

yourSAy

Consultation document - June 2021

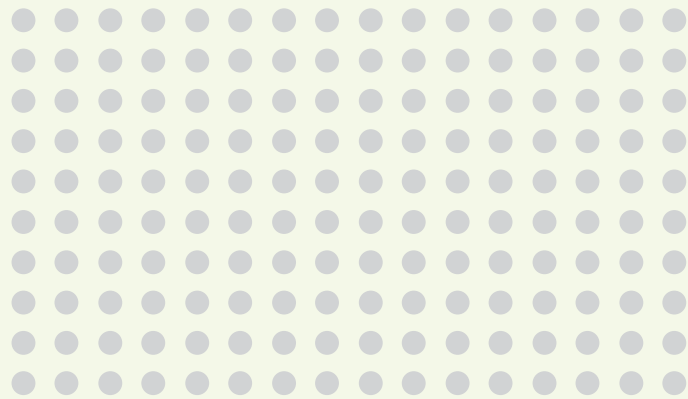


Report it Right

Guidelines for portraying
people with disability



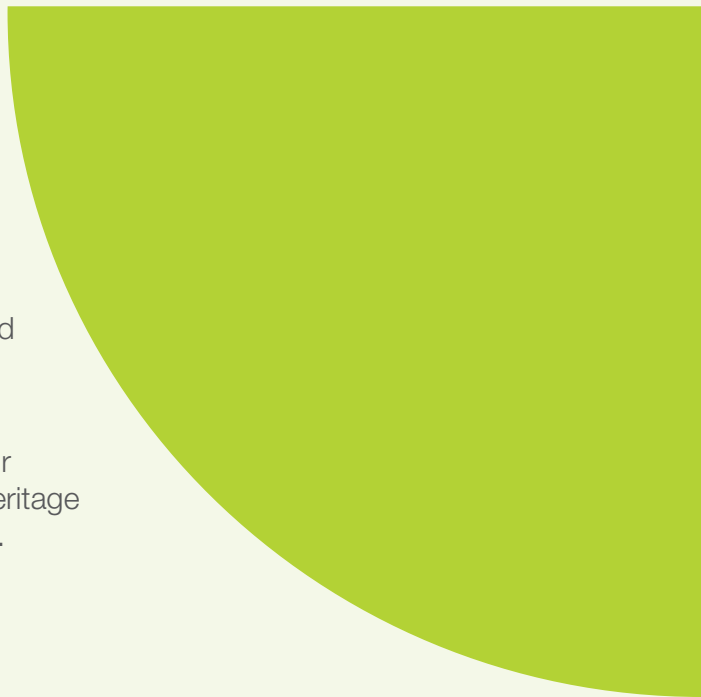
**Government of
South Australia**



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.



www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/2018

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 LGBTIQ+.
- As such, they may be exposed to overlapping and interconnected forms of discrimination and marginalisation.

 ³ Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings (ABS 2018)

www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-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.



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.

● ● 'We define disability as a mismatch between the needs of the individual and the service, product or environment offered.'⁴
● ●
● ●
● ●
● ●
● ●
● ● – Microsoft



⁴ Designing inclusive software

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



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.

✓ Be mindful of incorrectly associating disability with vulnerability – including portraying having a disability as 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.

✓ A person is not automatically **vulnerable** because of their disability. They are individuals who lead valuable and multi-dimensional lives.

✓ 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 stereotypes⁵

✗ Having disability is a tragedy.

✗ 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

✗ superhuman if they achieve everyday tasks

✗ Families, particularly spouses, of people with a disability are heroic.

✗ 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.

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



⁵ A Way With Words: Guidelines for the portrayal of people with a disability

www.inclusionwa.org.au/download/A%20way%20with%20words.pdf (962 KB)

Use standard human empathy and interest, without excessive emotional language

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

Ask yourself:

-  Is someone's disability relevant to the story?
-  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

-  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.

Avoid

-  **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 identity-first language. For example, 'deaf person' or 'blind person'⁶. This is also true of some people with other conditions. Always respect individual language choices.



⁶ **Disability Royal Commission – Our Guide for Media Reporting**

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



Appropriate words



Consider using

Has.. (the disability)

Lives with... (the disability)

People with disability

Person living with disability

Person with lived experience of disability

which is inclusive of people who are carers and people who may have experienced disability in the past.

