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SCHIZOPHRENIA SOCIETY OF CANADA
SOCIÉTÉ CANADIENNE DE LA SCHIZOPHRÉNIE
UNE SOURCE D'ESPOIR, DE SOUTIEN ET D'ENTRAIDE.

Schizophrenia Society of Canada Advocacy Tool Kit

September 2007

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This advocacy tool kit was developed as a cooperative effort between the Schizophrenia Society of Canada (www.schizophrenia.ca), Advocacy Solutions (www.advocacysolutions.ca) and See Jane Run Communications (www.seejanerun.ca).

Purpose:

The purpose of the Schizophrenia Society of Canada (SSC) Advocacy Tool Kit is to provide people living with mental illness, caregivers and supporters with some basic information to assist in their advocacy and media efforts.

For many using this tool kit, you may have limited knowledge or experience around advocacy and dealing with the press. Indeed, you may never have had occasion to speak to an elected official about an issue before, nor contacted the media. This guide is meant to introduce the core concepts of advocacy and working with the media, as well as provide you with the practical steps you need to start advocating on your own behalf.

We encourage you to share what you learn from this document with others engaged in mental health advocacy. We also strongly encourage you to share your efforts with other mental health consumer and family members. And you can find out more about SSC's advocacy efforts, including additional tips and resources, by visiting our web site at www.schizophrenia.ca.

The Schizophrenia Society of Canada, founded in 1979, is dedicated to improving the quality of life for those affected by schizophrenia and psychosis through education, support programs, public policy and research. Its membership includes people living with schizophrenia and related mental disorders, their family and friends, and mental health professionals who work directly with consumers and their families. The SSC works with 10 provincial societies and their over 100 chapters and branches in a federation model to: raise awareness and educate the public in order to reduce stigma and discrimination; support families and individuals; advocate for legislative change; and support research through the SSC Foundation and other independent efforts.

Please take the time to tell us about the advocacy and media work you've done. It will ultimately help us more effectively coordinate our joint efforts and be successful.

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Advocacy – Core Concepts

What is Advocacy?

- Advocacy is defined by the Canadian Oxford Dictionary as ‘verbal support or argument for a cause, policy’
- More simply, it is telling your story to someone in government (an elected politician or a bureaucrat), through various means, with the express purpose of compelling them to do (or not do) something
- It is a process, that normally takes time to realize tangible results
- It is not, for example, what protesters do when they chain themselves to a tree to prevent it from being cut down – that’s activism
- Advocacy is not radical; it’s reasonable, grounded in sound, rational thought
- There is no one way to do it - advocacy is personal to your own style or comfort level
- It is empowerment – exerting some form of control and initiating some form of action around issues that matters to you or others
- It is action, bringing about tangible change – it is more than just raising awareness or educating people about your issues

Why is Advocacy Important?

- Because decision-makers react to those credible groups or people who most effectively bring their issues to the forefront of the public agenda
- Because all governments have competing interests and concerns that must be addressed, as well as their own policy priorities and fiscal challenges - those who can best engage in this process will have their voices heard
- Because those who choose not to engage will have no say in decisions that could fundamentally impact their lives
- Because you as voters, taxpayers and citizens have the power to affect change around your issues

The following sub-headings will take you through the core concepts of advocacy.

Knowing Your Issues:

- You need to demonstrate that you know your issues and the core facts surrounding them, in order to establish credibility
- Be able to discuss your issues in the context of a story, using examples of real people like you who are being impacted – **your personal experience or story is the key to effective advocacy**
- Ideally, if you are advocating to a politician, your examples will incorporate constituent concerns or reflect their personal interests

Positioning Your Issues:

- Find out what matters to the people that you represent, if you are advocating on behalf of an organization – this will help to frame your issues
- Build alliances with other people around common issues and move forward as a united force
- Look for third party advocates who may be willing to take your issues to decision-makers on your behalf ie. physician, former Member of Parliament (MP)

Understanding the Government's Agenda:

