

EDITORIAL GUIDELINES

Updated: 1 May 2020

GENERAL

Provincial Media is based on community and we aim to engage with our readers and to publish well informed and factual content which our readers can trust and enjoy.

Provincial Media conducts its publishing and journalism in accordance with the guidelines of the Australian Press Council and we take all reasonable steps to comply with the following principles, guidelines and standards in print and online.

The Standards of Practice, apply to text, headlines, photographs, graphics, captions, audio, video and all other forms of published material, but not advertising.

WE APPLY THE FOLLOWING GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Accuracy and clarity

1. Ensure that factual material in news reports and elsewhere is accurate and not misleading, and is distinguishable from other material such as opinion.
2. Provide a correction or other adequate remedial action if published material is significantly inaccurate or misleading.

Fairness and balance

3. Ensure that factual material is presented with reasonable fairness and balance, and that writers' expressions of opinion are not based on significantly inaccurate factual material or omission of key facts.
4. Ensure that where material refers adversely to a person, a fair opportunity is given for subsequent publication of a reply if that is reasonably necessary to address a possible breach of General Principle 3.

Privacy and avoidance of harm

5. Avoid intruding on a person's reasonable expectations of privacy, unless doing so is sufficiently in the public interest.
6. Avoid causing or contributing materially to substantial offence, distress or prejudice, or a substantial risk to health or safety, unless doing so is sufficiently in the public interest.

Integrity and transparency

7. Avoid publishing material which has been gathered by deceptive or unfair means, unless doing so is sufficiently in the public interest.
8. Ensure that conflicts of interests are avoided or adequately disclosed, and that they do not influence published material.

STATEMENT OF PRIVACY PRINCIPLES

Provincial Media complies and adheres to the guidelines from the Australian Council Press

Privacy Principle 1: Collection of personal information

In gathering news, journalists should seek personal information only in the public interest. In doing so, journalists should not unduly intrude on the privacy of individuals and should show respect for the dignity and sensitivity of people encountered in the course of gathering news.

In accordance with Principle 5 of the Council's Statement of Principles, news obtained by unfair or dishonest means should not be published unless there is an overriding public interest.

Generally, journalists should identify themselves as such. However, journalists and photographers may at times need to operate surreptitiously to expose crime, significantly antisocial conduct, public deception or some other matter in the public interest.

Public figures necessarily sacrifice their right to privacy, where public scrutiny is in the public interest. However, public figures do not forfeit their right to privacy altogether. Intrusion into their right to privacy must be related to their public duties or activities.

Privacy Principle 2: Use and disclosure of personal information

Personal information gathered by journalists and photographers should only be used for the purpose for which it was intended. A person who supplies personal information should have a reasonable expectation that it will be used for the purpose for which it was collected.

Some personal information, such as addresses or other identifying details, may enable others to intrude on the privacy and safety of individuals who are the subject of news coverage, and their families. To the extent lawful and practicable, a media organisation should only disclose sufficient personal information to identify the persons being reported in the news, so that these risks can be reasonably avoided.

Privacy Principle 3: Quality of personal information

A media organisation should take reasonable steps to ensure that the personal information it collects is accurate, complete and up-to-date.

Privacy Principle 4: Security of personal information

A media organisation should take reasonable steps to ensure that the personal information it holds is protected from misuse, loss, or unauthorised access.

Privacy Principle 5: Anonymity of sources

All persons who provide information to media organisations are entitled to seek anonymity. The identity of confidential sources should not be revealed, and where it is lawful and practicable, a media organisation should ensure that any personal information which it maintains derived from such sources does not identify the source.

Privacy Principle 6: Correction, fairness and balance

In accordance with Principle 3 of the Council's Statement of Principles, where individuals are a major focus of news reports or commentary, the publication should ensure fairness and balance in the original article. Failing that, the media organisation should provide a reasonable and swift opportunity for a balancing response in the appropriate section of the publication.

