

POLICY & PROCEDURE – REPORTING MENTAL ILLNESS RESPONSIBLY

Suicide is a prominent public health issue in Australia with over 2,000 people dying by suicide each year.

Some important facts about suicide are:

- rates of suicide are generally three to four times higher among males than females
- Many more people attempt than die by suicide with hospital admissions for intentional self injury about ten times as common as deaths by suicide
- Migrants in Australia show similar suicide rates to those in their country of origin
- People in any form of custody have a suicide rate three times higher than the general population.

Mental illness is a major risk factor for suicide with psychological autopsy studies showing that up to 90% of people who suicide may have been experiencing mental disorder at the time of their death.

Issues to consider when reporting

- Should I run the story?
- Be careful with the language you use
- Don't be explicit about the method or location of suicide
- Discussion of celebrity suicide can glamourise suicide
- Consider the angle (or positioning) of the story
- Should you interview the bereaved? Is it necessary?
- Place the story in context
- Include helpline contacts in your story.

The Mindframe Media and Mental Health (MMMh) project is one of a suite of projects on suicide, mental illness and the media developed as part of the national media strategy. MMMh aims to build a collaborative relationship with the Australian media and mental health systems to enable a more accurate and sensitive portrayal of suicide and mental health issues across all news media in Australia. A key activity of MMMh is the development of a resource kit for use by media professionals. It is available from: www.mindframe-media.info