

On-the-Go Checklist On a deadline?

If you have limited time, scan this page for some of the most critical considerations when covering mental distress and tāngata whaiora.

1. Protect the mana of those you're reporting on.

Language matters. Use language that uplifts and honours lived experience journeys. For example, focus on the whole person, not just a diagnosis. A person can also be a parent, artist or manager.

2. Take extra care when linking mental health with violence or crime.

Consider leaving out a diagnosis if it isn't relevant, especially if there's no evidence linking it. For example, do you need to say "depressed armed assailant"?

Question any source of information that links violence to a person's mental distress; is it true, accurate, balanced?

3. Include the voices of people with lived experience of mental distress.

We can help you find these voices. Email nokuteao@maiastudio.co.

4. Consider whether a person's diagnosis is relevant to the story.

Avoid speculating whether someone is experiencing mental distress until a diagnosis can be confirmed by the person themselves or a formal statement.

5. If a diagnosis is relevant, say that a person is 'living with', 'experiencing' or 'has a diagnosis of' that condition.

This avoids labelling a person by the diagnoses. Ideally, ask a person how they'd like to be referred to.

Best practice example: "The person is living with mental distress."

6. When describing a person's behaviour, say they are in 'distress' or 'showing signs of distress'.

7. Help share the message that mental distress is not forever.

Include positive narratives that show people recovering and living well. If you need help finding a lived experience voice to give depth and context to your story, reach out to the Nōku te Ao team.

8. Consider Māori and other cultural and social understandings of mental health.

Consult with experts of that culture or group to ensure stories are not offensive and do not lead to further distress. If your organisation does not have practices and processes for consulting cultural advisors, please reach out to the Nōku te Ao team.

9. When choosing photos, use images of real people, showing their faces or of people supporting each other with permission.

Consider finding alternatives for dark or despairing images.

10. Include helplines.

If you can only include one, make it 'Free call or text 1737 any time for support from a trained counsellor'.

11. Include a warning if any stories may cause distress.

12. Check for unintended stigma or discrimination.

Contact us if you'd like advice on a story.

