



australian reproductive
health alliance

A Practical Guide to Engaging the Media about Sexual and Reproductive Health

A Toolkit for Asia-Pacific Parliamentarians



This publication was made possible with financial support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Australian Aid. The views and opinions expressed in this document do not necessarily express those of UNFPA or Australian Aid.



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Introduction



Improving maternal, newborn and child health rests on realising women's sexual and reproductive health (SRH).

Parliamentarians play a vital role in galvanising community support for sexual and reproductive health by engaging with and mobilising the involvement of the media.

The Australian Reproductive Health Alliance (ARHA) has produced this toolkit to support the goals of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and advance the Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5, by:

- Encouraging parliamentarians in the Asia-Pacific region to speak out on issues of sexual and reproductive health
- Ensuring parliamentarians have the skills and confidence to engage with the media in interesting ways about matters of sexual and reproductive health.

Proactively dealing with the media has the potential to result in strong media contacts, greater media coverage, an enhanced public profile and community recognition of what parliamentarians stand for and why when it comes to women's health and wellbeing.

This toolkit is structured in three main sections:

- About the media – providing insights into how the media works and how journalists think
- Communicating about reproductive health – providing information and language to equip parliamentarians to speak with the media for maximum impact.
- Useful resources – practical tools to help prepare for dealing with the media.

You may reproduce the whole toolkit or extracts or summaries, provided the title and the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance (ARHA) are attributed, with a link to our website at <http://www.arha.org.au>. This toolkit is available to download in its entirety at: <http://www.arha.org.au/>.

Section 1: About the media



What are media relations?

Media relations involve working with newspapers, magazines, television, radio and online news content producers for the purpose of informing the public about a certain issue in a positive, consistent and credible manner.

It means coordinating directly with the people who are responsible for producing the news, including journalists, producers, presenters and editors.

The goal of media relations is to maximise positive coverage, in order to advance a particular cause.

Why bother to deal with journalists and the media?

Choosing to proactively engage with the media can:

- Help raise public awareness about causes which are important to you, including sexual and reproductive health
- Allow you to communicate with a large audience or a highly-targeted one
- Act as a valuable independent endorsement of your ideas
- Raise your profile quickly and cost-effectively
- Mobilise support among your constituents
- Forge strong media relationships, which are useful if times get tough.

By engaging the media you can advance the cause of sexual and reproductive health by:

- Promoting evidence-informed policies and advancing gender equality
- Ensuring commitments from government and other organisations are met
- Calling for increased resources
- Mobilising the private sector and community groups to act
- Promoting discussion, debate and understanding among community members.

How do the media work? A day in the life of a journalist

Journalists, producers, researchers, editors and chiefs-of-staff sift through thousands of possible stories every day from sources including other media outlets, local and international news wire services, press releases, their own personal contacts, and from topical and timely news events as they happen.

The bulk of information that flows into a newsroom ends up in the bin.

Many stories which journalists investigate and even conduct interviews for don't ever make it to print or broadcast.

Securing media coverage is different from placing an advertisement because:

- You don't pay for it directly
- You are never guaranteed that your news will be covered and if it is, how your content will be presented
- You can only ever positively influence the outcome, you can't directly control it.

How the main media work

Print

Print media includes daily newspapers, weekly newspapers and magazines. Print outlets usually include a mix of news stories, feature stories (longer in-depth articles), opinion columns (also known as opinion-editorials or op-eds) and reviews (of things such as products and movies).

Because of the number of outlets, print often represents the biggest opportunity to achieve media coverage.

Print journalists usually interview people over the phone, though occasionally they attend press conferences and meet face-to-face with their interview subjects. Often they will want to speak with more than one person to ensure they include multiple perspectives in their articles.

Numbers, statistics and graphs are great because print outlets have more space to run them in, in a format where people can take their time to digest dense or complex information.

In print, placement of an article can be hard to predict, and stories are often dropped due to changing news priorities. The Chief of Staff is the main decision-maker in a newsroom.

Online

Online news outlets and websites favour immediate ‘hard news’ stories. They will often publish news with a great sense of urgency. Pressure to ‘break’ a story first is high, because many people now go online to source their news.

