

Using the Media

There is no more efficient method of spreading your message than through the media. Media attention builds public awareness and support by keeping an issue on people's minds and reminding them about it. Like the rest of us, decision makers pay attention to what is in the news. The media is a tremendous asset to getting your message out.

It is important to remember, however, that even though the issue of rural women's health is very important to you, it is only one of many issues for the media. Your job is to find ways to persuade the media that rural women's health is newsworthy and of interest to their readers, listeners or viewers. Events, announcements and new research provide especially good opportunities for attracting media attention.

It takes time to be comfortable working with the media. Many groups have several spokespeople so that they can develop good skills for dealing with media. Here are some tips:

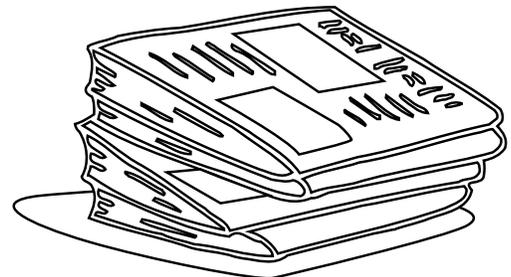
HOW TO WORK WELL WITH THE MEDIA

- Catch their attention with newsworthy stories.
- Provide information in bite-sized pieces. A single news item can only cover so much. Plan your media releases to offer information at a reasonable rate.
- Don't expect them to do all the research or writing for you.
- Get to know reporters and their deadlines.
- Position yourself as an ongoing resource and regularly provide them with up-to-date information.
- Return media calls promptly to honour their tight deadlines.
- Watch for national or local events related to your issue and use them to create a story with a local angle.
- In answering media questions, be brief, clear, calm and careful.
- Let them know about events you are planning and other progress being made.

WHICH MEDIA TO CONTACT ABOUT RURAL WOMEN'S HEALTH ISSUES

- Local newspapers, radio, television
- Editorial or news departments of national newspapers, television, radio
- Farm or rural-focused media
- Magazines, especially ones focusing on women, Health or parenting
- Research publications
- Business and economic publications

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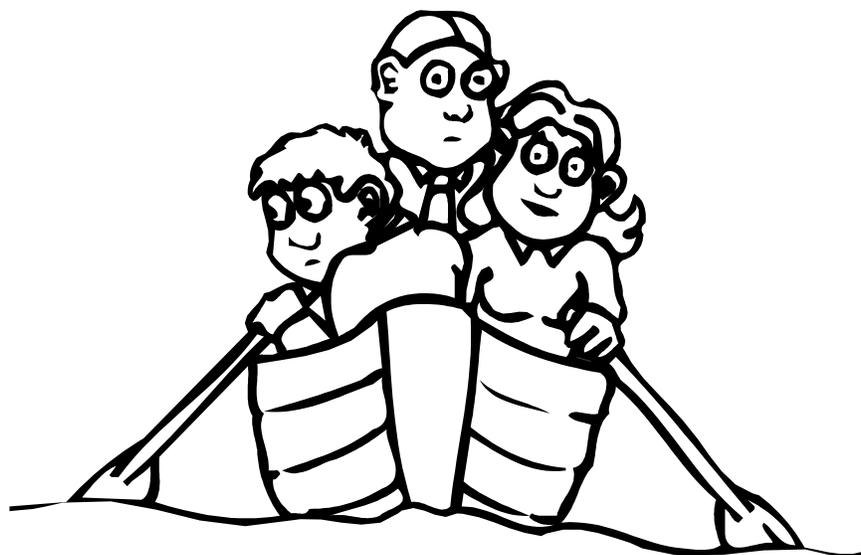


DIFFERENT WAYS TO WORK WITH THE MEDIA

- You can write
 - Letters to the editor
 - Opinion articles or commentaries
 - Articles
- You can send
 - Press releases
 - Public service announcements
 - Announcements of events
- You can offer
 - Interviews
 - Ideas for articles

IN ANY MEDIA CONTACT, ASK YOURSELF:

- What are my three key messages?
- What is my personal connection to these messages?
- Why should the readers, listeners or viewers care?



Powerful Letters To The Editor

After the front page, the editorial page is the best-read part of a newspaper. Politicians read letters to the editor to gauge public opinion on an issue. Letters to the editor are the quickest and cheapest way to communicate your message to a wide audience.

