



Suggested Guidelines for Media Reporting on Mental Health

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The following Manitoba agencies are collaborating to improve mental health literacy:

The Canadian Mental Health Association, Winnipeg Region
The Canadian Mental Health Association, Manitoba Division
The Manitoba Psychological Society
The Manitoba Schizophrenia Society

Mental health literacy refers to the skills that enable people to access, understand and use information for mental health. These agencies are working towards challenging stigma and discrimination by providing accurate information on mental health related issues.

We believe the media has a critical role in helping greater public understanding of mental health issues. Using these media guidelines, we hope to advance a balanced and accurate reporting of mental health issues.

The agencies request that journalists be mindful of language that may unintentionally hurt people and encourage the use of accurate and sensitive words when talking about mental health problems. Please report on mental health accurately and with respect.

We invite the media to use these guidelines to help stop stigma and discrimination and to influence change in attitudes about mental health in our society.

We would like to acknowledge the Mental Health Literacy Network, on which this document is based, and the Canadian Association of Suicide Prevention (CASP) for the creation of their guidelines on suicide reporting (available at www.casp-acps.ca).

Key Contacts

The following are mental health agencies that can provide you with information about mental health issues. They are also able to provide contact information for industry experts and people who have experienced mental health problems.

Canadian Mental Health Association – Winnipeg Region
930 Portage Avenue
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www.cmhawpg.mb.ca



www.facebook.com/CMHAWinnipeg



[@wpgmentalhealth](https://twitter.com/wpgmentalhealth)

Canadian Mental Health Association – Manitoba Division
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www.facebook.com/cmha.manitoba



[@MbDivisionCMHA](https://twitter.com/MbDivisionCMHA)

Manitoba Psychological Society
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F: 204 478-4900

www.mps.ca

Dr. Teresa Sztaba
Executive Director
executived@mps.ca

Manitoba Schizophrenia Society
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Quick Facts

- 1 in 3 Canadians will have mental health problems at some point in their life.
- 1 in 5 Canadians will have mental health problems in a given year.
- 50% of people who develop mental health problems begin experiencing difficulties by the age of 14.
- Mental health problems can affect anyone at any age, regardless of education, income, religion or culture.
- Of those experiencing mental illness, 70-80% will go on to make a full recovery.
- Some people will believe that a person experiencing mental distress is more likely to be violent and dangerous. It is more likely that they will be a victim of violence. In fact, you are thirteen times more likely to be killed by a stranger *without* a mental health problem than by someone who has a mental health problem.
- Stigma sets mental health conditions apart from other diseases and results in part from the public's lack of understanding that mental health conditions are in fact illnesses. Illnesses such as cancer and leprosy, for example, don't carry the same stigma they once had, largely because of an informed public. Regardless of why and how they develop, mental health problems are health problems — just like arthritis, diabetes and heart attacks.
- The Business and Economic Roundtable on Mental Health has estimated that the economic costs of mental health conditions are the equivalent of 14% of corporate Canada's net operating profits.

Getting It Right

Words matter. The following sets out some of the preferred language to use when reporting on mental health.

POSITIVE LANGUAGE

Person with a mental health problem Person with a mental illness	Generally used to refer to a person with a diagnosed condition, or for whom problems with their mental health has a significant impact on their lives. This is preferred to such phrases as “patient,” “sufferer,” or “victim.”
A person living with schizophrenia, depression or any other diagnosed condition	Avoid language that implies that people ARE their mental illness. A person is not “a schizophrenic.” Instead say a person has a diagnosis of, or is currently experiencing, or is being treated for schizophrenia. This terminology will help the public see the person, not the label.
Suicide, death by suicide and died by suicide	Terms such as “committed suicide” or “successful suicide” are outdated and inaccurate. “Committing” suicide associates the act with illegal activity, and “successful” suicide implies that the death is a positive outcome.
Be informed. Report accurately and with respect.	Never sensationalize an illness.

STOP USING

“Demented,” “loony,” “crazy,” “wacko,” “schizo”

• Harmful, outdated and offensive terms. Not to be used in any context as they perpetuate ignorance and lead to stigma.

Psychotic

• It should never be used as a general description of someone with mental health problems. Its correct use is to describe the symptom of psychosis.

Split personality

• This is a common myth associated with the symptoms of schizophrenia and that people swing between being “normal” and “dangerous.” This is rarely the case, although an individual may be experiencing very unpleasant and frightening thoughts.

Released from hospital

• People are discharged from hospital not released as if they were in jail.

Stop the use of a psychiatric diagnoses as metaphors for other situations

• Terms like “a schizophrenic situation” are not only stigmatizing but also inaccurate.

What's the Difference?

Mental Health refers to emotional and social wellbeing in which the individual realizes his/her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make contributions to his/her community.

Mental Health Problems and Mental Disorders refer to the spectrum of cognitive, emotional and social disorders that interfere with the daily lives and productivity of people.

A Mental Health Problem interferes with a person's cognitive, emotional or social abilities, but to a lesser extent than a mental disorder. Mental health problems are more common than mental disorders, and are often experienced temporarily as a reaction to a life stressor. Mental health problems can be differentiated from mental disorders in that their symptoms are less severe and of shorter duration.

A Mental Disorder (Illness) is a diagnosable illness that *significantly* interferes with an individual's cognitive, emotional or social abilities. Mental disorders can have different degrees of severity. Some of the major mental disorders perceived to be public health issues are depression, anxiety, substance use disorders and psychotic disorders, such as schizophrenia. The term mental illness is often used interchangeably with mental disorder.