- Know what matters to the government of the day in terms of their overarching public policy goals
- Try to incorporate your issues within their agenda
- Offer solutions – policy positions that represent a ‘win’ for both your cause and the decision-maker you are advocating to, are the best
- Politicians want to be re-elected – frame your issues with this in mind

Building Relationships:

- **At the heart of effective advocacy is impeccable relationships with key politicians and government officials**
- Look for people within your immediate circle of family, friends and associates who have established relationships with the people you need to see
- Go beyond your immediate circle to find connections through acquaintances and others, and use these links to secure introductions with decision-makers

When You Have No Relationships:

- Make an appointment to visit your local elected representatives ie. on constituency days
- Invite local politicians to your events
- Communicate with them consistently about what you are doing ie. newsletters
- Offer to support them in their work, by building opportunities for them to get their messages out to constituents ie. town hall meetings
- Offer to provide them with information or other resources that may be of assistance
- Ask them to provide you with key introductions to others in government
- Go to local events where you know policy influencers will be in attendance

Process for Developing an Effective Advocacy Strategy

Outlined below is the three step process that you (as an individual or as part of a larger concerted effort) can start to do right away to create an actual advocacy strategy that you can then implement in support of your issues. These steps are very practical and do not require substantial resources. However, successful advocacy does require some measure of time, commitment and a willingness to stick with it.

Step 1 - Developing Key Messages:

- Identification:
 - define the issues that are important to you
 - decide which of these issues you want to advocated for
 - craft key messages to support your position around these issues
 - distill all information down to its simplest form
 - develop consensus on the issues
 - be able to separate fact from fiction ie. ensure you can prove the content of your key messages

- Framing:
 - develop 3 key messages that explain the salient points of your issues in simple language
 - each key message should be 25 words or less
 - each key message must be clear, compelling and consistent
 - practice presenting your key messages to someone with no knowledge of your issues and see if they understand them

- Knowing to Whom to Advocate:
 - determine if your issues fall within federal, provincial or local jurisdiction, or some combination
 - if you do not already have existing relationships with all of your local elected representatives, contact them and introduce yourself and your issues
 - do the same with any locally-based bureaucrats (including municipal/regional government staff people) and political staffers that may have an impact on your issues

- Knowing When to Advocate:
 - timing is everything – if your issues are in the media and top of mind for decision-makers, that is the moment you should make your views known
 - newly elected politicians often look for issues to champion – try to position your issues as ones they should consider taking on as their own
 - make sure that at election time, you approach all of your local candidates with your issue concerns, not just the person seeking re-election

Step 2 - Advocacy Tools:

- The means of delivering your key messages
- Anything you have or produce that is used by you to communicate with members, supporters or people outside of your advocacy effort, is a potential tool
- Sample advocacy tools include:
 - web site
 - newsletter
 - in person meeting
 - telephone call
 - voice mail information
 - letter/fax/e-mail
 - direct mail campaign
 - advocacy day
 - brochure
 - fact sheet
 - news release
 - newspaper/periodical article/op editorial/PSA/advertorial
 - published book
 - information session
 - e-advocacy

Step 3 - Presenting Your 'Ask':

- Using your selected advocacy tools, deliver your key messages and ask the decision-maker for the **one thing you need to support your policy issues, not a list of what you want**
- Your one ask must be tangible – more than just asking someone for ‘support’ or ‘help’
- As with your key messages, consensus on the ‘ask’ will be important, because people engaged in your cause may have varying perspectives on what the effort needs
- Sometimes opportunities will present themselves that will make the ‘ask’ very timely

Meeting with Your Elected Representatives

Of all of the tools you may choose to employ in support of your advocacy efforts, one of the most effective is an in person meeting with your locally elected federal or provincial representatives. It allows you to deliver the key messages and ‘ask’ directly to the people that need to hear it the most. This section will walk you through the process of preparing, attending and following up from an in person meeting.

Finding Your MP:

Finding your Member of Parliament (MP) and their contact information is easy. Log on to the Elections Canada web site at www.electionscanada.ca. Type your postal code in the box on the home page. There you will find all of the contact information you need. Elections Canada can also be reached at 1-800-463-6868.

