

## Media guidelines for reporting on the events of 15 March 2019 and the aftermath of those events

Media have played a significant role in keeping the public informed about events around the Christchurch terrorist events.

*Some media coverage and interviews about the Friday 15 March incident have resulted in significant distress for many New Zealanders.*

These clinically approved guidelines have been prepared with population health expertise to support media when covering the events.

### WE ASK MEDIA:

- Do not publish stills or audio from the live-stream of the attacks.
- Try not to focus stories on graphic details of the violence and the injuries. Avoid too much detail of graphic events.
- Do seek out first responders, survivors or witnesses but focus on positive actions they took and limit or avoid graphic descriptions of what took place.
- Remove from circulation or reduce the prominence of graphic stories that have been published.

### GUIDELINES

Our clinical advice to media when interviewing people and when reporting on the response is:

- Give more prominence to how people feel about their experience and less prominence to the detail of what they saw or heard - graphic details can and do trigger trauma.
- Exclude or limit too much detail on graphic descriptions of what was seen and what happened e.g. injuries, death, dying, distress of the victims - that can traumatise people who weren't directly involved, and retraumatise those who were.
- Do be conscious of the cultural needs of those injured and deceased.
- Try and include messages of kindness and compassion and hope – they are so useful to the public at this time.
- You play an important part in updating the public on key issues. You can also play an important role in helping the public process and deal with their reaction to what's happened in Christchurch.
- **Always** include in your articles, details of where people can get support for the distress they or their whanau may be feeling. Below is suggested text:

**The events in Christchurch are distressing. If you, or someone you know, needs mental wellbeing support or advice then call or text 1737 anytime. There is some great advice on coping after a traumatic event here <https://www.health.govt.nz/node/9714> It includes key information for parents for children.**

### **A SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT THOSE WHO HAVE VIEWED THE FOOTAGE OF THE SHOOTINGS**

Those who witnessed the events or viewed the footage will be highly vulnerable to trauma and significant negative mental health consequences that are likely to be exacerbated by graphic reporting on the violence.

It is imperative that they know that they deserve help and support to process what they have seen while avoiding any message that indicates or states that self-harm or self-destructive behaviours would be understandable or expected as a response to viewing traumatising footage. Seeing stills or hearing audio from the video would be extremely damaging to these individuals and creates a risk of re-traumatising them.

### **RATIONALE**

The trauma of what happened in Christchurch is not just confined to the Canterbury region. At a population level, due to the widely shared and discussed live streaming of the shootings, there are a number of virtual eye witnesses. *Mental health services are dealing with the traumatising effects of that.*

At any time, 1 in 20 New Zealanders will be in a highly vulnerable mental and emotional state. These New Zealanders will always make up a proportion of your audience, and their numbers will have increased because of the wide-ranging impact of the terror attacks.

These people will be put at considerable risk by exposure to graphic reporting of the violence. Those in the Muslim community will be particularly vulnerable to trauma and fear.

*We urge you to not recount eyewitness and first responder accounts in graphic detail. This reporting is causing harm.*

### **NOTE TO JOURNALISTS**

We are aware that journalists covering the terror attacks are under enormous pressure and are having to hear and see things that are extremely distressing. While we know this is part of the job, your wellbeing is important too.

We encourage newsrooms, editors and managers to talk about the possible emotional and physical impacts of covering this story with journalists before, during, and after assigning them to the story. We encourage journalists to talk about how you're feeling with someone you trust, especially a peer or colleague who can somewhat understand what has happened.

While distress is a normal and human response to trauma, you may need professional assistance to cope if you find you are unable to cope with how you're feeling, feel numb or empty, continue to experience strong, distressing emotions, continue to have physical symptoms such as feeling tense, agitated and on edge, have disturbed sleep or nightmares, have no one to support you, experience relationship problems or increase your use of alcohol and drugs.\*

# Canterbury

District Health Board

Te Poari Hauora o Waitaha



NEED TO TALK?

1737

free call or text  
any time

New Zealand Government

Remember it's all right to feel however you're feeling, and it's all right to ask for support to get through. You too can free call or text 1737 any time to talk with a trained counsellor. It's confidential and available 24/7.

\*Credit: [Mindframe](#)

Handwritten signature of David Meates in black ink.

David Meates  
Chief Executive Officer  
Canterbury DHB

Handwritten signature of Dr David Codyre in black ink.

Dr David Codyre  
Clinical Lead 1737  
National Telehealth  
Service

Handwritten signature of Andrew Slater in blue ink.

Andrew Slater  
Chief Executive Officer  
National Telehealth  
Service

Handwritten signature of Shaun Robinson in black ink.

Shaun Robinson  
Chief Executive  
Mental Health  
Foundation of New  
Zealand