



Media and Communications Policy

1. Purpose

The WA Country Health Service (WACHS) values effective communications with the media as a means of fulfilling its aim to achieve and promote a healthier country Western Australia.

WACHS Communications is the focal point for all contact with, and comment to, the media to ensure that we deliver a consistent and timely message to all sections of the media.

This includes mainstream print, radio and television and online media, as well as health-specific media.

The team have built strong working relationships with news organisations and have specialist skills in managing media matters.

The media are a communications tool that allow WA Country Health Service to reach large and specific audiences quickly. The media provide the opportunity to promote the health service's achievements, events and health messages to its community, staff and stakeholders.

WA Country Health Service supports coordinated official media engagement. The same standards of professional practice and conduct associated with all communication activities apply.

This policy provides the standards for staff within WA Country Health Service who engage with the media.

2. Policy

2.1 Media enquiries

If contacted by the media for information, comment or clarification, before making any comments staff should advise the journalist to refer their query to WACHS Communications.

The media is to be provided with the WACHS media contact number 0467 499 525 which is monitored 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Often, due to the immediacy of news, information will be required at short notice and within tight deadlines and staff should endeavour to meet these to avoid negative publicity and to promote a positive relationship between WACHS and the media.

WACHS Communications liaises with senior management, including all members of the WACHS Executive, the WACHS Chief Executive Officer, the Director General of WA Health, and Media Advisers to the Minister for Health and Minister for Mental Health and other government departments, as appropriate, to obtain approval for any information to be sent to the media.

2.2 Public comment

Staff members are not permitted to publicly communicate information (confidential or otherwise) obtained through the course of their employment without authorisation from the relevant instrument of authorisation, unless it is part of their official role.

The WA Country Health Service adopts the [Use of Official Information, Digital Services \(Social Media\) and Public Comment Policy](#) which states:

A staff member may be called upon to explain or provide information or Public Comment in any forum, including those in which a fee is charged, but should only do so under guidance, and if authorised under the relevant instrument of authorisation. To this end, staff members must not:

- *give their personal views on matters*
- *disclose Official Information without the authorisation of their Chief Executive or the Department CEO (Director General)*
- *engage in discussion or offer opinion in any political forum, unless it is part of their official role*
- *prolong discussion or debate on an issue once a decision has been made, or a policy adopted.*

Staff members should be mindful that there is a risk of reputational damage (either directly or indirectly) to the WA health system if they provide Public Comment without authorisation under the relevant instrument of authorisation.

Media training is available for staff who may be called upon to act as WACHS spokespeople. This can be arranged through WACHS Communications.

2.3 Media on site

No staff member, patient or organisation is permitted to invite the media into the health service without first seeking approval from the Communications Unit.

If the media attends unexpectedly they are not to be permitted to gain access to the health service and the Communications Unit is to be notified immediately via 0467 499 525.

Members of the media are not permitted to film on health service property without arranging prior permission from the Communications Unit. Any media representatives who disregard this policy may be asked to leave the premises.

2.4 Patient Condition Reports

The WACHS Communications Unit is responsible for providing patient condition reports to the media. Patient / parent / guardian / carer consent is not required for WACHS to issue condition reports, however, staff may choose to tell the family as a courtesy.

WACHS Communications staff do not confirm any other details about the patient and do not confirm if a patient has died (unless approval has been given by the doctor).

Levels of patient condition that are to be provided to the media are as follows:

- **Undiagnosed** – patient has not been in hospital long enough for a condition report to be available.

- **Discharged home without being admitted** – minor health issue, sent home with instructions for management.
- **Discharged** – patient has been admitted, is now well and then has been sent home.
- **About to be discharged** – patient is well, ready to go home but has not left the hospital.
- **Stable** – when the patient has been admitted, has a medical problem that is being managed and a good outcome is expected.
- **Serious** – when the patient has been admitted, has a medical problem, which is more difficult/challenging to the person’s health. Outcome could improve, deteriorate or remain stable.
- **Serious but stable** – patient has been admitted with a serious health issue, which is being managed, and their condition is not deteriorating.
- **Serious but improving** – patient has been admitted with a serious health issue, which is being managed, and their condition is improving.
- **Critical** – almost always in Intensive Care Unit or Emergency Department and very unwell.

2.5 Proactive media promotion

To promote WACHS achievements, its sites and services, staff are encouraged to identify opportunities for proactive media around our programs, initiatives, achievements and infrastructure building projects. The opportunities could also include new or upgraded services, staff achievements and new or improved equipment or technology.

Staff are encouraged to discuss their ideas with WACHS Communications team members who can assist in exploring opportunities for media announcements, online and social media, ministerial announcements, launches, publicity or other events.