Otherwise, look in your local telephone directory in the Blue Pages under ‘Members of Parliament’.

Finding Your Provincial Member of Parliament:

Every province has a comparable agency to Elections Canada that oversees provincial general elections.

- www.elections.gov.nl.ca
- www.electionspei.ca
- www.electionsnovascotia.ns.ca
- www.gnb.ca/elections
- www.electionsquebec.qc.ca
- www.electionsontario.on.ca
- www.elections.mb.ca
- www.elections.sk.ca
- www.electionsalberta.ab.ca
- www.elections.bc.ca

Contacting Your Elected Representative:

- Telephone the local constituency office and advise the person who answers who you are and that you live in the riding
- Take notes during the conversation
- Ask to make an appointment to meet with your federal or provincial elected representative as soon as possible to discuss the issues of concern to you
- Note the name of the person that you speak with
- If you are told that your elected representative is too busy to meet with you right away, insist that you'd still like to meet with that person, but that you'd be pleased to meet with an assistant if that could be arranged quickly
- Be flexible in deciding the date and time of the meeting
- Immediately upon booking an appointment, confirm the date and time in a letter, fax or e-mail to the person you spoke with, including:
 - the issues you'd like to discuss and what you want to achieve
 - a list of people who will be attending the meeting (ie. patient, spouse, caregiver, health professional) – it is suggested that no more than three people (including yourself) attend the meeting

Before the Meeting:

- Know your elected representative - research his/her background on their political party web site
- Provide any material that you want your elected representative to read ahead of time (keep it brief)
- Just prior to the meeting, telephone the elected representative's office and confirm who you will be bringing, and ask for information on who will be attending along with the elected representative (if anyone)
- In that same call, confirm the date and time once again

At the Meeting:

- Arrive 10 minutes prior to the meeting
- After exchanging pleasantries, you have one minute within which to ensure that you have engaged your elected representative
- In that first minute, you must indicate:
 - who you are
 - why you are there (your 3 key messages)
 - what you need your elected representative to do for you (your ‘ask’)
- Tell your story with sincerity and passion, indicating why it is an important issue
- Take notes
- Know the core facts and present the ones you feel most relevant to supporting your story
- If you are asked a question that you do not know the answer to, commit to getting the information requested
- Repeat your key messages throughout
- Conclude with the ‘ask’ – what tangible thing you want to see happen ie. for your elected representative to write a letter on your behalf to another official in government
- Know how long the meeting is and leave enough time for discussion and interaction
- Let your elected representative speak – effective advocacy is about presenting, listening and responding
- If you are unclear about something, ask for clarification – do not be afraid to ask questions, but keep them focused on the issue at hand
- Be patient – your key messages are likely a few of many your elected representative will hear that day
- Establish clear follow-ups, with timelines and assigned responsibilities

After the Meeting:

- Take a moment to discuss and evaluate the meeting with the people that attended with you
- Provide any further information right away that may have been requested
- Call, write, fax or e-mail to thank your elected representative for meeting with you
- Follow-up shortly thereafter to track progress and advise what you are doing to move the issue forward – be persistent

What NOT to do:

- Threaten anyone
- Talk down or belittle anyone
- Waste anyone's time
- Present repetitive versions of the same argument
- Engage in an emotional display of anger or frustration

Writing Letters:

One of the most popular advocacy tools is letter writing – or more specifically, writing a letter to your elected representative. Such letters can be delivered by post, fax, courier or e-mail. Below is a sample letter that was used by SSC during our successful campaign to the Government of Canada, in which we called for the establishment of a Canadian Mental Health Commission.

Here are some letter writing tips to assist you:

- Always ensure that the first paragraph of your letter clearly states that you are a constituent of the elected representative that you writing to and tells that person why you are writing to them ie. what is your issue
- The second paragraph should ideally focus on your story or experience as a person impacted by mental illness and link back to the main issue you're writing about
- The next few paragraphs should note your core facts and deliver your 3 key messages, providing further information about why you are writing this letter
- Then set out your 'ask' – the tangible thing that you need your elected representative to do for you
- Conclude by thanking them and asking for a written response – and if you've asked them to do something like write a letter on your behalf, indicate that you'd like a copy of that letter
- **Always include your full name, address and other contact information ie. telephone number, e-mail address**

Further information about writing letters to elected representatives can be found at the SSC web site (www.schizophrenia.ca).

