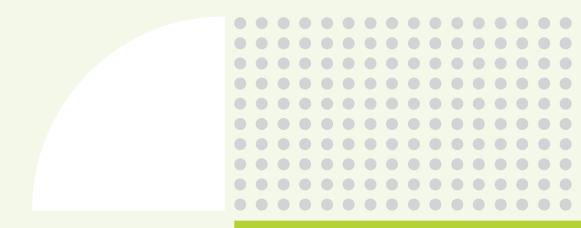


people with disability





#### **Acknowledgement of Country**

The South Australian Government acknowledges and respects Aboriginal people as the State's first people and recognises their traditional relationship with Country.

We acknowledge that the spiritual, social, cultural and economic practices of Aboriginal people come from their traditional lands and waters, and that the cultural and heritage beliefs, languages and laws are still of importance today.

## Report it Right

Guidelines for portraying people with disability

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### What this is all about

When a person lives with disability it does not completely or wholly define who they are.

Disability is a natural and ordinary part of human diversity and people with disability live full lives with interests, desires and dreams – just like anyone living without disability.

Sadly though, what it means to live with disability is often misunderstood by the general public.

But the media can play an important role in shifting the narrative.

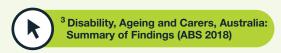
When it comes to reporting on and to people with disability, you can make important choices that support meaningful change.



## Diversity and overlapping discrimination

People with disability are diverse and many disabilities are not visible or apparent.

- People live with a wide range of disabilities, including physical, sensory, cognitive, intellectual and psychosocial.
- Some people have one disability, others live with multiple disabilities.
- Some people live with disability from birth.
   The prevalence of disability increases with age in 2018 one in nine (11.6%)
   Australians aged 0 to 64 years lived with disability while for those aged 65 years and over, it was one in two (49.6%).3
- People with disability represent all sectors of society, including culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, youth and LGBTIQA+. As such, they may be exposed to overlapping and interconnected forms of discrimination and marginalisation.



abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageingand-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release

## Impactful reporting

The stories you tell and how you tell them – including your choice of interviewees, words, images and narrative – should portray people with disability in ways that are:

fair, accurate and authentic



respectful of people's human rights and dignity



cognisant that people with disability are individuals and full members of the community



inclusive of people with disability in general reporting of issues affecting the community as a whole



free from myths, stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination.

For interviews, rather than deferring to 'experts', spokespeople, carers, etc. who may not themselves live with disability, you should speak directly with people with lived experience of disability when you can.

### R.E.S.P.E.C.T.

The most important thing to remember when communicating with (or about) a person with disability is to treat them with respect.



Ask the person with disability how they would like to be referred to and depicted – and respect their wishes.

## United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The Convention follows decades of work by the United Nations to change attitudes and approaches to persons with disabilities. It takes to a new height the movement from viewing persons with disabilities as "objects" of charity, medical treatment and social protection towards viewing persons with disabilities as "subjects" with rights, who are capable of claiming those rights and making decisions for their lives based on their free and informed consent as well as being active members of society.

## Challenge your approach. Is it ableist?

**Ableism:** a belief or set of beliefs and actions that either consciously or unconsciously discriminates against people with disability by devaluing their lives or assuming that having a disability makes a person inherently inferior.

People with disability are not responsible for the limitations imposed on them by outside forces. Social change is needed to provide equality, inclusion and justice for people with disability. This is done by **removing barriers** that come from:



the physical environment



attitudes



law, regulations and policy.





<sup>4</sup> Designing inclusive software

docs.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/uwp/ design/accessibility/designing-inclusivesoftware



### Do

## Recognise the impact of barriers for people with disability

These can be physical, attitudinal or systemic. Barriers can stem from the way society is organised or common perceptions and attitudes to disability.



### Instead of

## Seeing the individual or their disability as responsible for outcomes

For example, focussing on an individual's attitude in *overcoming* barriers in society, or medical *deficit* aspects by emphasising 'treatments' and 'cures'.

## A person is a person is a person

People with disability should not be patronised or objectified through stereotypical pitying portrayals that paint them as sufferers or inspiration-based clichés that portray them as heroes.



Disability can be variable and due to many factors, including chronic illness and accidents. However a person is not automatically **vulnerable** because of their disability. They are individuals who lead valuable and multi-dimensional lives.



