

Dear Mental Health Partners,

Our collective effort to change public attitudes around mental illness took a giant step forward today:

The Associated Press, an international news organization, will include guidelines for reporting on mental illness in its influential AP Stylebook. Known as the "The Journalists' Bible" for its influence on the media industry, the publication is widely used by print, broadcast and online newsrooms and taught in journalism classes, so the new guidelines present an opportunity to significantly improve the way the news industry reports on mental illness.

The new entry in The Associated Press Stylebook directs news media to avoid describing people as mentally ill unless someone's mental health is clearly pertinent to a story and the person's diagnosis is properly sourced. The new entry addresses the assumption that mental illness is a factor in violent crime and identifies that people with mental illness are more likely to be victims of crime rather than perpetrators. It also suggests a more precise use of language, such as avoiding derogatory terms in health and non-health stories.

As you know, the news media's impact on public attitudes is profound, and ensuring that media portrayals of mental illness and individuals living with mental challenges are accurate and balanced is an important part of the Prop 63 (MHSA) supported efforts the California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA) is making on behalf of counties to reduce stigma and discrimination that prevents people with mental illness from seeking services.

AP was one of many news organizations with which CalMHSA partner, the Entertainment Industries Council (EIC), has conducted outreach in an effort to improve mental health reporting as part of CalMHSA's Stigma and Discrimination Reduction Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative.

An EIC analysis of stories published in more than 20 English- and Spanish-language newspapers in California over 12 months revealed that most coverage about people with mental illness is negative and much of it links mental illness with dangerousness. The analysis, coupled with EIC's survey of 40 California reporters, shows that members of the news profession could benefit from specific guidelines and more resources to help with their coverage of mental health. In response, EIC, through the TEAM Up project, is developing a wealth of resources in English and Spanish for reporters that will supplement AP's mental health guidance. To download the materials, visit www.eiconline.org/calmhsa.

Press releases from the National Association of Broadcasters and AP can be found at <http://www.nab.org/documents/newsRoom/pressRelease.asp?id=2886> and <http://www.ap.org/Content/Press-Release/2013/Entry-on-mental-illness-is-added-to-AP-Stylebook>.

As our Prevention and Early Intervention initiatives continue to unfold, we look forward to sharing more news.

In partnership,

Dr. Wayne Clark
Board President

California Mental Health Services Authority