



## Reporting on mental illness in LGBTI communities

It is important to acknowledge that statistics relating to suicide and mental illness in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex communities are not routinely collected. However recent research has indicated that mental ill-health, self-harm, suicide attempt and suicidal ideation rates within these communities are disproportionately higher.

Private Lives 2 (2012) surveyed almost 4,000 LGBT people and found:

- High rates of depression in same-sex attracted men (24% of the sample), same-sex attracted women (33%), and transgender men (38%) and women (50%).
- Nearly 80 percent had experienced at least one episode of intense anxiety in the 12 months prior to completing the survey.

The First Australian National Trans Mental Health Study (2014) found that compared to the general population transgender people:

- Appear to be four times more likely to have ever been diagnosed with depression.
- Are approximately 1.5 times more likely to have ever been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder.

Further current research is available on the National LGBTI Health Alliance website

[lgbtihealth.org.au/hub/](http://lgbtihealth.org.au/hub/)

### Recommendations for reporting about a person with a mental illness

**Avoid linking sexuality, gender identity or intersex characteristics to suicide.** Increased prevalence of mental ill-health and suicidality among LGBTI people is linked to the impact of discrimination and exclusion.

**Consider whether mental illness is relevant to the story.** Speculation about mental illness contributes to stigma and discrimination. Where possible confirm through official sources and follow media codes relating to discrimination, privacy, grief, and trauma.

**Check the representation is fair and balanced.** Seek expert advice to ensure your story does not exaggerate a person's illness or the effect this has on their behaviour or life.

**Take care interviewing a person with a mental illness.** While many people are happy to speak to the media, it can be difficult to talk publicly about a deeply personal issue. Where possible, source someone who is supported to speak to the media and ensure there are no legal considerations.

**Report from police incidents and courts with care.** Confirm mental illness is relevant to the story and ensure not to perpetuate myths about links between mental illness and violence as these stories relate to specific and relatively rare circumstances.

**Use recommendations for online content.** Consider implementing procedures to manage message boards for posts that may be harmful or from people in crisis.

**Apply cultural considerations.** Be aware of differences in language and communication styles for Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

### Consider the language used



Respectful and appropriate language can impact on health and wellbeing. Some key points to remember in relation to inclusive language include:

- Choose accurate and respectful language that separates a person from their diagnosis (e.g. a person is 'living with' or 'has a diagnosis of' mental illness).
- Take care not to stigmatise mental illness by use of colloquialisms or terminology out of context.
- Check people's preferred names, gender identity and pronouns as well as those of their partner in a respectful way and confirm prior to running a story, news report or interview.
- Only include details about a person's body, behaviour or identity if it is relevant and avoid sensationalising these factors for the sake of perceived public curiosity.

For more information, visit the National LGBTI Health Alliance [www.lgbtihealth.org.au](http://www.lgbtihealth.org.au)



**Be mindful of reinforcing stereotypes.** Balanced and accurate reporting can increase understanding, but stereotypes can contribute to negative community attitudes and stigma.

Myths 	Facts 
People who are mentally ill are violent	People with a mental illness are much more likely to be the victims of violence
People are unable to recover from mental illness	Most people will recover completely and go on to live full and productive lives
Mental illnesses are all the same	There are many types of mental illnesses and related symptoms

**Present information about mental illness in ways that are helpful including:**

- Covering mental illness accurately and sensitively.
- Sharing stories of people with lived experience of mental illness.
- Emphasising the importance of seeking help.
- Providing information about specific illnesses, policy implications, and debates on mental health care delivery.

*Consider how celebrity stories are framed. This is also important when reporting on well known members of the LGBTI community. Before reporting, consider the reliability of your source, and the language and images you use.*

*Presenting a story as entertainment or gossip trivialises mental illness, but respectful coverage can break down stigma and encourage others to seek help.*



[www.mindframe-media.info](http://www.mindframe-media.info)



**Apply appropriate helplines.** To help ensure stories about mental illness do not impact negatively on people who are vulnerable, add help-seeking information such as QLife, which provides nation-wide peer-supported telephone and web-based services to support LGBTI people of all ages.

### Promote help-seeking

#### National 24/7 crisis support

##### Suicide Call Back Service

1300 659 467  
[www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au](http://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au)

##### Lifeline 13 11 14

[www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)  
beyondblue 1300 22 4636  
[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

##### MensLine Australia

1300 78 99 78  
[www.mensline.org.au](http://www.mensline.org.au)

#### National support and advice

##### QLife [www.qlife.org.au](http://www.qlife.org.au)

1800 184 527 (5:30pm–10:30pm)

##### MindOUT!

[www.lgbthealth.org.au/mindout](http://www.lgbthealth.org.au/mindout)

#### Youth specific services

Clinical intervention and advice  
**headspace** [www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au)

1800 650 890

24/7 crisis support

**Kids Helpline** 1800 55 1800

[www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au)

**For expert advice on reporting suicide and mental illness contact:**

#### Mindframe

02 4924 6904  
[www.mindframe-media.info](http://www.mindframe-media.info)

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#### SANE Media Centre

0414 427 291  
[www.sane.org](http://www.sane.org)

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*This quick guide is supported by more detailed information online. Journalists can also download the Mindframe app for media professionals, available on both Apple and Android devices.*