



# Shift the conversation

Community Health and Wellbeing Week

*People and Communities First*

September 26 - October 1, 2016

## Media Relations Guide

### Purpose

In the lead-up to Community Health and Wellbeing Week use this guide to help you produce special events and storylines that demonstrate how your centre is putting people and communities first.

### Some story ideas

The first step is to come up with a focus for your special event or media outreach activity. Some strategies are listed below. And given that our main message is *People and Communities First* here are some questions to get your creative juices flowing:

- Is there something new and interesting happening at your centre that demonstrates the value of having community members govern your centre?
- Can you demonstrate a strong outcome because you have engaged community members in a meaningful way in the development of a service or program?
- Is there a social, economic or environmental issue in your community that is harming people's health? What is your centre doing to address it and what has been the positive impact?

Special events or media relations materials that answer these questions are definitely newsworthy.

### Tools

Consider a wide variety of materials, channels and strategies to get editors and journalists to pay attention to your story or special event.

- a news advisory issued in advance of a special event. (*AOHC is providing you with a template*)
- a tour invitation that outlines what newsworthy information will be featured, as well as photo opportunities
- a news release that succinctly summarized new information, and quotes key players in the story and provides reporters with information about how they can follow up
- social media reminders
- press kits containing additional information on your story or issue. The more background information you can provide a reporter, the more likely your story will be covered in an optimal way.

## Strategies

Here are a few tips developed by AOHC's Jason Rehel, a former editor for one of Canada's national newspapers.

1. **Research what's already making local news.** Develop your special event or storyline based on what's already being covered in the local news, then get in touch with reporters covering the story and pitch them on your new angle. For instance, if your local paper has been covering homelessness in a particular neighbourhood, frame your story as an alternative version of that same story, told from your centre or team's angle.
2. **Consider what kind of story you are telling.** If your story provides new information relevant to public policy or the business world, then it's "hard news" and you should target the news editors and journalists. If your story doesn't contain any major news nuggets but shines light on an important social or environmental issue then it's "soft news" and feature editors are a better target.
3. **Focus on individual reporters/editors who you know cover social and/or health issues.** Write them short, personalized emails that precede a press release or news advisory, which should be copied and pasted into the body of your email, not just attached as a PDF. Mention that you've been reading their stories about a particular issue, then explain the connection to what you are pitching.
4. **Follow up over email or phone after you send a press release or advisory, but NOT to ask if they received the release.** Instead, pitch your story and/or event using a strong, three-sentence pitch that focuses on the most new and interesting part of your story. If you're sending a follow-up email, highlight another part of the reporter's work and how you think the story you've suggested helps take their work in a new direction. You can remind them that you sent a release towards the end of the call/email. Also, avoid calling in the late afternoon when most reporters are working on deadline.
5. **Offer reporters access to experts and insiders.** Board members, fundraisers, spokespeople for agencies you collaborate with, municipal government allies, key staff, and community program developers are all examples of people who can strengthen your story. Suggest them as sources and make sure they are accessible.
6. **Do it with data.** When possible back up your story with data and make sure you have someone at your centre/team who can speak to it.
7. **Show them the money.** Reporters will "follow the money". You increase your chances of making news if you can highlight how your story connects to overall health system planning/funding.
8. **Go with your gut, and aim for theirs.** If your story has a strong human interest component, then emotion can help provide a basis for your pitch to local media. Especially on the community level, human interest stories can break through. If a person affected by a program or service gives permission, quote them directly in your news release to back of the facts about your centre you are presenting.
9. **Be your own storyteller.** If a news outlet doesn't attend your event in person, once it's over send them quotes, photos, videos, candid descriptions. They may well provide coverage after the fact.