



## Building **Equitable** Futures

COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELLBEING WEEK  
OCTOBER 4-10, 2021

# Media Relations Guide

## Purpose

As you plan events and activities at your centre for Community Health and Wellbeing Week, use this guide to help you reach local media outlets with your story pitches. The guide contains tips to gain coverage of your staff and organization that show how you are building equitable futures and healthier communities together with your local partners. And remember, if you hit a snag or you're being shut out and wondering how to get your story covered, feel free to reach out to the Alliance for advice, via Jason Rehel: [jason.rehel@allianceon.org](mailto:jason.rehel@allianceon.org).

## Generating good story ideas

Start by developing a focus for your special event or media outreach activity. Some strategies are listed below. Based on our main message of *Building Equitable Futures*, here are some prompts to get your creativity flowing:

- Is there a health equity initiative, program or service at your centre that readily shows how you build equitable futures? This could be a transportation program, a program checking in on isolated community members, anti-racism actions/policies, outreach programs, anti-poverty advocacy, food security programs or more. If the program is new, you'll have a "hook" to pitch to the media about why the story needs to be told.
- Have you engaged community members in a meaningful way in the development of a service or program? Find a way to tell your community's behind-the-scenes story of people working together to build equitable futures through meaningful co-design.
- Is there a specific barrier in your community that your centre addressed directly, and what positive outcomes can you report so far? Examples include: addressing the impacts of climate change on health, harm reduction advocacy and action to keep people safe from the toxic drug supply crisis, digital equity supports and advocacy.

Background materials and press releases that answer these questions are newsworthy. Ensure that you have a spokesperson or two to make available to journalists if someone is interested in the story: think of staff experts, but also volunteers, and with proper permissions and release forms, clients, too. Try to be guided by two ideas: What is the story your whole community needs to hear about the organization's work? Whose voice can best carry this story for maximum impact and audience reach?

## Tools

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

- Media advisory issued in advance of an event ([Alliance template is here](#))
- Tour invitation that offers access to interview subjects, as well as photo opportunities
- News release ([Alliance template is here](#)) that summarizes new information, and quotes key players in the story and provides follow-up details
- Social media reminders, retweets and direct messages
- 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.

## Strategies

Here are a few tips developed by the Alliance's story editor and media relations lead, Jason Rehel:

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 poverty, talk about what your team has been doing on poverty alleviation, help with social assistance navigation, and connections to social services.
2. **Consider what kind of story you are telling.** If your story provides new information, then it's "hard news" and you should target 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 features or life section/health section 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 (no one opens links or attachments anymore, due to malware concerns). Mention that you've been reading their stories about a particular issue, then explain the connection to what you are pitching. Offer to have a phone chat.
4. **Offer reporters access to experts and insiders.** Board members, key staff, fundraisers, spokespeople for agencies you collaborate with, municipal government allies, and community program developers are all examples of people who can strengthen your story. Suggest them as sources and make sure they are accessible to the reporter via phone or email.
5. **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.
6. **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/savings. Any story idea that charts ROI (Return on Investment) is hard news.
7. **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. Real, local human interest stories often break through. If a person affected by a program or service gives permission, quote them directly in your news release to back up the facts you are 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, particularly if the story is mostly put together already. Particularly if you're pitching a smaller or medium-sized community paper, write the story about your event as if it already is the news story. Often smaller publications are in need of "readymade" content that they can simply plug into their website or print publication. Make it clear in your pitch that you're happy for them to use your release as a story, if they see fit!