The WACHS Communications team will assist:

- in determining the suitability of the idea as a media announcement or media event
- check possible involvement and availability of senior management, the WACHS Chief Executive, Director General or Minister
- check the timing does not clash with other announcements across the WA health system and WA Government
- liaise with other Government Departments, or the Minister’s Media Adviser
- work in collaboration with WACHS staff to prepare draft media statements and other materials for public release, including, approvals and distribution to the media

2.6 Social media

Staff have a responsibility when using social media to not engage in online communication that is disparaging towards WA Health, its patients and/or its employees.

At all times, staff use of social media must comply with the Department of Health [Use of Official Information, Digital Services \(Social Media\) and Public Comment Policy](#) and the WACHS [Social Media Policy](#).

2.7 Photography and filming

In order to protect the privacy of patients, visitors and staff, the use of image/video capturing devices, including mobile phone cameras, is not permitted without appropriate permission. Where staff observe such equipment being used they are to approach the individual concerned and inform them of this policy.

Social and family photography on premises may be permitted if prior approval has been given by the nurse manager or coordinator. This does not remove the need for obtaining consent from parties to be photographed/filmed in accordance with the [WACHS Photography and Filming of Clinical Care by Patients, Carers, Relatives, Visitors or Contractors Policy](#).

Consent forms must be obtained for any photography organised by the health service for use in publications, media or promotional purposes.

Consent forms can be found [here](#).

2.8 Contentious issues

Staff are to keep WACHS Communications informed of all issues and anything that they believe may have the potential for adverse publicity. This will enable communications to research the issue and prepare a response in the event of the media contacting WACHS.

Note: All communications produced by WACHS Communications go through a rigorous approvals process before being released or published.

2.9 Contact

The WACHS Senior Media Coordinator number is 0467 499 525. This number is monitored 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Non-time critical matters can be emailed to WACHS.Comms@health.wa.gov.au.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

WACHS Communications staff coordinate the flow of information between the media (including television, radio, newspapers, or on-line media) and the WA Country Health Service.

All staff are to liaise, in the first instance, with the WACHS Communications unit regarding reactive or proactive media opportunities or contact.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation

4.1 Monitoring

Monitoring of the effectiveness of the policy and the implementation of key requirements will be carried out through ongoing reporting activities undertaken by WACHS Communications in conjunction with the WACHS Executive.

The Senior Communications Coordinator will offer support throughout this process.

4.2 Evaluation

Prior to formal review of this policy, the Senior Communications Coordinator will evaluate compliance and effectiveness via feedback from key staff in order to inform potential changes in future iterations.

Communications provides regular reports and relevant statistics to Executive and the WACHS Board upon request.

5. Compliance

This policy is a mandatory requirement under the [Health Services Act 2016](#) (WA).

Failure to comply with this policy may constitute a breach of the WA Health Code of Conduct (Code). The Code is part of the [Integrity Policy Framework](#) issued pursuant to section 26 of the [Health Services Act 2016](#) (WA) and is binding on all WACHS staff which for this purpose includes trainees, students, volunteers, researchers, contractors for service (including all visiting health professionals and agency staff) and persons delivering training or education within WACHS.

WACHS staff are reminded that compliance with all policies is mandatory.

6. References

- Government of Western Australia “Website Accessibility Policy.” Accessed 2 June 2023, <https://www.wa.gov.au/accessibility>
- W3C “Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0.” Accessed 2 June 2023, <http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/>
- Government of Western Australia “Digital Services Content Writing Guide”. Accessed 2 June 2023, <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/publications/digital-services-content-writing-guide>

7. Definitions

Term	Definition
Media	Media are communication outlets or tools used to store and deliver information or data. For the purposes of this policy, the term refers to components of the mass media communications industry, including print and publishing, news media (online, radio and television), photography, cinema, broadcasting digital media and advertising.

8. Document Summary

Coverage	WACHS-wide
Audience	All WACHS staff
Records Management	Non Clinical: Corporate Recordkeeping Compliance Policy
Related Legislation	Western Australian Public Sector Management Act 1994 (WA)
Related Mandatory Policies / Frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WA Health Communications Policy Framework • WA Health Employment Policy Framework • Use of Official Information, Digital Services (Social Media) and Public Comment Policy MP 0128/20 • WA Health Discipline Policy MP 0127/20 • WA Health Code of Conduct Policy MP 0124/19
Related WACHS Policy Documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Media Policy
Other Related Documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WA Country Health Service Authorities Schedule
Related Forms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photography and film consent forms
Related Training Packages	Nil
Aboriginal Health Impact Statement Declaration (ISD)	ISD Record ID: 2591
National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards	6.04
Aged Care Quality Standards	NA
National Standards for Mental Health Services	NA

9. Document Control

Version	Published date	Current from	Summary of changes
6.00	26 Sept 2023	26 Sept 2023	Updated evaluation, new template, revised related documents and links.

10. Approval

Policy Owner	Chief Operating Officer
Co-approver	N/A
Contact	Manager Strategic Communications
Business Unit	Communications
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