Sample Letter

(Name) Member of Provincial Parliament (Constituency)

(Street Address)

(City, Town) (Postal Code)

(Date)

Dear (Mr. Ms. Mrs.) (Surname),

I am writing as one of your constituents to express my concerns as someone affected by mental illness, and to ask for your help.

On May 9, 2006 the Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology released its final report on mental illness and mental health entitled *Out of the Shadows at Last*. The document provides a blueprint to build an innovative and leading edge mental health system that will enhance services and outcomes for all Canadians living with psychiatric illness.

The report, prepared by Senator Michael Kirby and his colleagues, contains some 118 recommendations to improve the lives of people living with mental illness. Many organizations in Canada strongly support the recommendations contained in the report and have been encouraging the federal government to move forward on implementation.

I am writing to you as my elected representative because I want Ottawa to move quickly on a key recommendation previously tabled by the Committee; the establishment of a Canadian Mental Health Commission. Such a body would mobilize federal, provincial, and territorial governments, as well as non-governmental organizations, to gather information on the state of mental illness and address service needs in a coordinated and comprehensive fashion. This would provide an accurate picture of the mental health system in Canada and ensure that services are equitable and accessible across the country.

Unfortunately, no action has been taken to date, despite the call in the report for the Commission to be up and running by September 1, 2006.

During the last federal election campaign, the Conservative Party of Canada expressed its support for a national commission on mental health in a letter to the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health, stating, the Conservative Party of Canada and Member of Parliament (and then Health Critic) Steven Fletcher “have long called for a Mental Health Commission of Canada and a Conservative government will ensure that such a commission is established.”

Now is the time to put these words into action. That is why I am asking you to write to the Minister of Health to request that he immediately establish and fund the Canadian Mental Health Commission.

Your willingness to take action now will demonstrate your support for a Canadian Mental Health Commission and the vital first step towards a national strategy on mental illness. The sooner it is operational, the sooner we will begin to see improvements for individuals and families affected by mental illness.

Thank you for your commitment.

I look forward to receiving a response from you.

Sincerely,

Please insert Your Name
Address
Town, Province
Postal Code

cc. The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister
The Honourable Tony Clement, Minister of Health

Organizing a Petition:

Petitions can be a very effective way to raise awareness of your issues (including your 3 key messages and 'ask') with elected representatives. While the sample petition below is from the Ontario Legislature and there may be variations from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, the following is a general guide to having your federal or provincial elected representative present a petition on your behalf. Your local MP or provincial member will be able to provide you with more detail about developing petitions to Ottawa or your provincial legislature.

Step 1:

The first thing you need to do is decide on the wording of your petition. Your petition should tell a story, setting out the issue at hand and asking the government to take a particular action to address the matter.

"Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan does not cover the cost of the PSA (prostate specific antigen) test as an early method of detection for prostate cancer in men;

"Whereas mammogram tests for women are fully covered by the Ontario insurance plan for early detection of breast cancer, and the PSA test for men is only covered once the physician suspects prostate cancer,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We support Bill 201. We believe PSA testing should be covered as an insured service by the Ontario health insurance program. Prostate cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in Canadian men. At least one in every eight Canadian men is expected to develop the disease in their lifetime. Some five million Canadian men are currently at risk in their prostate-cancer-risk years, which are between the ages of 45 and 70. For many seniors and low-income earners, the cost of the test would buy up to a week's worth of groceries for some individuals."