Be mindful of incorrectly associating disability with vulnerability – including the portrayal that having a disability is a tragedy or an affliction/illness. This is an outdated view that stems from the 'medical model of disability', which treats disability as a clinical deviation from 'normal', a deficit or burden to be 'fixed' or alleviated.



Likewise, people are not **superheroes** just because they live with disability. **Avoid** portraying people with disability who are married/have jobs/volunteer/have children/undertake daily activities as 'extraordinary' as doing so can imply people with disability are not capable of these things.

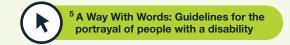
## Common stereotypes<sup>5</sup>

- Having a disability is **a tragedy**.
  - is a tragedy. spouses, of people with a disability are heroic.
- People with disability are...
  - objects of pity and charity
  - passive and dependent and lead boring, uneventful lives
  - \* chronically sick or unhealthy
  - not providers of expertise, services or assistance to their families and communities
  - always on income support. Many work in a range of professions and pay taxes
  - people with limited interests
  - x superhuman if they achieve everyday tasks

extraordinary if they have romantic partners, marry or have children. Also don't assume that if someone does not, it is because they have a disability. People make these choices for a wide range of reasons.

Families, particularly

asexual by default. As in the general population, asexual people with disability exist and are valid. However, assuming that disability equals asexuality is problematic.



# Use standard human empathy and interest, without excessive emotional language

Focus on what people can do, not what they can't.

#### Ask yourself:



What is the **main point** of the media item you are preparing?

Would mentioning someone's disability **change the story**?

If it does not relate, it is probably best not to focus on it.

## Respect a person's individuality and rights

### **Do** Avoid

- include people with disability in a range of everyday stories not just about disability.
- give people with disability a voice and let them speak for themselves, even if doing so is challenging - and regardless of how a person communicates and whether they need assistance to do so.
- portray the person as part of their community

   not part of a separate class of people.

  Just like other community members, people with disability have jobs, friends, families, relationships and viewpoints.

## referring to people with disability in a childish manner

Adults with an intellectual disability are not children; avoid portraying them as such, for example, using their first name while others are given a title 'Jane, pictured with colleague Ms Ying...'

## In general, put the person first

People with disability are people first.

People with disability are multi-dimensional.

They are not all the same or defined by their disability.

In general, it is advisable to use the person-first term 'person with disability' rather than the identity-first 'disabled person'.

Of course, language is personal and people with disability are not a homogenous group. Some people will prefer identity-first language such as 'autistic person'. This is a legitimate preference.

Do not make the assumption that you know – ask the person.

Specific groups within the disability community may also have preferences for identifying their group or identifying a member of their group. For example, 'person with Down syndrome' is the preferred term in the Down syndrome community. However, the autistic, Deaf and blind communities generally prefer identify-first language. For example, 'deaf person' or 'blind person'. This is also true of some people with other conditions. Always respect individual language choices.



startingwithjulius.org.au/wp-content/uploads/ 2019/08/SWJ-DRC-Media-Guide-.pdf (515 KB)



## **Appropriate words**



People who are vision impaired



Mr Jones has cerebral palsy



## Instead of

People with physical disability	The handicapped Crippled	
	The physically handicapped Cripple	
Wheelchair user	Confined to a wheelchair	
People who use wheelchairs	Wheelchair-bound	
Person who uses a wheelchair	Wheelchairs can be liberating, providing mobility and accessbility.	
Person with intellectual disability	Mentally disabled Minda	
	Intellectually challenged	
A person with: mental illness	Insane Mentally disabled Crazy	
mental health disability schizophrenia	Mad Demented Psychotic	
psychosocial disability bi-polar disorder	Lunatic Deviant Schizophrenic	
(specify the condition)		
Brain injury Acquired brain injury (ABI)	Brain-damaged Vegetative	
Traumatic brain injury (TBI)		
Cognitive impairment	Stupid Special Special needs Defective	
	Delusional Demented	
Typical development	Normal development	
Neurotypical	Normal	
Developmental delay	Slow	
A person with epilepsy	An epileptic	
A person who has epilepsy	All epileptio	
A person living with epilepsy		

which implies that Mr Jones is either diminished

as a result of his disability or is a victim.





#### Instead of

Athlete/person with disability

Paralympian

Place the athlete or person first rather than referring to his or her disability.

