuals in relation to the transmission of COVID-19.

Mindframe asks media to consider the relevance of including information about transmission sources and the potential impacts that this may have on mental health and wellbeing.

This is particularly important for reporting on details that have already reached saturation in the media.

Helpful ways to communicate about COVID-19

Ensure accuracy, context and balance of communication
Provide up-to-date and verifiable information about the disease, transmission routes, infection rates and vaccines. Include details of recoveries, progress towards effective treatments and community support.

Minimise sensationalist language
Ensure language being used is factual and accurately reflects public health definitions.

Include expert advice
Where possible and appropriate, obtain advice from reputable experts, who can provide accurate interpretation of statistics, evidence-informed calls to action and broader contextual information.

Provide a 'call to action'
Highlight actions that individuals, families and businesses can take to maintain physical and emotional wellbeing and to minimise further transmissions of the virus.

Avoid speculation
Opinion pieces or eliciting expert speculation about the future spread or impact of the virus can increase uncertainty or distress in the community. Factual information or graphics on what is known are more helpful.

Include help-seeking information
Provide support options for people who may be distressed by the impact of COVID-19.

Include stories of recovery and community support
Stories of recovery and support can provide hope and a sense of calm for the community. Examples include stories honouring health care workers, acts of kindness, communities supporting each other, alternative ways of socialising or how people are recovering at home.

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If you find any problematic media coverage, please refer directly to Sane StigmaWatch for follow up:
https://www.sane.org/changing-attitudes/report-a-media-item-to-stigmawatch

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Images when communicating about COVID-19

Images have a powerful impact on people and can significantly shape emotional reactions during a public health crisis. This is particularly important where increased anxiety and stress may compromise capacity for the public to effectively process information.

Mindframe recommends:

- Avoid over saturation of distressing images to reduce fear, anxiety and stigmatisation of people with COVID-19.
- Avoid sensationalist visual images, including both stills and video. These can cause mental distress and increase fear and anxiety in the community. For example, extensive use of images of empty supermarket shelves or stock footage of patients on ventilators.
- Feature images of recovery, support and simple informational graphics. Ensure images or videos are in context, balanced and do not perpetuate negative stereotypes or misleading information.

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Support services

Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service: 1800 512 348 (24/7)

Adult

Lifeline: 13 11 14
lifeline.org.au
Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467
suicidecallbackservice.org.au
Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636
beyondblue.org.au/forums
MensLine Australia: 1300 789 978
mensline.org.au

Youth

Kids Helpline: 1800 551 800
kidshelpline.com.au
headspace: 1800 650 890
headspace.org.au
ReachOut: ReachOut.com

Other resources

Head to Health: mental health portal
headtohealth.gov.au
Life in Mind: suicide prevention portal
lifeinmindaustralia.com.au
SANE: online forums saneforums.org

healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
1800 184 527 qlife.org.au - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and/or intersex
mhima.org.au - Culturally and linguistically diverse

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Media self-care

To provide support to media professionals *Mindframe*, in consultation with the DART Centre Asia Pacific, has developed journalism self-care resources. These resources can be found here.

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Self-care for journalists

Every person will have an individual trauma response based on the type and severity of the experience, their age, gender, resilience and other psychosocial factors.

Warning signs for seeking professional assistance may include:

- Being unable to handle the intense feelings or physical sensations
- Feeling numb and empty
- Continuing to experience strong distressing emotions
- Continuing to have physical symptoms of being tense, agitated and on edge
- Continuing to have disturbed sleep and/or nightmares
- Having no-one to support you and with whom you can share your feelings and emotions
- Having relationship problems with friends, family and colleagues
- Increasing your use of alcohol or drugs.

The *Mindframe* project team

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