Step 2:

Start to disseminate the petition:

- Print off multiple copies and distribute to people within your community – you can also e-mail the petition and ask people to print off copies themselves

- Make sure that you keep track of who you sent the petitions to and when you sent it to them
- Make sure you indicate that the completed petitions are to be returned to you (and perhaps one other person) – provide a mailing address, e-mail address and contact telephone number
- Ask individuals to send back the petitions they have completed within a certain period of time ie. 3 weeks – you can always send out another round to people within your community in subsequent months

Step 3:

While the petitions are circulating, contact your local elected representative:

- Telephone their office and tell them you are collecting signatures on a petition – read/send a copy of the petition to them – ask if your elected representative will agree to present the petitions in the legislature (YOU MUST GET CONFIRMATION OF THEIR COMMITMENT TO PRESENT THE PETITIONS, PREFERABLY IN WRITING) – if they agree to present the petitions, make an appointment to see your elected representative to deliver them
- If they do not or will not agree to present the petitions, tell them that you will find another elected representative in the province who will do so on behalf of their constituents
- At the meeting with your elected representative, tell them when you would like the petitions presented in the federal or provincial legislature
- Get confirmation of a date for presentation and hand the completed petitions to your elected representative
- Ask your elected representative to sign the petition and have some pictures taken of the group of you meeting – you may also want to invite the local media to attend the meeting, write a story and take some pictures, but confirm with your elected representative ahead of time
- Stay in contact with your elected representative’s office leading up to the presentation date just to make sure everything is on track

How to Work with the Media

The **media** may be broadly defined as the business of conveying information, although the term generally refers to the mass communication of publications and broadcast (including newspapers, magazines, radio, television and the internet). An **editor** is a person responsible for the editorial aspects of a newspaper, magazine or television broadcast. **Reporters or journalists** discover information about news events and either describe or write about them for a newspaper or magazine or for radio or television. A **press officer** is a person working within an organization whose specific role is to deal with the media.

Developing a Relationship with the Media

The first rule in establishing a relationship with the media is that your communication must always qualify as ‘news’. It is important that your news meets some or all of the following criteria:

- Information – does it contain something that listeners, viewers or readers don’t already know?
- Timeliness – is the information being provided well enough in advance to allow it to be taken advantage of within the season, schedule or calendar?
- Accuracy – will factual information help people understand something better or in an unbiased way?
- Significance – will it affect the lives of listeners, viewers or readers?
- Scope – does it have an impact on the majority of the community?
- Interest – is it intrinsically able to attract and hold public attention?
- Uniqueness – is it unlike any other information, or if similar, has it an element that makes it stand out?
- Human Interest – is it relevant on a personal level to many people because of a home town or family aspect?
- Relevance – it is a topic that enhances public understanding of a constant, or pressing local issue?

Although the media is generally driven by unanticipated events, it still provides a powerful and far-reaching opportunity to communicate your key messages.

Communicating Issues and Messages to the Media

There are several ways in which you can create and enhance your relationship with those working in the media and convey a positive impression about your issues. Following the suggestions below will help you gain the most from the media:

- Develop a list of media contacts that includes editors, reporters and journalists who cover health issues and keep them informed of important activities and issues you or your group are working on
- Identify publications that cover the types of news relevant to your issues
- Familiarise yourself with these publications
- When you first call, ask whether it is a good time, or if they would like to be contacted later
- Ask how they would like to receive information (fax, email, phone etc)
- Ask what kind of stories interest them
- Make sure you get their direct phone line, fax and/or email
- Keep a note of reporter responses – it may be worth opening a file in which you keep notes of what has been discussed each time contact is made
- When you subsequently call, remind the reporter of what was discussed before, for example ‘you might remember we spoke about the issues affecting cancer patients a few weeks ago’. This helps build a relationship.
- Invite them to any event your organization may have. They are more likely to remember you after a face-to-face meeting.
- Answer all media enquiries promptly, fully, accurately and courteously. If you do not know the answer, find it and get back to the reporter immediately or refer the reporter to another appropriate source for the information such as the BMC. In this way, you can establish your group as a valuable and helpful information resource and develop an effective relationship to secure balanced, consistent and frequent coverage in the future.
- All reporters work by deadlines. Your first question must always be ‘What is your deadline?’ You must provide the information quickly so that the reporter meets that deadline. If you do not provide the information in time, your side of the story will not be told. Furthermore, that reporter will not come back to you on other stories.
- Stress facts and keep to the main story. Many reporters react against attempts at self-promotion. At the same time, use your contact with the reporter to explain what your issues are. There might be future story possibilities if that reporter understands the issues in context, beyond the particular aspect in which he/she is currently interested.