Disabled athlete/person

Handicapped athlete/person

Person with Down syndrome

Down's kids Down syndrome person

Mongol

Autism / Autistic

Person on the autism spectrum

If preferred:

Autistic person

(Identity-first language)

Person with autism

(Person-first language)

Severe High functioning

Low functioning

These are not official diagnostic terms, do not provide a constructive view of a person on the autism spectrum and do not speak to the specific challenges or abilities of the individual.

It is important to ask the person with autism to understand their preference – and respect their wishes. Many autistic people prefer identity first language (autistic person, or Maria is autistic) as it reflects the belief that being autistic is a core part of a person's identity.

Some people still describe themselves as living with Asperger's syndrome or as being 'Aspie', even though Asperger's syndrome was removed from official terminology in 2013.

Person with dwarfism

Person of short stature

Midget Dwarf

While most people with dwarfism prefer to be called "people of short stature", some people prefer to be called dwarfs or little people. Always ask a person's preference.

Accessible seating/parking/toilet/lift

Disabled Handicapped

Seizure

Fit Attack Spell

Amputation

Amputee

Stumps

## **Examples in practice**

- Ms Jones, who is blind, works in banking. She said new app-based technology was helping to make workplaces more accessible for people who are blind or have low vision.
- The 27-year-old, who lives with a form of cerebral palsy and is a wheelchair user, has written to his local council to highlight the access challenges he faces when attending his nearby community centre.
- The 32-year-old from Glenelg, who is short-statured, is chair of the business chamber. He said many people incorrectly assume people with dwarfism are less capable than others.

- A wheelchair user since a diving accident as a teenager, Jody Smythe enjoys her role as a football coach.
- Jennifer Brown, who has an intellectual disability, plays in the Inclusive Basketball League.
- The St Mary's resident said she enjoyed connecting with other people in the disability community.
- The couple are part of a group of people with lived experience of disability from Stirling.
- He said **people living with disability** want the same employment and training opportunities as **people** without disability.

### **Words matter**

Language is powerful. It can inspire. It can shape perceptions... and it can have a devastating impact if used incorrectly.

#### **Outdated terms:**

- Wheelchair-bound. A wheelchair-user is freed, not bound, by using a wheelchair
- X Victim of..., suffers from..., suffering from the tragedy of..., afflicted with...
- Handicapped, retarded, spastic, mental, imbecile, birth defect/deformity
- Deaf mute, deaf and dumb, dumb, physically challenged, differently abled, handicapable

- Deficient, people with deficits, slow or slow learner, idiot, mongoloid
- Crippled or physically challenged
- Medical terms such as patient or invalid
- X Has the mental age of...
- Emotional words of pity and charity, for example, unfortunate, pitiful
- Words of heroism and inspiration, for example, brave, special, super-determined, unstoppable.

## Interview tips

**Before the interview** – when preparing to interview a person with disability for a story it can help to:

- 1 Consider the **interview location**, for example will the person require ramps/lifts/accessible parking/accessible toilet.
- 2 Is the interview location **quiet enough** to enable the person to hear you?

  Are there any distractions that may make the person feel overwhelmed or find it difficult to concentrate?
- 3 If the person has a **service animal**, do you need to consider providing a bowl of water and outside access for the animal's toileting?
- 4 Ask the person if they need additional support, for example, will they need their carer or support worker with them or do they require a sign language or other interpreter?
- Does the person need to see the questions in advance? This may be helpful for people with anxiety and people with brain injury or intellectual disability. Someone using a communication aid may need extra time to prepare their responses before they meet you.

## Types of support people with disability may need

Required support may include, but is not limited to:



Auslan interpreting for people who are deaf



Personal assistance

for people with physical disability



#### A support worker

to explain complex terminology and concepts (for people with cognitive disability)



to provide emotional assistance (for people with psychiatric disability who may feel overwhelmed by the process).

## Interview tips

**During the interview** – Respect the person's dignity, individuality and independence.

#### **Speak directly**

Look and speak to the person with disability, not just the people accompanying them, including interpreters or carers. Place yourself facing a light source and keep your hands away from your mouth when speaking so the person can easily read your visual cues.

#### Be aware

Some people with disability may be sensitive to things that are considered acceptable in social settings such as touch or making eye contact.

#### Be considerate

Take extra time where needed to gather appropriate information. People with disability, including someone using a communication aid or living with intellectual disability, may need your patience and sufficient time to act independently.