Statistics, facts and figures are used widely in online news stories. But note - because of the immediate nature of the medium, many online outlets will not honour news which is shared under ‘embargo’. An embargo is a request that the information or news provided not be published until a certain date or time. With online, once you share your news with them, expect that they could publish it at any time.

Radio

Radio is often the easiest way to get a story across. Segments include news bulletins and talkback, where callers dial in to comment on a topic of the presenter’s choice. Radio is immediate, and doesn’t require any images or visual prompts to catch a journalist’s attention.

Presenters will often conduct interviews over the phone rather than invite interviewees to sit with them in the studio. The presenter will conduct the interview, with a producer commonly doing the background preparation and research.

Live talkback radio, where listeners dial in to contribute their views on a given topic, enables greater depth of discussion and debate. An advantage of live radio is that you cannot be misquoted or edited down – what you say is exactly what listeners hear.

For radio, speak in clear and short sentences and avoid using statistics unless they are simple and clear. For example, don’t say “26.15% of people” when you can say “one quarter”. Above all, remember that you are being listened to, not read. Use spoken language and try to avoid using jargon.

TV

TV is often the most competitive media to secure coverage on because each story must be able to be told in a way that is accessible to a wide variety of viewers and must have a visual element to accompany it. Opportunities for TV coverage include on news bulletins, current affairs programs (more in-depth coverage of topical issues of the day) and morning shows (lighter, live-to-air information and entertainment-based programs).

TV is the most visual medium. TV shows need interesting pictures and shots to create a news story. Often TV presenters will want to speak with more than one person for their story, and will want these people to be able to distil their main points into catchy seven-second sound bites, known as ‘grabs’.

In TV, the executive producer makes the decisions about what stories will be covered, while the producers and researchers do the background work. They are often the person who will approach you and organise logistics for filming.

Principles of effective media engagement

The five “Fs” of good media relations

You probably already know most of what you need to educate the media about the importance of sexual and reproductive health.

Here are the basics of strong media relations:

- **Factual** - Use statistics, real-life examples and personal anecdotes to bring your story to life.
- **Friendly** - Be courteous by remembering the journalist’s name, reading their articles, and thanking them for their time.
- **Fair** - Treat different news outlets equally by giving them the same chance to cover your story.
- **Fast** - When a journalist calls, always assume it is urgent. Be sure to ask if they are “on deadline?”. A call returned even a few hours later may miss their deadline, and you will lose your chance for media coverage.
- **Frank** - Never mislead a journalist. If you can’t answer a question, say so and then try to get back to them with the answer as soon as possible.’

How to get the media interested in covering your story idea

When you think you have a story which a journalist will be interested in, condense your idea to 2-3 key points and, if possible, link it to a current news issue.

To make it easy for the media to cover your story, be prepared by providing:

- Good ‘talent’ - make sure you have a strong media spokesperson available to comment. They should be interesting, informed and informative
- Visuals – make sure you have images and graphics for the journalist to use in their story if they want. This is a good way to increase the size of the coverage your story receives
- Facts and figures – have these readily available before you talk with the journalist.

To make sexual and reproductive health issues compelling, personalise the issue and give it a human dimension. Try to make it local by using real people from your own community who have been affected by the issues. This will bring what can be an abstract story to life and ‘grab’ a journalist’s attention.

When you want to contact the media you can...

Write a press release

There are some basic tips for writing a really effective press release:

- Keep it short – one page maximum
- Grab attention – make sure it has a punchy headline
- Get to the point – ensure the first 2-3 paragraphs include ‘what, when, where, who and why’
- Use key messages – these are the 2-3 main points which you’re trying to convey to the journalist and to their readers, listeners or viewers
- Distribute it to the right journalist and the right outlet.

If you don’t know how to write a good press release, type these words into your search engine: ‘Sample press release’ and you will see plenty of examples.

