



# Health Equity at the Centre

## Community Health and Wellbeing Week

October 16 to 22, 2017

## Media Relations Guide

### Purpose

In the lead-up to Community Health and Wellbeing Week, use this guide to help you produce special media-friendly events and storylines that demonstrate how your staff, volunteers, and community members are putting health equity at the centre. Reach an engaged local audience by aligning your narratives with what people are talking about in local press and radio.

### Coming Up with Story Ideas

Generating a focus for your special event or media outreach activity is the first step. Here are some strategies for getting the message of Health Equity at the Centre into broader conversations in your community:

- Consider programs, services, or innovations in service delivery (e.g., a volunteer driving program, peer outreach to newcomers) that illustrate health equity in action; things you do regularly, or have started to do regularly that increase the accessibility of the centre's programs and services are all fertile ground for stories.
- Can you demonstrate a strong outcome after you engaged community members in a meaningful way in the development of a service or program? These are the sorts of deliberate steps on health equity that help set you apart from other health providers. If you're able to gather testimonials from people who took part in program design, use those as a starting point to build a story that has heart – and shows results.
- 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.

### Your Media Toolbox

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

- **Issue a News Advisory** in advance of a special event. (*AOHC is providing you with a template*). Especially in an election year, if you're organizing a panel debate at your centre, or even just taking a candidate on a tour, you have the chance to invite reporters along for much-prized access to the people they'll be following and covering over the next eight months. In turn, political candidates don't mind getting the attention and photo opportunities. Position yourself at the intersection of those two points.

- **Send a Press Release** (*using the AOHC template*) that succinctly summarizes new information, and quotes key players in a straightforward and easy to understand story about health equity in action at your centre. Use this to provide reporters with information about how they can follow up.
- **Use Social Media** to remind people widely of your event. Use the handles of publications and/or broadcasting/radio outlets who you think would be interested in covering your event (*see AOHC's sample tweets for #CHWW2017*).
- **Provide Background and Context** on the story or event, especially once someone has expressed interest in attending, but don't inundate. In particular, extend a list of sources for the story, with short bios and direct phone contact information, so that the reporter knows you understand what they need, and the deadlines they're under.

## 8 Strategies for Getting Great Coverage

Here are a few tips developed by AOHC's Jason Rehel, a former health content editor and journalist:

1. **Research what people are talking about locally.** Develop your special event or storyline based on what's already being covered in the local news, and being talked about on social media, 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 important continuation of that 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 local political landscape, then it's "hard news" and you should target news editors and journalists. If your story doesn't contain any major news but shines light on an impact your health equity work is having, then it's "soft news" and feature editors are a better target. In either case, *provide good sources at your centre to speak to why the story matters.*
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, *re-pitch your story and/or event using the newest or most interesting part.* 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 mid to late afternoon when most reporters are working on deadline.
5. **Offer reporters access to experts and insiders.** Clinicians, health promoters, board members, fundraisers, spokespeople for agencies you collaborate with, and community program developers are all examples of people who can strengthen your story ideas.

*People who've been well served by a program or service that addresses health equity would, where possible and approached with care and respect, make excellent sources. In any case, ensure your source is accessible quickly via phone if you offer access to them to a reporter or broadcaster.*

6. **Be nimble with numbers.** Have a collection of basic statistics available to accompany press releases and reporter visits, ideally in a one-page format, that help make the case for your centre's work towards health equity. You could start by using the Health Equity fact sheet template, and customizing it to showcase some of your centre's examples of health equity in action. Have a clinical manager or someone comfortable with the statistics to speak to them if a reporter asks questions.
7. **Lead with heart, guide them to hard health outcomes.** If your story has a strong human interest component (e.g., isolated seniors who've come together and formed friendships exercising, or newcomers who've gained a sense of community over group meals) then emotion can help provide a basis for your pitch to local media. Especially on the community level, human interest stories can and do break through. If a person affected by a program or service gives permission, quote them directly in your news release to support the health outcomes you're presenting.
8. **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, or want to follow up with one of your sources.