#### **Clarify if needed**

It is ok to ask people with disability to repeat themselves if you do not understand what they have said or meant.

#### **Empathise rather than sympathise**

People with disability wish to be accepted not pitied.

#### Offer help if needed

Don't be afraid to ask if people require assistance. But always gain the person's approval before stepping in to help. Don't be offended if the person says they don't need support - your help may not be needed. If your assistance is needed, ask for instructions.

#### **Treat equally**

Treat and refer to adults with disability the same way you would any other adult. Use the same titles and prefixes you would with anyone else – for example, Mr, Mrs, Doctor.

#### **Explore meaning**

If relevant, ask how a person describes their disability and ask them how they would like their disability to be described. Many people with disability consider it a central part of their identity, culture and community, and are willing to discuss their views, if you are open to listening.

#### **Engage in conversation**

Do not be afraid to say or do something wrong. If a person's disability is central to the story, it is ok to ask about it. Your questions can be challenging and to the point – if they are well-informed and based on facts.

#### Don't patronise

Avoid putting people with disability on a pedestal or talking to them in patronising ways. Do not paint normal, everyday activities as exceptional – for example, 'Oh, you make your own meals. That's wonderful!'

#### Use common terms

It's ok to use common expressions like 'see you soon' or 'I'd better be running along'. Unnecessarily avoiding common terms can often feel patronising.

#### Respect personal space

Remember that mobility aids, including wheelchairs, are part of a person's personal space. Do not lean on a wheelchair or hang anything on the back of a wheelchair without the owner's permission. Never move mobility aids like canes or walkers out of reach.

#### Respect service animals

If the person with you has a service animal such as a guide dog, do not touch it, speak to it, or engage with it unless the owner invites you to. Service animals are working animals and must focus on their owners' needs at all times.

## Photos and filming





Ask the person how they would like to be depicted.

Guessing or assuming.

Show the person's disability and mobility or assistive equipment only if it is critical to the story.

Using gratuitous cutaways of wheelchairs, canes, hearing aids and other devices that are not critical to a story.

Depict the person with disability as having autonomy over their own life.

Including the person's carers or family in photos or video unless they are also part of the story.

Show real people who live with disability.

Using fake stock images of people without disability posing as people with disability.

Employing images of mobility aids, such as wheelchairs, as generic images for a story about disability.

Consider interviewing people with disability for stories that are not about disability, as they are a regular part of the community. Only interviewing people with disability for disability-related stories.

Show people with disability doing everyday things, such as catching public transport, working or shopping.

Only showing people *without* disability doing everyday activities.

Portraying people with disability doing everyday things as superheroes.

Showing people with disability in segregated or congregated settings (for example disability units in schools or sheltered employment settings), unless doing so directly illustrates the story.

Highlight a diverse range of people with disability, including people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and people with disability who hold positions of power and authority.

Using stereotypical images of people with disability. Many stock images fit this category. Some show models portraying people with disability.

Film or photograph a person using a wheelchair at their level.

Looking down on a person using a wheelchair in an image, which can portray people as objects of pity.

Show autistic people going about their lives in images of people with autism.

Employing the stereotype of autistic children with therapists or doctors – or images of puzzle pieces, which implies autism is a jigsaw or mystery. Many autistic adults find this offensive.

### **Music selection**

Music can impact people's perceptions. Two types of music can be particularly problematic.

#### Pity music

For example, using sad music when people are discussing the birth of a child with disability, or a person acquiring disability. Doing so frames these events as 'tragic'.

#### Heroic or triumphant music

This can be patronising if it stereotypes people with disability as 'inspirational'.





## Reporting on deaths

The death of a person, with or without disability can impact entire communities as well as the individual's friends, family and colleagues. Although a very difficult and sad event for those directly impacted, the death of an individual can also be a legitimate matter of public interest which the media has a right to report on.

Members of the media should proceed sensitively and respect private grief and personal privacy, as per the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) Journalist Code of Ethics, which notes journalists have the right to resist compulsion to intrude.

#### **Key considerations**



Any approaches to bereaved people, including friends and family, should be made with sympathy and discretion.



Immediate family should not learn about the death of a loved one via the media.