Occasions to write and distribute a press release may include when you want to:

- Announce new research or survey results
- Announce an upcoming event
- Respond to a topical news event
- Comment on the latest changes in government programs and activities – for example, to respond to how a particular piece of pending or recently-passed legislation will positively or negatively affect sexual and reproductive health in your country
- Commend community sector organisations on new initiatives or valuable work which they are delivering – for example, Marie Stopes International will soon be opening a new reproductive health centre in Dili to support outreach activities into rural and isolated communities¹
- Unveil a new partnership which has been formed in service delivery
- Celebrate a milestone achievement in the advancement of reproductive health
- Mark an international day of focus relating to sexual and reproductive health
- Announce the impending visit by an internationally-recognised expert.

You can alert journalists to your press release by fax, email, post or with a phone call.

To ensure your name becomes closely associated with positive sexual and reproductive health, also think about sending your press release to other organisations which might have an interest in what you are doing or saying – such as community health services, non-profit development or support centres in your area, church groups, and universities which have departments that focus on women’s health.

Hold a media conference

Hold a news conference if the news is ‘big’ or if there is limited time for media interviews.

To maximise your television news coverage, it is best to hold a news conference early in the day. TV news crews are assigned to stories early in the morning, so give them time to plan their daily schedules. Try to avoid clashing with other big news events where possible.

¹ Marie Stopes International Australia (2011), <http://www.mariestopes.org.au/how-we-help/where-we-work/timor-leste>

Location is important and will directly affect the number of journalists who attend your news conference. Make sure it is centrally-located and convenient to access. Try to ensure that the cameras and photographers have good visuals to shoot – whether this is an attractive outdoor location, the delivery of health services themselves, or signs in the background to show the organisations involved in your announcement.

On the day provide the media will want news releases and fact sheets via email and in hard copy.

Create a picture opportunity

Some news outlets need interesting photos or footage before they publish a story. Think creatively about what is newsworthy for these outlets. For example, a strong photo opportunity in the lead up to World AIDS Day might be to get yourself HIV-tested and invite select media outlets along to film or shoot you having the test done. Call the relevant journalist to ask if they would be interested in this picture opportunity, along with accompanying facts and an interview about your country's progress in reducing HIV/AIDs.

Common questions

For those who have not actively engaged with the media before, here are some common questions which often get asked:

Q: Can I review the story before it's published?

A: Rarely. On the odd occasion a journalist may let you review their article for factual accuracy. Most journalists will not allow you to make content changes. If a journalist is particularly concerned about getting their reporting of a complex subject right, they might send you the relevant section of their article for you to review.

Q: Why didn't my news story run or quotes from my interview appear?

A: There are a number of reasons this usually happens:

- A bigger news story breaks - other news events that hour or day emerge and demand more page space or air time
- The story develops after your interview - making your comments out-of-date
- Your perspective is not unique - your comments are too similar to those given by other people who were also interviewed.

If your comments don't make it to print or broadcast, do not fret. It happens frequently and ultimately it's the media's decision what news to run and when. If you want feedback about why your story or interview did not run, it is ok to politely ask the journalist. Usually if you ask diplomatically, the journalist will share with you what happened in the process.

Q: Can I get a copy of the photo, video footage or radio interview from the media outlet?

A: No. Most times this will become the intellectual property of the paper, television or radio station. You can often get back-copies of previous newspaper articles or stories that have run on TV or radio through a professional media monitoring service. Usually these come with guidelines about how the material may be used.

Section 2: Communicating about reproductive health



Facts about sexual and reproductive health

Sexual and reproductive health is the ability of all women and men to exercise control over their sexual and reproductive lives, including to²:

- **Decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children, and to have the information, education and means to do so.**
- **Attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health and make decisions about reproduction free from discrimination, coercion and violence.**

Sexual and reproductive health is an important component of general health and a prerequisite for social, economic and human development.

Everyone has the right to enjoy reproductive health, as a basis for having healthy children, intimate relationships and happy families.

Millennium Development Goals 4 & 5³

At the United Nation's 2000 Millennium Summit 186 countries signed the Millennium Declaration with the aim of freeing humanity from poverty.

Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 aim to reduce child and maternal deaths respectively and are directly related to sexual and reproductive health of women and their children.

Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 are also the most off track goals of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

MDG 4: Reduce child mortality

Target: Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate.

Indicators:

- Under-five mortality rate
- Infant mortality rate
- Proportion of one year-old children immunised against measles

MDG 5: Improve maternal health

Target 5a: Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio.

Indicators:

- Maternal mortality ratio
- Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel

Target 5b: Achieve, by 2015, universal access to reproductive health.

Indicators:

- Contraceptive prevalence rate
- Adolescent birth rate
- Antenatal care coverage
- Unmet need for family planning

² Summary of the Programme of Action from the International Conference on Population and Development, <http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/populatin/icpd.htm>

³ Asia Pacific Alliance (2011), *Investing in Sexual and Reproductive Health Saves Women's Lives*

http://www.asiapacificalliance.org/images/stories/APA_MDG5_Fact_Kit_On-Screen_Viewing_Spreads.pdf

and Women and Children First UK (2011) *A Manifesto for Motherhood – Achieving Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health from Commitment to Action*,

<http://www.wcf-uk.org/images/stories/docs/Manifesto%20for%20Motherhood%20Briefing%20Pack.pdf>

The statistics

Reproductive health problems remain the leading cause of ill-health and death for women of childbearing age worldwide.⁴

The main indicators of the sexual and reproductive health status of women are:

- **Maternal mortality rate** – or maternal death, the death of a woman while pregnant from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management.⁵
- **Child mortality rate** – the number of deaths among children under five per 1,000 live births.⁶
- **Fertility rate** – births per 1,000 women ages 15-49 years.⁷
- **Adolescent birth rate** – births per 1,000 women ages 15-19 years.⁸
- **Contraceptive prevalence (modern methods)** – the proportion of women between 15-49 years who are using (or whose partner is using) a contraceptive method.⁹

More than 215 million women in developing countries want to avoid or space pregnancies but are not using modern methods of contraception.¹⁰



⁴ UNFPA (2011), <https://www.unfpa.org/public/home/news/pid/8352>

⁵ WHO (2011), <http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/monitoring/9789241500265/en/index.html>

⁶ UNICEF (2011), http://www.childinfo.org/files/Child_Mortality_Report_2011.pdf

⁷ UNFPA (2010), State of the World Population Report pg. 100, <http://www.unfpa.org/public/swp2010>

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 94

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 94

¹⁰ UNFPA (2011), <https://www.unfpa.org/public/home/news/pid/8293>

Creating positive key messages on sexual and reproductive health

A 'key message' is one of the 2-3 main points which you're trying to convey to the journalist and to their readers, listeners or viewers.

Your 2-3 key messages should form the basis of all media interviews and press releases. Key messages have the best impact when they are consistently communicated over a long period of time.

Developing interesting and useful key messages will help you be quoted in the media more and develop better relationships with journalists.

When deciding your key messages, there are some basic rules to follow. Ensure your main points are:

- **Credible.** They must be based in fact. Your comments should not be an exaggeration or an advertisement.
- **Clear.** Avoid jargon and acronyms. These isolate people who are not familiar with the meaning of the technical terms you have used, and limit the effectiveness of your communication.
- **Positive.** Talk about what can be done to advance sexual and reproductive health, not what can't be done. It is fine to talk about the challenges to progress but this should always be followed by a further statement about what can be done and your proposed solution.
- **Short.** For each key message, make sure you have devised one memorable sentence to sum up your main point. It should take about 10-15 seconds to say.
- **Specific.** Rather than making a general statement, try to address a particular challenge and audience.

Here are three examples of key messages, backed by facts and statistics, which make for powerful media statements:

Example 1

Key message:

The spread of HIV is one of the biggest challenges facing Papua New Guinea.¹¹

Provide evidence:

Next year 208,000 people will be living with HIV in our country. An alarming number of babies are now born with HIV and AIDS.

Explain the outcome or the solution:

This World AIDS Day, which is coming up on December 1, I am getting a HIV test. I am urging both my fellow parliamentarians and Papua New Guineans to do the same.

Example 2

Key message:

Women in East Timor are dying during childbirth unnecessarily.