A media organisation should make amends for publishing any personal information that is found to be harmfully inaccurate, in accordance with Principle 2 of the Council's Statement of Principles. The media organisation should also take steps to correct any of its records containing that personal information, so as to avoid a harmful inaccuracy being repeated.

Privacy Principle 7: Sensitive personal information

In accordance with Principle 8 of the Council's Statement of Principles, media organisations should not place any gratuitous emphasis on the categories of sensitive personal information listed in Principle 8, except where it is relevant and in the public interest to report and express opinions in these areas.

Members of the public caught up in newsworthy events should not be exploited. A victim or bereaved person has the right to refuse or terminate an interview or photographic session at any time.

Unless otherwise restricted by law or court order, open court hearings are matters of public record and can be reported by the press. Such reports need to be fair and balanced. They should not identify relatives or friends of people accused or convicted of crime unless the reference to them is necessary for the full, fair and accurate reporting of the crime or subsequent legal proceedings.

SPECIFIC STANDARDS ON COVERAGE OF SUICIDE

Provincial Media complies and adheres to the guidelines from the Australian Council Press

General reporting and discussion

1. General reporting and comment on issues relating to suicide* can be of substantial public benefit. For example, it may help to improve public understanding of causes and warning signs, have a deterrent effect on people contemplating suicide, bring comfort to affected relatives or friends, or promote further public or private action to prevent suicide.
2. Subject to careful compliance with the following Standards, the Council does not wish to discourage material of this nature. Extra caution is required when the material is likely to be read or seen by people who may be especially vulnerable (e.g., because of their age or mental health) and relates to suicides by their peers or by celebrities.

Reporting individual instances

3. In deciding whether to report an individual instance of suicide, consideration should be given to whether at least one of the following criteria is satisfied: (a) clear and informed consent* has been provided by appropriate relatives or close friends*; or (b) reporting the death as suicide is clearly in the public interest*.
4. In deciding whether also to report the identity of the person who has died by suicide, account should be taken of whether at least one of the following criteria is satisfied:
 - (a) clear and informed consent has been provided by appropriate relatives or close friends; or
 - (b) identification is clearly in the public interest.

Explanatory Notes

1. References above to suicide apply also to attempted suicide. References to reports include all types of report (including of court proceedings or inquests) and headlines, text, images and sounds.
2. A matter is in the public interest if it is of substantial and widespread significance, not merely something in which many people may be interested. It may often be helpful for the assessment to be made at editorial level after seeking advice from an appropriate mental health expert. It may also be necessary to consult police, school principals, public health authorities or other people with special knowledge of the likely impacts of publication in the particular case.
3. A person can give informed consent to a report if they are reasonably aware of the circumstances to which it relates and the likely consequences for them of it being published. This may be difficult or impossible to obtain in the immediate aftermath of a suicide.
4. Often it will be important to request and conduct interviews with closely affected people by going through an intermediary such as a relative, professional counsellor or support organisation.

5. It may be preferable to use words such as “died by suicide” or “took his life” rather than a term such as “committed suicide” which can imply commission of a crime.

Mindframe publishes a range of resources for media professionals on the reporting of suicide.

The SANE Media Centre provides media with guidance about reporting mental illness and suicide. When deciding what sources of assistance should be mentioned in a report, advice could also be sought directly from organisations providing services to people with problems relating to suicide or mental illness, such as Suicide Call Back Service, SANE Australia, Lifeline, or beyondblue. Services providing assistance to young people include Kids Helpline, ReachOut.com, and headspace. Reporting methods and locations

6. The method and location of a suicide should not be described in detail (e.g., a particular drug or cliff) unless the public interest in doing so clearly outweighs the risk, if any, of causing further suicides. This applies especially to methods or locations which may not be well known by people contemplating suicide.