#### **Devaluing victims with disability**

When reporting on a person with disability who is the victim or suspected victim of violence, abuse or neglect, the media must be careful not to devalue the victim by:

- downplaying the crime
- > blaming the victim
- reducing the gravity of the crime by making assumptions about disability
- appearing to show sympathy or understanding for the alleged perpetrator
- presenting crimes as almost inevitable acts of opportunity due to the perceived vulnerability of the person with disability.



#### Reporting on inquests

An inquest is a court hearing in which the State Coroner gathers information to:

- assist in determining the cause and circumstances of death
- make recommendations that may prevent similar deaths occurring in the future.

Inquests are public events and the media plays an important information-sharing role – including clarifying facts about how a person died and sharing details and findings that may help to prevent other deaths in similar circumstances.

Families of the deceased should be approached sensitively. The media should consider that families may be incredibly distressed by the inquest itself and media reporting of it.

Families may not understand:

- that the media has a right to report on inquests and their findings
- the processes involved in an inquest.

## Some questions to consider when reporting on a death, funeral or inquest

Source: Independent Press Standards Organisation

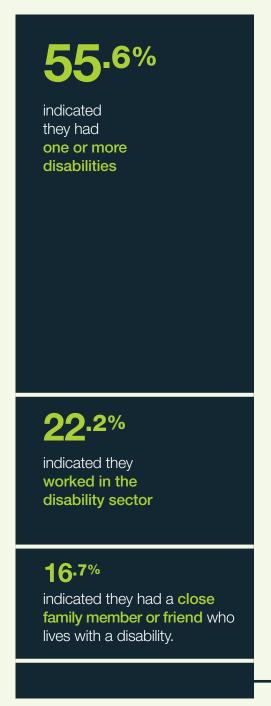
- Before approaching family members of a person who has died or using the name of a deceased person in a story, have you checked whether the immediate family is aware of the person's death?
- Are you publishing any information that could lead to the identification of the person who has died before their immediate family has been informed?
- How reliable is the information you are using to identify the individual who has died? What steps have you taken to verify the information?
- Are you including graphic information at a time of grief?
- Are you mocking or sensationalising the individual or the manner of their death?
- Are you thinking of publishing photos that show the individual engaged in embarrassing activity?
- If you are considering attending a funeral, what type of event is it and what are the family's wishes?
- Does the information you are thinking of publishing contain anything private about a living person?
- Have you considered the effect of your approaches and reporting on the family of the deceased?

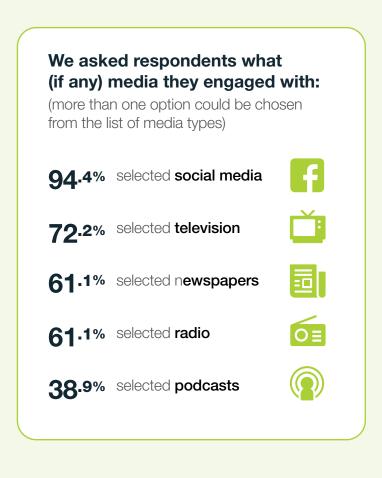
## Consultation and feedback on these guidelines

Reporting it right: an important topic for South Australians.

We heard from passionate South Australians during our consultation period for Report it Right: guidelines for portraying people with disability – including people living with disability, those who provide care to people with disability – parents, guardians and friends – and people who work in the disability sector.

#### Of all respondents:





indicated they had an interest in the area but did not have lived experience of disability.

5.6%

## When we asked whether the media represented people with lived experience of disability in a positive way, 72.2% of respondents indicated that it did not.

"Much reporting is deficit focused and uses language that is not appropriate."

- Amelia

"There is a high level of patronising people with disabilities even if the intent is positive. Sometimes a disability might be the least interesting thing about the person and yet it is the focus."

- 7even

"The guidelines you have prepared reflect exactly my feelings on this topic. People with disabilities are infantilised or treated as heroic for living their lives."

- Fliana

#### Although there has been progress in this area, it seems we still have a long way to go.

"There has been much improvement in reporting over the years, but there remains a tendency to portray [people with disability] as victims or heroes. The best reporting avoids emotive language."

-Nicola

"Language around disability has improved somewhat, although this depends: when a story is about issues with someone's equipment or government systems, words like 'confined' are still used to elicit emotion. TV channels like ABC have improved representation."

- BeeMcDee

We asked whether these guidelines could improve community attitudes towards people with lived experience of disability, with 77.8% of respondents saying they could.

