

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

Respectful Mental Health Language

For super fund member communications



PURPOSE

Use this guide when drafting, reviewing or approving mental health content for super fund members, including newsletters, emails, website copy, social posts and campaign materials. The aim is to use language that is respectful, plain, accurate and supportive.

FIVE PRINCIPLES FOR MEMBER COMMUNICATIONS:

1

Put the person first:

describe people as people, not as a diagnosis or label.

2

Use plain English:

choose everyday words members can understand.

3

Avoid judgement and assumptions:

do not assume what someone is experiencing or what recovery looks like.

4

Keep language calm and factual:

avoid dramatic, alarmist or sensational wording.

5

Encourage support-seeking:

use language that is respectful, hopeful and focused on support.

Why language matters

Words can help people feel included, respected and understood. They can also reduce stigma, make conversations safer and encourage members to seek support when they need it.

Extra care when writing about suicide or self-harm

Use factual, respectful language. Do not include details about methods or locations. Avoid wording that presents suicide or self-harm as a solution, release or peaceful outcome.

If content advice is needed, use: "Content advice: this content includes discussion of suicide or self-harm."



Remember

Mental health is part of everyone's overall wellbeing.

Avoid using "mental health" as shorthand for mental illness, distress or crisis.



Key message:

Thoughtful language can help reduce stigma, create safer conversations and encourage people to seek support when they need it.

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE: PREFERRED LANGUAGE

Plain English and understandable language

✓ Preferred

Experiencing suicidal distress; thoughts of suicide

Suicide or self-harm

Further suicides; increase in suicidal behaviour;
following a suicide death

Where a person's day-to-day life, relationships with
other people, or ability to work are impacted

⊗ Problematic

Clinical terms like suicidality; suicidal ideation

Intentional or deliberate self-harm

Coding or data-related terms such as intentional
self-harm; deliberate self-harm

Service-related terms like psychosocial disability
without defining them

Sensationalised language

✓ Preferred

Unusual behaviour

Predicted increases in mental distress

Area with high rates of drug use; area of concern

Person currently using methamphetamine; person
seeking treatment for drug dependence

⊗ Problematic

Labelling language like crazed; deranged; psychotic

Mental health time bomb

Alarmist language like drug-affected town

Derogatory language such as meth head; junkie

Mental health concerns

✓ Preferred

Mental health concerns; mental health challenges;
mental health difficulties

A person living with mental health concerns

A person accessing support or treatment for, or living
with, a mental illness

Has a diagnosis of schizophrenia; accessing treatment
for anorexia; living with depression

Their behaviour was unusual

Antidepressants; psychiatrists; mental health workers;
support services

Discharged from hospital

Clinical or medical terms used only within the correct
context

⊗ Problematic

Using the term mental health as a negative state or to
imply mental illness

Mentally ill; insane; mental patient; lunatic; psycho

Victim of; suffering from; afflicted with; hospitalised
for

A schizophrenic; an anorexic; a depressive

Crazed; deranged; mad; psychotic

Happy pills; shrinks; nuthouse

Released from hospital

Psychotic driver; schizophrenic economy; bipolar
weather

Suicide and self-harm

✓ Preferred

Died by suicide; took their own life

Suicide attempt; attempted to end their life

Increased rates of suicide; higher rates of suicide

A person who attempted or died by suicide; he died by suicide

Tragic death; a tragedy

Refrain from using suicide out of context

Content advice: this content includes discussion of suicide

A person with a lived experience or living experience of self-harm; a person who self-harms

They have harmed themselves

Experiencing self-harm; self-harming

⊗ Problematic

Successful suicide; completed suicide; committed suicide

Unsuccessful suicide; failed suicide bid

Skyrocketing rates of suicide; suicide epidemic

Labelling terms associated with suicide methods

Set free; free from his demons; finally at peace; can rest at last

Political suicide; suicide pass or ball; suicide mission

Trigger warning

Self-harmer; attempter; attention seeker

Any description of self-harm methods

Attention seeking; manipulating others; going through a phase

Alcohol and other drugs

✓ Preferred

Person who uses drugs; has an addiction to alcohol; a person who uses cannabis

Person with a dependence on drugs; substance use

Person who no longer uses drugs; person who currently uses drugs

Respond to or address drug use in the community

Increased rates of crystal methamphetamine use; concerning rates of substance use

⊗ Problematic

Addict; junkie; crackhead; drunk; alcoholic; potsmoker

Drug habit

Clean; dirty; fallen off the wagon

Fight or combat drugs; war on drugs

Ice epidemic

Important information

This Quick Reference Guide (QRG) has been compiled by TAL Life Limited ABN 70 050 109 450 (TAL). This QRG has been adapted from *Our words matter: Guidelines for language use* (Everymind, 2023), developed through the Mindframe program. Copyright in the original source content remains with Everymind. The original resource is available at <https://mindframe.org.au/our-words-matter-guidelines-for-language-use>.

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