Provide evidence:

The World Health Organisation's latest research shows the number of women dying during childbirth in our nation remains stubbornly high, at 380 deaths per 1,000 women. This is one of the highest rates in our region.

Explain the outcome or solution:

We must invest more in the delivery of services which ensure all East Timorese women have the ability to decide the number, spacing and timing of their children and can deliver their babies in a safe environment.

Example 3**Key message:**

Inadequate funding is a major failure in fulfilling commitments to improving women's reproductive health.

Provide evidence:

About 356,000 women die each year around the world due to complications in pregnancy or childbirth. The maternal death rate remains high among some of Australia's closest neighbours. Tragically, research shows that up to 80 per cent of these deaths are preventable with basic health interventions.¹²

Explain the outcome or the solution:

Australia must increase the proportion of official development assistance directed towards making reproductive health services available and accessible to all women in our region.

Short statements ('Sound bites') for media use

- Every day, 1,000 women die from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth.¹³
- Everyone should be able to decide the timing, spacing and number of the children they have.¹⁴
- When a mother dies the impact is felt by her children, family and community.
- Being able to decide the timing, spacing and number of children means more education, more food and better health for our women and our children.¹⁵
- When women have a choice they choose more for their children, not more children.
- Reproductive health for women aims to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth safe and every child healthy.

¹¹ AusAID (2010), *HIV/AIDS in Papua New Guinea* <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/country/png/hiv aids.cfm>

¹² Costello, T. and Thomas, M. (2011) 'Maternal death rate remains tragically high' in *The Sydney Morning Herald* <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/maternal-death-rate-remains-tragically-high-20100614-ya3e.html#ixzz1XuKdN2h9>

¹³ WHO (2010) Maternal mortality Fact sheet N°348 November 2010, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs348/en/>

¹⁴ UN World Conference Documents, <http://www.unfpa.org/rights/language/right2.htm>

¹⁵ Women and Children First UK (2011) A Manifesto for Motherhood – How the Next UK Government can Ensure that Every Pregnancy is Wanted, Every Birth Safe and Every Child Healthy, <http://www.wcf-uk.org/attachments/article/201/A%20Manifesto%20for%20Motherhood.pdf>

Section 3: Useful resources



What to do if you receive an incoming media enquiry

If you receive a media enquiry directly, it may be useful to get the following details:

- **The journalist's full name.**
- **Details of where they are calling from** – the media outlet they work for and the section/program.
- **Their job title** – are they a journalist, a presenter, a researcher, a producer, or the chief of staff?
- **Return contact details** – fax, email, landline, mobile.
- **Urgency** – are they on deadline? If so, when do they need a response by? All journalists' queries should be treated as a high priority.
- **Specifics of what they'd like to interview you about.** There are a few simple questions you can ask which will let you know what they want:
 - o Which show/program/segment am I being interviewed for?
 - o Who will I be interviewed by?
 - o What time and where?
 - o When are you likely to use it?

Whether you or someone in your office receives the initial media enquiry, it is always advisable to give yourself a little time to collect your thoughts before you take the interview.

If one of your staff takes the enquiry, they may be able to advise that you are unable to talk immediately but will return the call as a matter of priority. If you are phoned directly, you can always say something like: "I've got somebody with me right now. Can I ring you back in a few minutes?"

Remember:

Be aware that anything you say when speaking with a journalist can be published or broadcast. Even an off-the-cuff remark can become the main focus of a news story.

Preparing for a media interview

Before a media interview, try to take a few minutes to compose yourself and to work out what you want to say. Getting your thoughts in order and thinking about the best way of communicating your message is time well spent. Asking a journalist to edit or retract a comment after you've said it is hard – being well-prepared beforehand will help you to avoid this awkward situation.

Firstly, work out the setting and format of the interview:

- Is the format of the interview:
 - o Live-to-air or a pre-recorded interview which will be edited before being broadcast?
 - o Who else will the journalist be speaking with for their story?
- Is the setting of the interview:
 - o By telephone?
 - o In person, face-to-face?
 - o Live in a studio?
- Am I being interviewed as part of:
 - o A news or current affairs story?
 - o A feature story?
 - o Will I be taking part in a debate?
 - o Taking open line calls on talkback radio?