Responsibility and balance

7. Reports should not sensationalise, glamorise or trivialise suicides. They should not inappropriately stigmatise suicides or people involved in them. But this does not preclude responsible description or discussion of the impacts, even if they are severely adverse, on people, organisations or communities. Where appropriate, underlying causes such as mental illness should be mentioned. Sensitivity and moderation
8. Reports of suicide should not be given undue prominence, especially by unnecessarily explicit headlines or images. Great care should be taken to avoid causing unnecessary harm or hurt to people who have attempted suicide or to relatives and other people who have been affected by a suicide or attempted suicide. This requires special sensitivity and moderation in both gathering and reporting news*.

Sources of assistance

9. Published material relating to suicide should be accompanied by information about appropriate 24-hour crisis support services or other sources of assistance with these problems*. The degree of specificity may vary according to the nature of the report and the surrounding circumstances.

Specific Standards on Contacting Patients

Informed consent from the patient

1. Before making any contact* with a patient* in hospital*, journalists* should obtain the patient's informed consent unless
 - (a) the activity is an initial communication from outside the hospital for the purpose of seeking informed consent*; or
 - (b) an authorised person* confirms to them that informed consent has been given by the patient; or
 - (c) an authorised person has approved the contact on condition that no patient will be identifiable in any published material.

2. Journalists are responsible for establishing any claim by them that it was reasonable to believe informed consent has been given by the patient. This may often be difficult to achieve unless medical or other expert advice has been sought on the matter and been recorded.

Permission to visit the patient

3. Before visiting a patient in a part of the hospital in which patient care occurs, journalists should identify themselves and their publication to an authorised person and obtain permission for the proposed visit. However, making contact without permission is acceptable if doing so is clearly necessary as a matter of substantial public importance and has been approved at senior editorial level for recorded reasons.

4. Journalists are responsible for establishing any claim by them that
 - (a) they obtained permission from a person whom it was reasonable to believe was an authorised person; and
 - (b) they made adequate disclosure to that person of the nature and purpose of the proposed contact.

5. Where the hospital has given permission to visit the patient, it is reasonable for the journalist to assume the patient is in a medical condition which enables informed consent to be given. When visiting the patient, however, it will still be necessary for the journalist to explain the nature of what is being sought from the patient and obtain informed consent.

Ceasing contact with the patient

6. Journalists should immediately cease the contact if they are
 - (a) asked to do so by the patient, or by an authorised person on reasonable grounds; or
 - (b) it becomes reasonably clear that the patient is not adequately aware of what the contact involves and its likely consequences.

JOURNALIST CODE OF ETHICS

Provincial Media's contributors (includes staff, freelance journalists, writers, photographers) commit themselves to:

- Honesty
- Fairness
- Independence
- Respect for the rights of others

Our contributors comply with the ethical code set by the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance and apply the following standards

- Report and interpret honestly, striving for accuracy, fairness and disclosure of all essential facts. Do not suppress relevant available facts, or give distorting emphasis. Do their utmost to give a fair opportunity for reply.
- Do not place unnecessary emphasis on personal characteristics, including race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, family relationships, religious belief, or physical or intellectual disability.
- Aim to attribute information to its source. Where a source seeks anonymity, do not agree without first considering the source's motives and any alternative attributable source. Where confidences are accepted, respect them in all circumstances.
- Do not allow personal interest, or any belief, commitment, payment, gift or benefit, to undermine your accuracy, fairness or independence.
- Disclose conflicts of interest that affect, or could be seen to affect, the accuracy, fairness or independence of your journalism. Do not improperly use a journalistic position for personal gain.
- Do not allow advertising or other commercial considerations to undermine accuracy, fairness or independence.
- Do your utmost to ensure disclosure of any direct or indirect payment made for interviews, pictures, information or stories.
- Use fair, responsible and honest means to obtain material. Identify themselves and their employer before obtaining any interview for publication or broadcast. Never exploit a person's vulnerability or ignorance of media practice.
- Present pictures and sound which are true and accurate. Any manipulation likely to mislead should be disclosed.
- Do not plagiarise.
- Respect private grief and personal privacy. Journalists have the right to resist compulsion to intrude.
- Do their utmost to achieve fair correction of errors.
- Thoroughly and rigorously fact check
- Use social media channels with integrity and carefully cite and disclose its use.