Ensure you give all reporters equal access to information. Favouring one reporter can be extremely damaging to your relationships with others. However, if a reporter contacts you for a story, their initiative should be respected; there is no obligation to call other reporters. When dealing with reporters that appear hostile, sceptical or disinterested, do not react emotionally. Discuss issues calmly and back-up statements with facts. Do not lose your temper or act defensively, as this can easily result in an uncomplimentary story. It is not worth approaching the media with a story unless it is newsworthy. Appearing desperate and wasting reporters' time will result in your issue being ignored.

The Interview

Always ensure the relevant person is available for an interview with the media. Below are some suggestions that will help ensure a successful interview:

- Be warm and caring, yet professional
- Use clear language that is easy to understand. Try not to use specific terminology or sound like you are quoting complex medical documents. Neither reporters nor the audience can relate to something they do not understand.
- Have a positive attitude. Welcome the interviewer and questions.
- Try to find out who else is being interviewed for the story
- Be prepared. Make sure you have all the facts ready to support your story and that they come to mind easily. Do not exaggerate or make claims that you can't back up.
- Anticipate questions that might be asked and think how you will respond. You may even ask for a list of questions in advance so you can prepare answers.
- Take the point of view of the public interest. Put yourself and your supporters squarely on the side of the people.
- If asked a direct question, give a direct answer
- Answer one question at a time. If more than one question is asked at a time, answer your favourite first. Ensure you have finished answering the first before moving on and answering subsequent questions.
- Support answers with human interest stories that are relevant to the issue being discussed. This not only backs up your statement, but also ensures you are seen as being on the side of those in need.
- Never speculate. Only give factual information that you can verify.
- If a question contains incorrect information or inappropriate language, do not repeat it, even to deny it. You may answer the question, but repeating any defamatory question may result in a misquote.
- Always tell the truth, even if it is unpleasant. The public trust and credibility of your issues relies on its integrity. It is important not to be seen to be hiding anything.
- Avoid 'off the record' discussion. Do not make a statement unless you want it quoted.

- Consider a possible follow up to the interview. Keep a note of the points the interviewer was particularly interested in or misinformed about, and provide detailed information on them immediately.

Media spokespersons

Below are some suggestions to help you prepare for an interview:

- Ensure the chosen spokesperson feels comfortable talking with the media and has some human interest stories to tell – it is best to have the person directly affected by the issue act as spokesperson
- Identify a spokesperson ahead of time. If possible select one spokesperson for each topic who can speak on that subject with credibility.
- Work with the spokesperson in advance, making sure they understand all the key points and how they may emphasize them effectively
- Keep spokespeople informed with all the latest news in the field of the expertise
- Conduct practice interviews

The news conference/briefing

The difference between a news conference and a news briefing relates to the value of the news. The news conference makes an announcement, or delivers information that is of a critical nature. The news briefing is less formal, and is used to provide an overview or background information on something that is of interest to the public or the press. Both are ‘on the record’. A news conference or briefing provides an opportunity to present detailed facts, to clarify confusing issues, and to answer questions from reporters. News conferences are not recommended. **They should only be used when the story really warrants it or as a damage limitation exercise.** Reporters do not want to waste their valuable time.