Newspapers are eager to fill this space with well-written, passionate letters from the public. There are basic guidelines to follow to help your letter get published and read:

- Keep it simple and stick to the point. Letters to the editor should contain no more than 200 words and one clear point.
- Write the way you talk. Passion is more impressive than big words.
- No personal attacks. You can disagree with someone else's action or opinion, but don't attack the person.
- Write immediately in response to a current issue or event. The more current the topic, the more interest it will attract.
- Write often. Send a letter whenever you have an opinion – even if it is twice in one day.
- Governments often leak stories to the media in order to see public response. Keep this in mind when you're watching the news and reading the paper. If you feel strongly about an issue, make your opinion known.
- Always include your name, address and telephone number. Many newspapers and magazines verify authorship before printing.
- Get others to write too – there is strength in numbers.
- Letters to the editor can usually be faxed, emailed, mailed or delivered in person.

Many of these guidelines (other than length) apply to writing effective opinion pieces or articles. Check with the particular newspaper or magazine for their guidelines for longer pieces. Media are often eager to receive these articles and sometimes even pay for them.

Sample Letters To The Editor

"When I read the ad in last week's paper that Mary Doe was setting up her midwifery practice in our town, I cheered. As any woman who has driven more than fifty kilometres to a doctor's appointment in the middle of winter (as I have!) will tell you, this is terrific news for our community. I expect a baby boom will follow. -P.Smith."

"Last week the government of Canada reported that food bank use across Canada is up by 18% in the last year. Our Lourdes Catholic Church offers a food hamper program to families in need and I can tell you that we have more than doubled the number of hampers we prepare in the last year. This drought has hit our families hard and it's time we all woke up and did something about it. – S.Jones."



Effective Press Releases

Press releases inform the media about newsworthy events or information so that the media can spread the word. Organizations send out press releases to provide background for an event or an announcement, or to communicate timely information. Well-written press releases are often directly quoted in an article or on air.

Press releases are not used to persuade but to inform; there is no place for flowery description in a press release. Instead, press releases follow a specific format which allows important information to be communicated clearly and concisely.

Preparing a Press Release

- Compose an effective title which captures the angle and content of the release.
- Offer the date on which the information is distributed or the event or announcement is made.
- The first paragraph of a press release contains the vital information: who, what, when, where and sometimes why and how.
- Write in an active voice using strong verbs.
- Use good quotes from key people – i.e. the announcement of a community kitchen could contain quotes from the new director of the kitchen, a local woman who welcomes the community kitchen and/or the organization funding the project.
- Check and recheck spelling, grammar and facts.
- Provide contact information.
- Print your release on your organization's letterhead, if applicable.
- A press release ends with the centring of the symbol “-30-” to tell members of the media that the release is concluded. Add contact information below this conclusion of the press release.

Distributing a Press Release

- Decide which audiences and media would be interested this story – is it simply of local interest or might a national publication be interested? Does it have an angle which would appeal to a parenting magazine, for instance? Think widely.
- Find contact information on the editorial masthead inside the publication or by telephoning.
- Determine who would be the best person/people at each media outlet to receive the press release by calling and asking who normally handles such stories. You can send the release to more than one department of the same media organization.
- Ask each media outlet how they would prefer to receive the press release. Some organizations are cautious about email attachments. Fax is generally the standard way to send press releases.
- Follow up the sending of a press release with a telephone call. A shared fax machine may result in your press release getting lost. A call can ensure that the right person received the release.

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SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE
(Note the standard format used)

NEWSRELEASE

For Immediate Release

Full date of release

Town, PROVINCE from which the release is being sent- The Rotary Auxiliary of Havensbrook and Sir John A. MacDonald Secondary School announce the establishment of the "Cooking Club," a local Community Kitchen to be held each Tuesday afternoon from 1 to 3 p.m. at Sir John A. MacDonald Secondary School. The Community Kitchen is open to all women in the community who are interested in learning more about nutrition, planning and preparing simple, inexpensive meals for their families. Childcare will be provided at no cost to participants.

"We look at this as a way of helping families help themselves," stated Betsy Hepburn, volunteer director of the Cooking Club. "Stretching the dollar is a challenge. Our program will encourage participants to share tips and recipes, as well as teaching them some basic nutritional principles."

