



Media Release

For release 00 00 – 2 August 2011

New Standards for reporting about suicide

The Australian Press Council today released new Standards of Practice for reporting suicide and discussing related issues. The Standards are binding on all publications affiliated with the Council, which includes all major newspapers and magazines around Australia as well as their associated websites. They have been developed after extensive consultation with mental health experts, editors and journalists.

The Chair of the Council, Prof Julian Disney, said:

“The new Standards emphasise that general reporting and comment on issues relating to suicide can be of substantial public benefit. It can 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.”

“There should not be a taboo on reporting of this kind. It is important to be very careful, however, when the material is likely to be read or seen by people who may be especially vulnerable (for example, because of their age or mental health) and relates to suicides by their peers or by celebrities.”

While welcoming responsible reporting and discussion, the Standards include restrictions on naming people who have died by suicide, providing details about methods of suicide, and using inappropriate language.

The Standards are the first to be issued under the Council’s new three-year Standards Project to strengthen the scope and effectiveness of its general principles and specific standards of practice for newspapers and magazines.

Later this month the Council will begin a series of Round Tables around Australia to hear the views of community and media representatives about strengths and weakness in current standards of practice in the print media. The Press Council welcomes comments and contributions on its review of print media standards in Australia.

The Standards of Practice relating to Suicide are available on the Press Council website.

For further information or comment by Prof Disney, contact:

Simon Lloyd (access PR)
0424-470-923; simon@accesspr.com.au

Derek Wilding (Director, Standards)
02-9261-1930; 0425-242-401; derek.wilding@presscouncil.org.au

Background

The Australian Press Council

The Australian Press Council was established in 1976 and is responsible for promoting good standards of media practice, community access to information of public interest, and freedom of expression through the media. The Council is the principal body with responsibility for responding to complaints about Australian newspapers, magazines and their digital outlets. Publications which are subject to its jurisdiction account for about 98% of all print media sales in Australia.

The Council's three main areas of work involve

- developing standards that constitute good media practice and are applied by the Council when considering complaints;
- responding to complaints from the public about material in Australian newspapers, magazines and associated digital outlets;
- issuing statements on policy matters within its areas of interest, including through submissions to parliamentary committees, commissions and other public bodies.

The Council has 22 members, comprising

- the independent Chair and eight public members, each of whom has no affiliations with a media organisation;
- nine nominees of media organisations, including all the major publishers of newspapers and magazines as well as the principal union for employees in the media industry;
- four independent journalist members, who are not employed by a media organisation.

Further details on the history and operation of the Australian Press Council are available on the APC website.

The Standards Project

The Australian Press Council has initiated a major three-year Standards Project to review and strengthen the content of its current Standards of Practice. The Project will also focus on improving the extent to which the Standards are known and complied with by publications, especially in the context of growing emphasis on digital formats.

Key elements of the Project include:

- *community consultation about the Council's current standards and the level of compliance with them;*
 - this will include local community forums; Round Table discussions; polling; other interactive processes through newspapers, radio, television and social media.
- *systemic monitoring of compliance with the Council's standards;*
 - this will include assessments of compliance in particular areas, issues or types of publications over a specified period.
- *independent panels to advise on detailed drafting of standards;*
 - the panels will include people from community and media backgrounds as well as specialist experts in particular areas;
- *a new manual of APC Standards of Practice;*
 - comprising Statements of General Principles and Specific Standards (both of which will be binding on publications which are subject to the Council's jurisdiction) and Advisory Guidelines;
- *a comparative compendium of standards from other sources;*
 - including internal newspaper codes, other press councils, regulatory bodies of other media.

There will not be a general call for submissions to the Project, but comments from members of the public will be welcome and kept confidential in order to encourage frank provision of information and opinion.

Standards Relating to Suicide

The Australian Press Council commenced work on its Standards relating to Suicide in 2010. It invited representatives from a range of organisations specialising in mental health and suicide prevention to Round Table meetings in Melbourne and Sydney to discuss the benefits that can accrue from increased awareness of aspects such as the causes of suicide and the support available to people experiencing mental health problems, as well as the challenges of responsible reporting on suicide.

Media organisations involved in the consultations included the ABC, SBS, APN News and Media, *The Australian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, the *Herald Sun* and *The Northern Times*, as well as the Australian Communications and Media Authority and Free TV Australia. Community and government organisations included beyondblue, Lifeline, Mindframe, Orygen Youth Health, SANE Australia, Suicide Prevention Australia, the Australian Suicide Prevention Advisory Council, the Centre for Health Policy, Programs and Economics at the University of Melbourne and the Department of Health and Ageing.

The new Standards cover the following topics:

- General reporting and discussion about suicide
- Whether to report an individual instance
- Reporting the method and location
- Reporting with responsibility and balance
- Reporting with sensitivity and moderation
- Sources of assistance.

The Standards Relating to Suicide are available on the Press Council website.

Mindframe publishes a range of resources for media professionals on the reporting of suicide (see <http://www.mindframe-media.info/site/index.cfm?display=82652>). The SANE Media Centre (<http://www.sane.org/sane-media>) works with media professionals to portray mental illness and suicide accurately and responsibly.

Other sources of useful information include:

LIFE (<http://www.livingisforeveryone.com.au/>)

Suicide Prevention Australia (<http://www.suicidepreventionaust.org/resources/>)

Orygen Youth Health (<http://oyh.org.au/>).

Help in dealing with depression and suicide is available from the following organisations:

Lifeline (<http://www.lifeline.org.au/>)

beyondblue (<http://www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?>)

SANE Australia (<http://www.sane.org/index.php>)

Suicide Call Back Service (<http://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au/index.html>)

Kids Helpline (www.kidshelpline.com.au)

Headspace (<http://www.headspace.org.au/>)

ReachOut.com (<http://au.reachout.com/>).