

# Responsible Reporting Guide

## Introduction

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As one of the largest providers of housing and supportive services for New Yorkers living with mental health concerns in New York, Community Access recognizes that the media is an important part of our efforts to raise awareness about mental health and to help combat harmful stigmas and stereotypes. We frequently work with the media to produce accurate and informative journalism.

Mental health concerns are complex. They affect all kinds of people regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, or background, and should be covered responsibly in the media. Like physical health, mental health concerns affect individuals but do not define them. For example, a parent and police officer who has arthritis is described as a parent or a police officer, not as an arthritic. The same should be true of someone who lives with bipolar disorder or depression.

## Tips for Covering Mental Health with an Eye Toward Raising Awareness

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Common coverage mistakes can unintentionally cause serious harm to readers/viewers/subjects. Conversely, timely inclusion of a needed resource could be of tremendous help.

### WHEN YOU COVER MENTAL HEALTH, PLEASE:

- Use person-centered language. (“person living with schizophrenia” vs. “schizophrenic”)
- Refrain from emphasizing diagnoses; mental health is simply one part of the broader person.
- Refrain from using language that is stigmatizing: “person living with mental health concerns” instead of “mentally ill person” or “the mentally ill.”
- Remember that recovery is a journey, not a destination. (Try not to characterize relapse with negative connotations or as bad or weak behavior.)
  - Even the word "recovery" implies a baseline of overcoming something, which can sometimes be misleading. For many people with mental health concerns, “maintaining a certain level of wellness” is a more apt description.
- Avoid coverage that seeks to persuade readers that one pathway of recovery is better than others.

- Be aware that at least one in five Americans faces mental health challenges at some point in their lives.
- Avoid using comparisons to “normalcy.”

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- Remember that people experiencing mental health concerns are no more violent toward others than the general population.
- Talk about mental health concerns as matter-of-factly as you would talk about a physical health diagnosis; avoid tones that are pitying or imply helplessness or hopelessness.
- Do not sensationalize a mental health diagnosis when it is part of a story you are covering.
- Do not conflate social or economic issues with mental health concerns; a person who is homeless or who has substance use issues may or may not also live with mental health issues and vice versa.
- Do not assume or imply that mental health concerns indicate a lack of intelligence or education.

Thank you for your commitment to accurate, responsible media coverage.

## Did you know?

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People diagnosed with mental health concerns are more frequently the targets, rather than the perpetrators, of violence. One-quarter of Americans diagnosed with mental health concerns is the victim of a violent crime each year. This is well above the rate of victimization of those without mental health concerns.

**Swanson, J & Belden. 2018. *JAMA Psychiatry*. 75(7):669-670**

"Most violence is committed by people who have never been in contact with mental health services and the overwhelming majority of mental health service users have never been violent."

***Understanding Psychosis and Schizophrenia, British Psychological Society 2017***

Our perceptions around the correlation between mental health and violence are likely based in part from the ongoing discriminatory news reporting around individuals with mental health concerns. A 2016 John Hopkins University study "found that more than a third of all news

stories about mental health conditions were linked with violence toward other people," even though "data suggests only 3 to 5 percent of violent acts can be attributed to serious mental illness."

*Huffington Post*

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For additional info, we encourage you to visit <https://www.mentalhealth.gov/basics/mental-health-myths-facts>, and/or to contact:

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