Community Kitchens are not a new initiative in Canada. In some ways, every child who learned to cook and bake with his or her mother or grandmother participated in a kind of community kitchen. In years past, women often joined together to make jam or pickles. In today's community kitchen, supplies are bought in bulk and are cooked together, with each woman taking home several delicious meals for her family each week. Local, seasonal foods as well as bulk purchasing will be emphasized.

Havensbrook's Cooking Club will charge each woman for her share of the ingredient costs. The aim is to charge a total of \$7.00 per week, for three meals for a family of four. Adjustments will be made for women with larger or smaller families, as well as reductions for those who are able to contribute produce from their own gardens. Subsidies are available for those in need.

Childcare will initially be provided by Mrs. Thea Manfred's grade eleven Family Studies class from Sir John A. MacDonald, which has been studying child development and has created toys and musical instruments, as well as developing an eight week curriculum of songs and activities for toddlers and preschoolers. The community kitchen will take place in the school's cafeteria kitchen.

"We see this as a win-win situation," stated Sir John A. MacDonald principal Kate Gregory. "Our students will get valuable opportunities to learn about child development, while helping make opportunities possible for women to help their families."

For more information about the program or subsidies, please contact Betsy Hepburn at 232-4567.

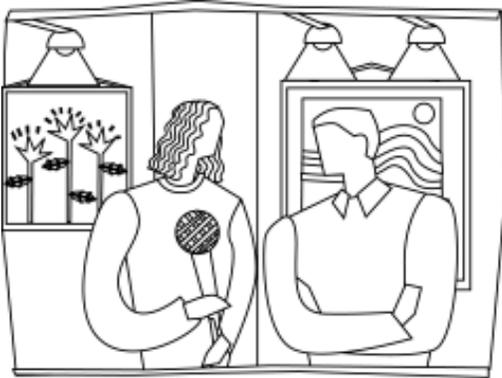
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FOR MORE INFORMATION, please contact:

Betsy Hepburn
Phone
Fax
Email



Successful Media Interviews



The media relies on experts to help them understand the real issues and concerns on any topic. You are an expert in any area you know well. As a woman involved with issues of rural women's health, you may be asked to share your expertise on the topic of rural women's health in the form of an interview. You may even approach the media to offer your insights in an interview.

The challenge being interviewed is to be able to speak clearly and think on your feet. When you write a letter or an article, you have time to review or revise your ideas but an interview requires different skills. Doing interviews requires careful preparation

- Ask about the subject/angle of the story, how your information might contribute, where/when it is likely to appear.
- Prepare a brief media information packet that includes your press release, fact sheets, background on your organization, photos etc.
- Prepare a short list of key messages and work them into the conversation.
- Avoid jargon or slang.
- Focus on communicating your message to the person interviewing you rather than worrying about the larger audience. Speak personally.
- Breathe deeply and speak as naturally as you can, while avoiding “um”, “like” and “you know” as much as possible.
- Use personal stories to illustrate your points. Try to describe the impact the issue will have on the lives of audience members.
- For a radio or television interview, be succinct – about 45 seconds per answer. Sound bites are usually only 7 to 12 seconds long.
- Think of questions as topic areas – stay calm, take your time, and say what you would like to say about that topic.
- Make abstract ideas concrete. – give actual numbers or use comparisons or metaphors audiences can relate to instead of generalizing.
- Be yourself.
- Answer truthfully. Don't lie, guess or exaggerate.
- Remember that **nothing is ever** “off the record.”
- Offer to check facts or to be available for follow up questions afterwards if needed
- Exchange full contact information – yours and theirs.
- If the interview is not live, ask if you can confirm any quotes before it is broadcast or published.

Persuasive Meetings with Politicians and Other Government Officials

There is often nothing more effective than a meeting. Meeting someone face to face builds a relationship and allows people to understand each other's ideas.

The prospect of meeting with a decision maker, such as a politician, can be intimidating, but with preparation, your meeting can be positive and persuasive.

WHO TO MEET WITH

- Identify who can make the changes you are looking for, and who influences that person's decisions
- If you have access to the Internet, each province and territory has lists of current MPPs and MLAs available. Federal politicians are listed at <www.parl.gc.ca>. Local officials are also listed in phone books, usually at the front.

