



Encouraging safe and purposeful media reporting

Why include this strategy in LifeSpan?

Research has shown that media representations of suicide can lead to a “copycat” effect, otherwise known as a “Werther” effect, where exposure to depictions or stories of suicide through the media can lead to suicidal behaviours. To prevent such an effect, a number of countries have developed resources and guidelines to advise the media in the responsible reporting of suicide. Primarily, these guidelines recommend that media not glorify, sensationalise or normalise suicide, provide information about health resources, avoid providing details about methods, avoid using stigmatising language (e.g. “commit suicide”) and avoid perpetuating myths about suicide.

Evidence supporting recommended interventions in LifeSpan

In mid-1987, media guidelines for suicide were implemented in Vienna in response to an increase in subway-related suicides and corresponding media reports. Researchers observed an 84.2% decrease in sub-way-related suicide deaths and attempts (n = 19 to n = 3) from the first half of the year before the guidelines were introduced compared to the second half of the year after the guidelines were introduced¹.

In Australia, the Mindframe National Media Initiative (Mindframe) engage in various activities including releasing guidelines, creating resources and running workshops for media and non-media professionals to ensure responsible portrayals and reporting for both fictional and non-fictional suicides. A media monitoring project conducted in 2000 and a follow up study in 2007 found that there was an increase in the quality of media reporting in news, television and radio after the introduction of Mindframe’s Reporting Suicide and Mental Illness resource. Overall, the evidence for the impact of guidelines on suicidal behaviours is limited², but collaborative approaches with media professionals in the creation and implementation of guidelines and training have been recommended for the greatest success³.

What is happening in LifeSpan NSW trial sites?

LifeSpan have collaborated with Mindframe to develop Mindframe Plus, an enhanced delivery of Mindframe training providing support to the regional collaborative in communicating about and responding to suicide in the media. Mindframe Plus targets local media representatives, suicide prevention multiagency group members, organisational leaders and local leaders who might be involved in community support after suicide or who might be asked to comment on suicide by the media. Community members recruited into the LifeSpan Champions program will also receive Mindframe training.

How will this be evaluated in LifeSpan?

LifeSpan will be conducting a national media monitoring study, examining the quality of suicide-related reporting over the course of the LifeSpan trial, comparing LifeSpan trial sites against non-trial sites.

LifeSpan is also working with Mindframe on their feedback evaluation surveys, distributed pre-Mindframe training, post-training and at 12-month follow up.

To find out how to make a difference, please contact us at: info@suicidepreventioncentralcoast.org.au



Key References

For more detailed information on the evidence underpinning LifeSpan and the NSW research trial visit www.lifespan.org.au

1. Etzersdorfer E, Sonneck G. Preventing suicide by influencing mass-media reporting. The Viennese experience 1980-1996. Archives of Suicide Research. 1998;4(1):67-74.
2. Pirkis J, Blood RW, Beautrais A, Burgess P, Skehan J. Media guidelines on the reporting of suicide. Crisis. 2006;27(2):82-87.
3. Wang X. Media guidelines for the responsible reporting of suicide: a review of effectiveness. Crisis: The Journal of Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention. 2012;33(4):190.

To find out how to make a difference, please contact us at: info@suicidepreventioncentralcoast.org.au