



Media and Communications Policy

1. Background

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.

2. Policy statement

2.1 Media inquiries

All media inquiries and calls from journalists must be referred to WACHS Communications. Key staff may be called upon to assist with a response to the media or to act as an official spokesperson.

The media is to be provided with the WACHS media contact number **9223 8755** 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 (see also 3.1 Approvals).

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

The WA Country Health Service adopts the [Public Sector Management Administrative Instruction 728 Media & Public Communications](#) which states:

Selected public servants may be called on, as part of their official duties, to explain or provide information to the media or the general public on their agencies' policies and activities. Chief executive officers will determine which officers shall be authorised to make public comment.

Those public servants who are empowered to make public comment should confine themselves to providing such information as is necessary to explain government policy or to provide factual, explanatory and background material pertinent to the question at hand.

In doing so, they should avoid making any comment which could undermine public confidence or disrupt the everyday administration of either the Public Service or the Government-of-the-day. To this end, they should:

- Not give their personal views on matters of government policy or administration, or on advice made to government*
- Not speculate on future policy directions*
- Not publicly criticise any political party, its actions or its policies*
- Not prolong discussion or debate on an issue once a decision has been made, or a policy adopted.*

2.2 Media on site

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

If the media arrives unexpectedly they are not to be permitted to gain access to the health service and the Communications Unit is to be notified immediately via **9223 8755**.

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

2.3 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.

2.4 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 and opportunities for media announcements, launches, publicity or other events with the WACHS Communications team members who can:

- 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.

WACHS staff may prepare draft media statements and other material for media use, but these must be forwarded to WACHS Communications for final editing, approvals and release to the media.

2.5 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 [Operational Directive 0656/16 Employee use of social media policy](#) and the [WACHS Social Media Policy](#).

2.6 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. Social and family photography may be permitted if prior approval has been given by the nurse manager or coordinator.

Where staff observe such equipment being used they are to approach the individual concerned and inform him/her of this policy.

Please also see 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](#).

2.7 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.

2.8 Contact

The WACHS Media Coordinator number is **9223 8755**. This number is monitored 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

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.

3.1 Approvals

Media responses are to be approved by those officers authorised to do so as outlined in the [WA Country Health Service Authorities Schedule](#).

4. Compliance

Failure to comply with this policy may constitute a breach of the WA Health Code of Conduct (Code). The Code is part of the [Employment Policy Framework](#) issued pursuant to section 26 of the [Health Services Act 2016](#) (HSA) 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.

5. Evaluation

This policy is to be evaluated through feedback from key staff, and reviewed at least every five years or as required by the Manager Strategic Communications.

6. Legislation

[Western Australian Public Sector Management Act 1994](#) (as amended)

7. References

[WA Health Communications Framework Policy](#)

[Public Sector Management Administrative Instruction 728 Media & Public Communications](#)

[Discipline Policy with Explanatory Notes and Template Letters](#)

WACHS [Social Media Policy](#)

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