HOW TO GET A MEETING

- Be politely persistent in calling the office of a decision maker to request a meeting.
- Use any contacts in the community you have who can help you get a meeting with the right person.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE MEETING

- There is strength in numbers – if you know others interested in the same issue, invite them to join you.
- Meet with your group ahead of time to plan your strategy. Discuss the issues and choose who will attend the meeting. Three or four people are likely enough. Choose one person to be your main speaker and one to take notes.
- Decide which concern is most important and don't overwhelm the decision maker by trying to deal with all the issues in one meeting. A friendly meeting will more likely result in future meetings.
- Decide how to present the issue: does the person already grasp the issue or does s/he need background information? Is s/he supportive? How have others been received in the past? Will it help or hinder your issue to be confrontational? Find others who have met with this politician to get tips on the best approach.
- Plan for different scenarios ahead of time. For example: if the decision maker tells you there's simply no money in the budget, how will you respond?
- Inform the local media about your meeting. Local media are almost always interested in the action of local government officials.
- Send a package of information in advance to the politician. This will help the meeting go more smoothly. Include information on who is coming, the issues to be discussed, etc.

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HOW TO CONDUCT THE MEETING

- Be confident. Politicians are elected to represent and serve you. They and other decision makers should value public input.
- At the start of the meeting, introduce yourself, your background and who you represent.
- It is more effective to describe the problem in terms of real people than it is to cite facts and figures, “What specific support can you provide to this issue in the coming three months?”
- Respect the decision maker’s time. Keep the meeting to the agreed upon length. If appropriate, suggest a follow-up meeting.
- Offer to provide more information from time to time. Ask, “How can we all work together to improve the situation?”

HOW TO FOLLOW UP THE MEETING

- Keep in touch with the decision maker after the meeting.
- Send a thank you note for the meeting.
- Any time you find material related to the matters discussed during the meeting, such as a useful article or website, send it along to the decision maker.
- Request a follow up meeting where appropriate.



Making a Great Presentation

Public speaking ranks among the greatest fears of people everywhere, but effective public speakers have learned to use their nerves to keep them sharp, to turn a pounding heart into a powerful message. They have also learned that when they focus on communicating their message to their audience, they forget about being afraid. Making a presentation is an opportunity to advertise your ideas and to persuade other people to join you in championing change for rural women's health.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE PRESENTATION

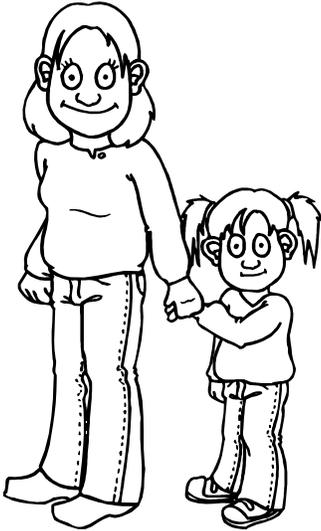
- Know your audience – how many people will be there, how many men, how many women, age, familiarity with the topic, attitudes, etc.
- Organize your ideas clearly. Figure out your conclusion and work backwards. Stick to the point of your talk. Usually three to five main points are enough.
- Use notes or cue cards to remind you of your points.
- Work hard on your introduction – state the issue clearly and briefly, explain why the audience should care, why you are a good person to talk to them about it, what action you are hoping they will take, and how the rest of the presentation will be structured. Draw the audience in.
- Include some personal stories to engage your listeners with your passion. Incorporate some element of surprise or mild humour if you can.
- Review any visuals you will be using, such as overheads or the Power Point presentation to make sure they are working and you are comfortable with them. They should enhance your message, but can distract people if they aren't used well.
- Determine well in advance what kind of presentation equipment you will need, such as an overhead projector, computer projector, flipcharts for displaying information or recording audience comments. Be clear whether you need to provide this equipment or whether it will be available for you.
- If you are using a computer, consider bringing paper or overhead copies of your presentation in case of technical difficulties.
- Practice speaking clearly and slowly. Time your talk.
- Bring lots of handouts for your specific audience and topic.

