



Mental
Health
Lived
Experience
Engagement
Network

LANGUAGE GUIDES – MENTAL HEALTH

The National PHN Mental Health Lived Experience Engagement Network (MHLEEN) main aims and objectives of MHLEEN align with the Department's Guidance to PHNs for [Consumer and Carer Engagement](#) (2016) and [Peer Workforce Development](#) (2019), and the [Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan](#) (2017). In accordance with these guidelines, MHLEEN has a role to work with PHNs at a national and regional level towards promoting consumer and carer engagement and growing the peer workforce in line with the priority objectives of the 5th National Plan

The following summary of resources has been put together to assist PHN's to understand and incorporate positive use of language with all people.

How can positive language affect mental health?

Used in a constructive manner, language can have a substantial impact on people's lives. In the context of mental illness, mental health, and wellbeing, negative words can be experienced as condescending, isolating, and stigmatising, whereas **positive words can convey dignity, empathy, and hope.**

How do we use appropriate language when describing mental illness?

When speaking with someone living with a mental health condition the **language you use must be respectful and accepting.** The messages you give need to be clear, positive and show that you see that person as an individual. Do: focus on the person, not the mental health condition

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre based at Blackdog Institute has developed a working definition.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience working definition

"A lived experience recognises the effects of ongoing negative historical impacts and or specific events on the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It encompasses the cultural, spiritual, physical, emotional and mental wellbeing of the individual, family or community.

People with lived or living experience of suicide are those who have experienced suicidal thoughts, survived a suicide attempt, cared for someone through a suicidal crisis, been bereaved by suicide or having a loved one who has died by suicide, acknowledging that this experience is significantly different and takes into consideration Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples ways of understanding social and emotional wellbeing."





Below are some reputable resources developed to use as a reference point.

Author and Title	Link
National Mental Health Commission 'Quality and Safety Guidelines'	See appendix 1 for Language Guide
Mental Health Coordinating Council 'Recovery Oriented Language Guide'	http://www.mhcc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Recovery-Oriented-Language-Guide_2019ed_v1_20190809-Web.pdf
NSW Mental Health Commission 'Language Guide' for Employers	https://www.nswmentalhealthcommission.com.au/sites/default/files/2021-05/MHC_223072_Language-Guide_Consumer_v4_0.pdf for carers
Suicide Prevention Australia 'Safe Language'	https://www.suicidepreventionaust.org/news/safe-language/
Alcohol & Drug Foundation 'Language guide'	https://adf.org.au/resources/power-words/
National Alcohol and Drugs Ass (NADA) 'Cracking the Ice'	https://cracksintheice.org.au/health-professionals/quick-tips-for-managing-and-working-with-clients/language-matters
Life in Mind 'National Communications Charter'	https://lifeinmind.org.au/the-charter/national-communications-charter-language-guide
Australian Human Rights Commission 'How to talk about mental illness'	https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/appendix-c-how-talk-about-mental-illness
Monash University 'For Interpreters'	Mental Health Interpreting Guidelines for Interpreters
National Mental Health Commission 'Embrace' Framework	CALD communities – Embrace Framework
EveryMind 'Language and Stigma'	https://everymind.org.au/mental-health/understanding-mental-health/language-and-stigma
SANE Media Centre	Media Reporting Guidelines
Beyond Blue 'Reporting Guidelines'	https://www.beyondblue.org.au/media/mental-health-reporting-guidelines



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