

MEDIA ALERT:

Germanwings air crash – reporting mental illness

Please share with news staff

Our thoughts are with the families of those who lost their lives in the Germanwings incident late last week.



The *Mindframe* National Media Initiative today urges Australian media professionals continuing to report on the Germanwings air crash to consider the potential for stigmatising mental illness, particularly around depression.

Media are reminded that stereotypes (such as those with a mental illness can't do their job properly or are more likely to be violent) can lead to negative community attitudes and stigma. However, balanced and accurate reporting has the potential to increase understanding of mental illness.

It's important when linking mental illness to a story that media ensure they provide context and factual information to avoid stigmatising millions of Australians who are living with a mental illness in the community.




Be mindful of reinforcing common stereotypes

Myths and facts are outlined in the table below:

Myths 	Facts 
People who are mentally ill are violent, dangerous, untrustworthy or unpredictable.	Many violent people have no history of mental illness and most people with a mental illness have no history of violence. ¹⁰⁴ People with a mental illness are much more likely to be the victims of violence and crime than the perpetrators. ¹⁰⁵
People are unable to recover from mental illness.	Mental illness is not a life sentence. Most people will recover completely and go on to live full and productive lives. There are various treatments available to enable people to manage their symptoms/illness. ¹⁰⁶
Mental illnesses are all the same.	There are many types of mental illnesses and many kinds of symptoms or effects. ¹⁰⁷
People who share the same diagnosis will have the same experience of mental illness.	Even though a particular mental illness will tend to show a certain range of symptoms, not everyone will experience the same symptoms. A diagnosis will tell you little about a person's ability and personal characteristics. ¹⁰⁸
Some cultural groups are more likely than others to experience mental illness.	Anyone can develop a mental illness and no one is immune to mental health problems. ¹⁰⁹ Cultural background may affect how people experience mental illness and how they understand and interpret the symptoms of mental illness. ¹¹⁰
People with a mental illness differ in appearance to others in the community.	People with mental illness do not look any different from others in the community. ¹¹¹

Consider the language you use

Certain language can stigmatise people living with mental illness as well as present inaccuracies about mental illness or mental health care. Some suggestions about preferred language are provided below.

Issue 	Problematic 	Preferred 
Certain language sensationalises mental illness and reinforces stigma ²⁶	Terms such as 'mental patient', 'nutter', 'lunatic', 'psycho', 'schizo', 'deranged', 'mad'	A person is 'living with' or 'has a diagnosis of' a mental illness
Terminology that suggests a lack of quality of life for people with mental illness ²⁷	Referring to someone with a mental illness as a 'victim', 'suffering from' or 'afflicted with' a mental illness	A person is 'being treated for' or 'someone with' a mental illness
Labelling a person by their mental illness ²⁸	A person is 'a schizophrenic', 'an anorexic'	A person 'has a diagnosis of', or 'is being treated for' schizophrenia
Descriptions of behaviour that imply existence of mental illness or are inaccurate ²⁹	Using words such as 'crazed', 'deranged', 'mad', 'psychotic'	The person's behaviour was unusual or erratic
Colloquialisms about treatment can undermine people's willingness to seek help ¹⁰⁰	Using words such as 'happy pills', 'shrinks', 'mental institution'	Accurate terminology for treatments e.g. antidepressants, psychiatrists or psychologists, mental health hospital
Terminology used out of context adds to misunderstanding and trivialises mental illness ¹⁰¹	Terms like 'psychotic dog', using 'schizophrenic' to denote duality such as a 'schizophrenic economy'	Reword any sentence that uses psychiatric or medical terminology incorrectly or out of context



HELPFUL WAYS TO PRESENT INFORMATION

Australian research shows that mental illness is reported frequently and is generally covered responsibly by the Australian media.⁸² There are a range of helpful ways to present or explore mental illness, such as:

- Covering mental illness sensitively and accurately can change public misconceptions, challenge myths and encourage community discussion about the issue⁸³
- Sharing stories of people who live with a mental illness can be powerful and these stories have been shown to reduce stigma⁸⁴
- Emphasising the importance of seeking help can lead to people connecting with support and treatment⁸⁵
- Exploring the impact of mental illness on family and friends, and providing information about specific illnesses, policy implications, and debates about mental health care delivery can increase community understanding.⁸⁶

A *Mindframe* quick guide for reporting mental illness is available to download here: www.mindframe-media.info/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/10011/QRC-MentalIllness-Press.pdf

More information about the reporting of mental illness can be found on the *Mindframe* website: www.mindframe-media.info/for-media/reporting-mental-illness

Help-seeking Information

People are more likely to seek help and advice when appropriate services are included in stories. We recommend adding the following services to any story about mental illness:

National 24/7 Crisis Services

- **Lifeline:** 13 11 14
www.lifeline.org.au
- **Suicide Call Back Service:** 1300 659 467
www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au
- **MensLine Australia:** 1300 78 99 78
www.mensline.org.au
- **beyondblue:** 1300 22 4636
www.beyondblue.org.au

Youth Support Services

24/7 crisis support



kidshelp.com.au
1800 55 1800

direct clinical services



headspace.org.au
1800 650 890

Expert advice on media reporting of suicide and mental illness is available from:

The *Mindframe* program team

The *Mindframe* team at the Hunter Institute of Mental Health provides advice, resources and training to the media, mental health and suicide prevention and education sectors nationally to support the reporting, portrayal and communication about suicide and mental illness.



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

www.mindframe-media.info

The SANE Media Centre

The SANE Media Centre provides the media and the mental health sector with day-to-day guidance about reporting and portrayal of mental illness and suicide-related issues. It provides a 'one-stop' service of information, expert comment, advice and referral.



Tel: 03 9682 5933

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

www.sane.org

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