HOW TO GIVE YOUR PRESENTATION

- Dress appropriately. Smile. Your presentation starts the moment you arrive.
- Arrive early to check out the space, audiovisual equipment, etc.
- Take a deep breath. Relax your body. Make eye contact.
- Speak clearly and enthusiastically. People usually speak too quickly. Remember to pace yourself.
- If you lose your spot, take a deep breath, smile and find your place. It happens to all of us and is no cause for alarm.
- Keep to your allotted time.
- End with a strong conclusion – encourage people to action.
- Leave some time for questions.
- Stay afterwards to answer questions, give out handouts, and to encourage people to support rural women's health.



Writing Effective Letters To Politicians



Politicians assume that for every person who sends a personal letter on an issue, there are probably a hundred more who share the same concern. Writing letters is an effective way to persuade decision makers to make changes that promote rural women's health. It is also a way to begin a conversation or to ask for a meeting.

Effective letters are...

- Short and simple. They get to the point.
- Sent to the right people. Local councillors can't directly change provincial regulations. (You can send them a copy of your letter, though, in case they want to get involved too!)
- Personal. They are addressed to one person, not "to whom it may concern."
- Handwritten. In an age of computer-generated letters, a neatly printed or handwritten letter gets attention.
- Focused. The writer clearly asks for what s/he wants.
- Requests for a response. They indicate a need for the recipient to respond by a certain date. They include a complete return address.
- Persistent. If you are unhappy with a response, keep writing. Ask for a meeting.

WRITING TO POLITICIANS

Write to your own councillor, MPP/MLA or MP. They represent you, and you are a voter with the power to re-elect them. This should make them likely to read and respond to your letter. Letters to all federal politicians do not require postage.

It is a good idea to copy your letter to the committee chair, Minister or whoever is responsible for the issue. It can't hurt to copy the Mayor, Premier or Prime Minister. You can list at the bottom who is receiving copies of the letter. Be sure you are reaching the appropriate level of government for the change you are requesting.

Numbers count. Encourage your friends to write too. Each person should be encouraged to write her own letter rather than use a form letter. Personal letters are taken more seriously.

WRITING TO OTHER DECISION MAKERS

While politicians set policy at various levels of government, many other groups of people have influence on rural women's health decisions. These include bureaucrats in various departments and ministries, health practitioners and hospital boards, among others. Ask your politician who you should talk to or write to on these issues. Investigate how decisions are made on rural women's

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**WRITING TO OTHER
DECISION MAKERS**
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health in your region or province and target the key decision makers with letters and requests for meetings.

Members of the media are also receptive to receiving letters on timely issues. See the tool section on generating positive media attention for a sample letter to the editor.

SAMPLE LETTER

November 10, 2004

Dear Ms. MPP

I moved to Spring Creek thirteen years ago and feel right at home in this community. That is why the shortage of doctors in Spring Creek upsets me so much. I recognize that a doctor shortage is a complicated matter, but I am writing to you today to urge you to lend your support and influence to helping us find a new doctor.

When Dr. Zimmerman retired last year, there was no one to take over his practice. This means that there are about seventy-five families living in and around Spring Creek who have no family physician. This puts a tremendous strain on our families, particularly during the times of year when it isn't convenient or safe to drive seventy kilometres to the nearest hospital.

There is a woman living in Spring Creek who was trained eight years ago as a doctor in Switzerland. It would seem an obvious solution to me that she could serve as our doctor. Currently, provincial and federal law does not easily license foreign-trained doctors to practise here. I am also aware of a local nurse practitioner who is actually struggling to find a funded position in this area. I know that many Canadian communities face this same shortage of health care workers. I am asking you to consider drafting a bill on behalf of those of us who need good rural health care.

Other solutions come to my mind too: my nephew from Rock Falls is currently studying medicine. He plans to do his internship in a large city that has a teaching hospital. I don't blame him, because he will benefit from that experience. The question I raise to you is this: how can we create an environment *here* that will benefit doctors in training, that will give them incentives to be residents in rural areas, and to set up practise *here*?

You can sense my passion. I must tell you Ms. MPP that it is rooted in fear: I am afraid that it could take a terrible tragedy before changes are made so that rural folks have decent, local health care. Please don't let that happen. I ask you to do something about this today. I look forward to your response at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Mary McDonald
RR#5
Spring Creek
XXX-232-5476

cc. Ms. Minister of Health
Mr. Premier