News briefings are generally less formal and cameras are not present. They may therefore be held in an ordinary meeting room. A news conference will however require special arrangements, and the following suggestions should be considered:

- Fix a time that is appropriate for the media, bearing in mind reporter’s deadlines
- Identify a location that is convenient for the media. Avoid rooms with windows or mirrors as these can cause problems for cameras.
- Prepare an agenda that provides details of each presentation and those taking part
- Invite reporters several days in advance, and follow up with telephone calls
- Provide a lectern (a stand for the spokesperson) with a microphone for speakers, as well as a space for reporter microphones
- Ensure that all materials and the lectern are appropriately branded with a logo or the name of your organization

- Arrive in advance to check the room is in order and that everything is in place and to test the equipment
- Start promptly; do not waste reporters' valuable time
- Have a well prepared opening presentation that does not last more than 5 minutes (if you can't say it in five minutes look at your presentation again and edit it). The presentation should be followed by a question and answer session.
- Provide media kits for reporters that should include: news release; copy of opening presentation; charts and fact sheets; and any other relevant information. This could also be available on a CD or DVD.
- Ensure someone is assigned to answer any follow up phone calls

The Written Media

Writing a news release

The news release is the most common method of drawing media attention to a particular item of news. The focal point or subject matter may differ from culture to culture, but the basic structure of a news release is the same. The most important aspect of a news release is the lead (first paragraph) which must contain the essential elements. The lead serves two purposes:

- to provide the most important facts; and
- to gain the attention of readers, so they will want to know more

The 5 W's of the story:

Who?
 What?
 Why?
 When?
 Where?

A news release should then proceed to give a more detailed account, but with each subsequent paragraph containing facts of lesser importance than the previous one. If editors have to cut text due to limited space for a story, they tend to cut from the bottom. All news editors will want the facts in a readable and orally comprehensible format. Avoid unnecessary adjectives, adverbs or editorial opinions. If an opinion is an essential part of the story, write it as a direct quote from the relevant person. Ensure the news release is concise. Remember to keep it short and simple. Once you have sent a news release to your media contacts, follow it up with a telephone call. As a news release is considered an invite to a reporter to investigate or to a journalist to write an article, ensure that the appropriate people (press officer, spokesperson etc.) are available to

answer their questions. If they are busy with another journalist, try to have a further person who can manage an 'interview' schedule and arrange an exact time at which an interview can be conducted or call can be returned.

Types of stories

There are two types of stories with the media:

- *News stories*: are generally reported in many media outlets (newspapers, magazines, television, radio and internet). The resulting story generally presents information provided in a press release.
- *Feature stories*: are offered with the expectation of a major story, often accompanied by photos. Such features are written by a journalist assigned to the story by the newspapers, magazine, radio or television station. This journalist will conduct one or more interviews, often in the subject's home or place of business. To place such a feature story you will need to send out a 'pitch letter' to sell the story, to just one journalist at a time.

The feature story

A feature story is a very effective way of developing the identity of an organization and furthering public understanding of an issue. Unlike a straight news item, a feature story allows some in depth examination of a particular aspect of your issue. The writer will have much greater scope for descriptions, explanations, human interest anecdotes (or case studies) and examples that appeal to the audiences' emotions. When thinking of a feature story, first identify the target audience. Where does public understanding need to be enhanced? Are there any negative rumours that persist about your issues or your organisation? A single positive feature can do more to enhance the image of your group than a dozen factual reports. A feature is an excellent way in which to deal with an issue. Discuss with the editor ideas that may make an interesting feature which would appeal to their audience.

Electronic Media

The great majority of people will have access to both television and radio, which are two of the most effective tools for communicating your key messages. In addition, they may have access to the internet.

Radio

Despite the growth of television, radio remains popular. People listen to the radio in their cars, while working around the house, when walking and exercising. The programming

range and number of channels make radio a highly accessible and effective way to communicate. The overall radio audience is large and varied, but by targeting a particular programme or channel you may reach a particular group in terms of age, gender and area of interest.

In addition to following the general tips suggested for interviews, the following are specific to radio interviews:

- Maintain a distance of 14–20cm (6–8in) from the microphone
- Talk normally. Microphones are very sensitive and volume will be adjusted accordingly during transmission.
- Avoid shuffling papers, etc.
- Assume the microphone is ‘live’ and you are on air, unless told otherwise. Save any personal remarks for when you are certain the microphone is off.
- Ask for a brief rehearsal, though rarely will this be possible.