You might also find it helpful to know the answers to the following questions:

Purpose

- Why have I agreed to do this interview?
- What is it I am trying to communicate?
- Who will it benefit?
- How will it benefit them?

Audience

- Who will be listening or watching?
If you're not familiar with the audience, check with the journalist, producer or do some research yourself into the program.
- What language will the audience be able to understand?
- What tone will they find most engaging and interesting?
- How much understanding of reproductive health issues, if any, will the audience have already?

Message

- What are the 2-3 three key points I want to get across?
Always have a clear, positive statement that you can put simply in 10 -15 words.
- How can I provide evidence of my main points?
- Can I use any real-life examples or personal anecdotes to put a human face to my story?
- What are the 3 questions I don't want to be asked – and how would I answer them if I do get asked them?

Medium

- Am I going to be interviewed in front of a camera, or have my photo taken? If so, what should I wear?
- Can I draw on brief notes while I am in-studio?
- Are there any additional pieces of information which I can provide to the journalist to extend or expand their coverage of my story? Pictures, graphs, tables, etc?

Presentation skills for TV

Clothing and appearance

- Try to avoid wearing all black attire if you can, it looks a bit bleak.
- Try to avoid wearing stripes, checks and 'loud' patterns – these can play tricks on camera and become distracting for the viewer.
- Only wear a white shirt if you plan to wear a jacket over the top – large slabs of white tend reflect on camera.
- Do your own hair, chances are it will make you feel more comfortable.

On-camera

- Look at the interviewer, not the camera - viewers should feel as though they're being invited into a conversation, not being directly addressed.
- Maintain eye contact with the presenter at all times.
- Avoid rustling papers, drumming your fingers or tapping your toes – TV and radio microphones are designed to be sensitive to noise and will magnify even the smallest of movements.
- Make sure you have a glass of water beside you – you never know when you will need it.
- Do not refer to notes – it will look like you don't know what you're talking about.
- Try not to scratch, sniff, sneeze or cough (if you can help it!).

Annual days to talk about positive sexual and reproductive health messages¹⁶

Date	Event
20 February	World Day of Social Justice
8 March	International Women's Day
7 April	World Health Day
15 May	International Day of Families
11 July	World Population Day
12 August	International Youth Day
15 October	International Day of Rural Women
24 October	World Development Information Day
20 November	Universal Children's Day
1 December	World AIDS Day
10 December	Human Rights Day



¹⁶ UN Days, Weeks, Years and Decades (2011), http://www.unac.org/en/news_events/un_days/index.asp

Online resources



The following sources provide further information about sexual and reproductive health:

Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development

A coordinating body of National Committees of Parliamentarians on Population and Development. It is committed to informing, educating and motivating parliamentarians on the linkages between increasing population and issues such as reproductive health, family planning, food security, water resources, sustainable development, environment, ageing, urbanisation, migration, HIV/AIDS, and gender equality. <http://www.afppd.org/>

Asia Pacific Alliance

Aims to ensure everyone's right to health is fully achieved through the promotion and inclusion of sexual and reproductive health and rights. <http://www.asiapacificalliance.org/>

United Nations Population Fund

Offers a wealth of information about reproductive health and its role at the heart of development. <http://www.unfpa.org/rh/index.htm>

International Planned Parenthood Federation

A global service provider and advocate of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all. <http://www.ippf.org/en/>

UN Women

The United Nations entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. <http://www.unwomen.org/>

World Health Organisations (WHO) World Health Statistics

Presents the most recent health statistics for WHO's 193 Member States. <http://www.who.int/whosis/whostat/en/>

Women and Children First

A UK based international development agency set up to address the unacceptably high levels of maternal and newborn mortality and morbidity in poor communities in the developing world. <http://www.wcf-uk.org/index.php>





ARHA gratefully acknowledges the funding support of the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians for Population and Development (AFPPD), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Australian Aid.



This toolkit is available to download in its entirety at:
www.arha.org.au