"Any resources that can help people like myself that do not have a long history in the disability sector is a good thing."

- BigKev

"Improving media portrayal will help slowly but surely change the way people with a disability are seen by the wider community."

- just16

"I think they can definitely help because even as a disabled person, there were terms I didn't know were wrong or outdated, so it will benefit everyone in the long run."

- Emily

We also asked for feedback on what we had potentially missed in the guidelines, with some fantastic suggestions that we've taken onboard, including:



reporting on families of people with disability who have passed away (see page 18)



referencing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (see page 5)



refining the definition of disability; that it can be variable and due to chronic illness (see page 7).

## Finally, we asked what the biggest misconception was about living with disability:

"That [people with disability] can't do much. They can't work or live the same life as someone without a disability."

Leasha

"That we feel sorry for ourselves and are always looking for ways to be fixed."

- Bridgett

"That people with disability can't lead full lives – for example, there is an assumption that people with a disability have no need to be taught about sexuality."

- just16

"That we choose this way of life. Dole bludgers. Less than human. Lower class."

- Kristine

"The biggest misconception about living with disabilities is you can't do what normal people can."

- Billy

The Department of Human Services thanks all those who took the time to participate in our consultation and for the valuable insights and feedback provided. These guidelines will continue to evolve as the community evolves and help shift the narrative about what it truly means to live with disability.

## You can help to build a better community

What you report, how you report and how you decide to show people has an important impact on the public's perception of disability.

By striving each day to report in a fair and appropriate way that considers the perspectives of people living with disability, you can help to build a more inclusive and just community.



### **Further information and resources**

#### **Aruma**

Disability language guide

aruma.com.au/about-us/about-disability/disability-language-guide/

#### **Australian Bureau of Statistics**

Disability information and statistics

abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability

### Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO)

Disability statistics and facts

afdo.org.au/resources/

### Australian Government Department of Social Services

About People with Disability in Australia

dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers/supportingpeople-with-disability/about-people-withdisability-in-australia

#### **Australian Network on Disability**

Disability statistics

and.org.au/pages/resources.html

#### **Disability Royal Commission**

Our guide for media reporting

startingwithjulius.org.au/disability-royalcommission-our-guide-for-media-reporting/

#### **Down Syndrome Australia**

Media guidelines (PDF 99KB)

downsyndrome.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Media Guidelines.pdf

#### **Emerging Minds**

Keeping children and families in mind: Guidelines for media professionals reporting on disaster or community trauma events

emergingminds.com.au/resources/keepingchildren-and-families-in-mind-guidelines-formedia-professionals-reporting-on-disaster-orcommunity-trauma-events/

#### **Government of Queensland**

A Way with Words: Guidelines for the portrayal of people with a disability (PDF 962 KB)

inclusionwa.org.au/download/A%20 way%20with%20words.pdf

#### Government of South Australia

Inclusive SA: SA's first Disability Inclusion Plan

inclusive.sa.gov.au/resources/state-disability-inclusion-plan

### Independent Press Standards Organisation

Deaths and inquests guidance

ipso.co.uk/member-publishers/guidance-forjournalists-and-editors/deaths-and-inquestsquidance/

### International Day of People with Disability

Respectful Communication

idpwd.com.au/resources/communication/

### Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA)

Journalist Code of Ethics

meaa.org/meaa-media/code-of-ethics/

#### **Mindframe**

Communicating about suicide guidelines

mindframe.org.au/suicide/communicating-about-suicide

#### **MS** Australia

Reporting on MS — Media Briefing

nsaustralia.org.au/about-ms/information-sheets

#### **People with Disability Australia**

Disability Information

pwd.org.au/resources/disability-info/

#### Stella Young's TED Talk

'I'm Not Your Inspiration, Thank You Very Much' (9.03 mins)

ted.com/talks/stella young i m not your inspiration thank you very much

#### **United Nations**

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

un.org/development/desa/disabilities/ convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-withdisabilities.html

## Finding a spokesperson

- Australian Network on Disability and.org.au
- International Day of People with Disability idpwd.com.au
- People with Disability Australia pwd.org.au

These guidelines outline terms broadly accepted in Australia. They are intended to promote reflection and positive change.



inclusive.sa.gov.au

email: dhsdisabilityinclusion@sa.gov.au

phone: (08) 8415 4383