Person without disability

Born with disability

Person living with disability from birth

People who are deaf

People who are hard of hearing

People who are hearing impaired

The Deaf community

(With a capital letter on Deaf - this refers to people who identify themselves as part of the Deaf community and who use sign language.)

Person who is deaf and non-verbal

Person who is deafblind

(Some people may use speech if they became deaf later in life.)

Blind person People who are blind

The Blind community

People who are legally blind

People who are vision impaired



Instead of

Suffers from Sufferer Victim

Afflicted with Disease

(when used to refer to disability.)

De-personalising collective labels such as:

The disabled Handicapped

Invalid Special needs

Normal person Non-disabled Able-bodied

Birth defect Deformity

Abnormality

The deaf A deaf person

A deaf and dumb person

The blind Visually impaired

✓ Consider using

People with physical disability

Wheelchair user

People who use wheelchairs

Person who uses a wheelchair

Person with intellectual disability

A person with: mental illness

mental health disability schizophrenia

psychosocial disability bi-polar disorder
(specify the condition)

Brain injury Acquired brain injury (ABI)

Traumatic brain injury (ABI)

Cognitive impairment

Typical development

Neurotypical

Developmental delay

A person with epilepsy

A person who has epilepsy

A person living with epilepsy

A person with cerebral palsy

Mr Jones has cerebral palsy

✗ Instead of

The handicapped Crippled

The physically handicapped Cripple

Confined to a wheelchair

Wheelchair-bound

Wheelchairs can be liberating,
providing mobility and accessibility.

Mentally disabled Minda

Intellectually challenged

Insane Mentally disabled Crazy

Mad Demented Psychotic

Lunatic Deviant Schizophrenic

Brain-damaged Vegetative

Stupid Special Special needs Defective

Delusional Demented

Normal development

Normal

Slow

An epileptic

Spastic Cerebral palsy sufferer Mr Jones

which implies that Mr Jones is either diminished
as a result of his disability or is a victim.

Consider using

Athlete/person with disability Paralympian

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

Person with Down syndrome

Autism / Autistic

Person on the autism spectrum

If preferred:

Autistic person (Identity-first language)

Person with autism (Person-first language)

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

Accessible seating/parking/toilet/lift

Seizure

Amputation Amputee

Instead of

Disabled athlete/person

Handicapped athlete/person

Down's kids Down syndrome person

Mongol

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.

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.

Disabled Handicapped

Fit Attack Spell

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
- ✗ 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
- ✗ 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?
- 5** 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

✓ Do

Ask the person how they would like to be depicted.

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

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

Show real people who live with disability.

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

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

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.

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

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

✗ Instead of

Guessing or assuming.

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

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

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.

Only interviewing people with disability for disability-related stories.

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.

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

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

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'.



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
www.aruma.com.au/about-us/about-disability/disability-language-guide
-  **Australian Bureau of Statistics**
Disability statistics
www.abs.gov.au/Disability
-  **Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO)**
Disability statistics and facts
www.afdo.org.au/resources
-  **Australian Government**
Department of Social Services - About People with Disability in Australia
www.dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers/supporting-people-with-disability/about-people-with-disability-in-australia
-  **Australian Network on Disability**
Disability statistics
www.and.org.au/pages/resources.html
-  **Down Syndrome**
Media guidelines
www.downsyndrome.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Media_Guidelines.pdf (98.5 KB)
-  **Government of Queensland**
A Way with Words: Guidelines for the portrayal of people with a disability
www.inclusionwa.org.au/download/A%20way%20with%20words.pdf (962 KB)
-  **Inclusive SA**
SA's first Disability Inclusion Plan
www.inclusive.sa.gov.au
-  **International Day of People with Disability**
Respectful Communication
www.idpwd.com.au/resources/communication
-  **MS Australia**
Reporting on MS – Media Briefing
www.msaustralia.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'
www.ted.com/talks/stella_young_i_m_not_your_inspiration_thank_you_very_much

Finding a spokesperson



Australian Network on Disability

www.and.org.au



International Day of People with Disability

www.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.



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