Television

The visual advantage of television is obvious. In many countries it offers the best opportunity to get the message through to the greatest numbers in the shortest time. It may target particular sectors of the population including opinion leaders, major donors and government officials. There are various types of programmes that can convey your key messages: news, talk shows, documentaries, etc. However, the primary requirement that newspapers and radio do not have – the information must be visual. Suggestions to ensure good television coverage:

- Ensure your story is newsworthy. Extensive resources are used in covering a news story for television. If a station is disappointed they may be reluctant to cover future stories.
- Telephone news directors of stations well in advance, do not rely on a news release alone
- Ensure you have good visuals. Television needs an interesting scene, voice, face or some other way of visualizing your story.
- Check out the location and ensure adequate electrical outlets are available for equipment (you may wish to enquire about requirements in advance)
- If there are speeches or prepared statements ensure you have printed copies to give reporters, possibly as part of a media kit
- Schedule the event in the morning to give plenty of time to prepare the final item for the evening news
- Having a person affected by your issue (ie. a patient, a caregiver or a healthcare provider) tell their story - the most interesting aspect of television is about people

Tips for top interviews on camera

Preparation for television, especially when 'live', requires particular preparation and skills:

- Approach an interview as an important opportunity to get across the key messages important to your story/issue, not just to respond to questions
- Prepare carefully. Determine the three most important points you want to make and repeat them often. Use anecdotal examples to add colour and credibility to every assertion.
- Find the focus of the interview well enough in advance to anticipate the questions
- Know the format and style of the interviewer or reporter
- Provide the reporter with background material in advance
- Arrive early so you can become accustomed to the setting and have a chat with the interviewer
- Dress appropriately and remember your body language
- Look, listen and speak to the person talking to you, not at the camera or yourself on the monitor
- Say the most important information first and don't get lost in the details
- Do not discuss as it will make you sound equivocal
- Do not defend in such a way to make you sound defensive
- Do not debate!
- Challenge any effort to put words in your mouth
- Once filming begins assume you are on air until told otherwise

Questions to ask prior to a broadcast interview?

- Live or taped interview?
- Panel or one-on-one?
- Length of interview?
- Name of show?
- Name of interviewer?
- Location of interview?

The 3 C's of an interview

- Confidence – Be confident in your knowledge, you know your subject better than the journalist
- Clarity – Use clear, conversational style and avoid jargon
- Control – Take charge of the interview. Preparation is the key. There is no such thing as a wrong question, only a wrong answer.

Questions to ask when the media calls

Before conducting an interview, ask:

- Who do you work for?
- What's your beat?
- What's the story about?
- Who else are you interviewing?
- What's your deadline?

Photography

'A picture is worth a thousand words.' - Napoleon Bonaparte (French general, politician and emperor (1769–1821)). Despite Napoleon's famous observation, only a 'good' picture is worth a thousand words. Indeed, pictures can make all the difference and are one of the most dramatic ways of enforcing a story. Furthermore, a story is more likely to get printed with a good picture. However, health care and patient issues can be difficult to photograph. Many people do not like pictures that deal with the reality of illness. You will need to think hard about how to convey your message within a picture that will really grab the readers' attention, drive their curiosity and make them want to read more.

Tips for good photography

- Think what the picture says
- Take people centred pictures, people are what the story is about.
- Ensure the logo is clearly visible, but not anywhere it would not naturally be placed (you do not wish the picture to look faked)
- Gear the photo to the theme. For example, show people in action.
- Faces speak for themselves so highlight them, particularly interaction between people
- Make the scene interesting, do not just show a face but include some action or the environment in the background
- If your photo depicts celebrities, try to seek out opportunities when they are doing something or at least interacting with others
- Ban pictures of photo donations (usually cheques) and force photography to be more creative
- Do not have more than four people in one photograph
- Avoid dark backgrounds

When Media Call – Quick Tips

Remember to review your key messages before doing the interview.

Before conducting an interview, ask:

Who do you work for?
What's your beat?
What's the story about?
Who else are you interviewing?
What's your deadline?

If your interview is for the broadcast media, also ask the following questions:

Is the interview live or taped?
A panel or one-on-one interview?
What is the length of the interview?
Name of the show?
Name of interviewer?
Location of interview?