

Handling Media Inquiries on COVID-19 related issues

Being approached by the media can be intimidating, whether they are asking about good news or bad. When a journalist, reporter, blogger, or producer reaches out to you about the ways COVID-19 may impact on your CLCs work it's always best to notify your Communications lead.

Who Can Help Me?

Official Spokesperson on COVID-19: Designate an official spokesperson. Be aware that as the situation continues to develop, your CLCs positions on issues around the impact of COVID-19 on services and communities may be potentially controversial or sensitive.

Communications Lead: Your CLCs communications lead is responsible for fielding media inquiries and responding to media requests. If a member of the media reaches out to you directly for an interview regarding your subject matter expertise, please involve your CLCs communications lead as soon as possible.

What are your CLCs Policies Concerning Access?

- Physical distancing decisions that affect clients and the general public should apply to media.
- The Communications lead should be as helpful as possible to the media. However, clients and staff have a right to privacy. Reporters are not allowed to disrupt the provision or continuity of the legal services provided.
- Speaking to members of the news media on the part of staff or clients is always voluntary. If a reporter approaches you with an impromptu question, feel free to refer him/her to the Communications lead. Never feel obligated to answer questions on-the-fly when you haven't had time to prepare. Reporters are always asked to coordinate any inquiries with the Communications lead.

PREPARING MESSAGES IN LINE WITH THE COMMUNITY LEGAL SECTOR'S VALUES¹

Key messages to consider:

- Share facts and accurate information about the disease.
- Challenge negative stereotypes and correct misconceptions
- Choose words carefully. The way we communicate can affect the attitudes of others
- Collective solidarity and cooperation is needed to prevent further transmission and alleviate the concerns of communities.

¹ The do's and don'ts section and other key points are adapted from the Guide for Preventing and Addressing Social Stigma associated with COVID-19 published by UNICEF and WHO (2020)
[https://www.unicef.org/media/65931/file/Social%20stigma%20associated%20with%20the%20coronavirus%20disease%202019%20\(COVID-19\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/65931/file/Social%20stigma%20associated%20with%20the%20coronavirus%20disease%202019%20(COVID-19).pdf)

- Share sympathetic narratives, or stories that humanize the experiences and struggles of individuals or groups affected by the new coronavirus (COVID-19)
- Communicate support and encouragement for those who are on the frontlines of response to this outbreak (health care workers, volunteers, community leaders etc).
- The Community Legal Sector in Australia promotes physical distancing as a socially responsible act of solidarity in support of those that are at higher risk of being severely affected by the virus. Our sector will remain socially connected and committed to high quality deliver services to the communities we serve.
- The Community Legal Sector in Australia is concerned about the on-going discriminatory effects of social stigma
- The Community Legal Sector in Australia is concerned about the exacerbation of poverty and social exclusion
- The Community Legal Sector in Australia would like to emphasize that health, economic, and natural crises can add to the pressures and inequities facing survivors and others who are already more vulnerable to economic and health insecurity.
 - People who are surviving violence in their relationships and families may be experiencing increased isolation and danger due to the current outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). Survivors may have specific needs around safety and health, and it is crucial to take those needs into consideration.

Some DOs and DON'Ts on language when talking about the new coronavirus disease (COVID-19):

DO - talk about the new coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

Don't - attach locations or ethnicity to the disease, this is not a "Wuhan Virus", "Chinese Virus" or "Asian Virus".

DO - talk about "people who have COVID-19", "people who are being treated for COVID-19", "people who are recovering from COVID-19" or "people who died after contracting COVID- 19"

Don't - refer to people with the disease as "COVID-19 cases" or "victims"

DO - talk about "people who may have COVID-19" or "people who are presumptive for COVID-19"

Don't - talk about "COVID-19 suspects" or "suspected cases".

DO - talk about people "acquiring" or "contracting" COVID-19

Don't talk about people "transmitting COVID-19" "infecting others" or "spreading the virus" as it implies intentional transmission and assigns blame.

DO - speak accurately about the risk from COVID-19, based on scientific data and latest official health advice.

Don't - repeat or share unconfirmed rumours, and avoid using hyperbolic language designed to generate fear like "plague", "apocalypse" etc.

DO - talk positively and emphasise the effectiveness of prevention and treatment measures. For most people this is a disease they can overcome. There are simple steps we can all take to keep ourselves, our loved ones and the most vulnerable safe.

Don't - emphasise or dwell on the negative, or messages of threat. We need to work together to help keep those who are most vulnerable safe.

DO - emphasise the effectiveness of adopting protective measures to prevent acquiring the new coronavirus, as well as early screening, testing and treatment.