

Words Matter: Guidelines for Journalists When Reporting on Veterans

Post-Event Summary

October 27, 2021 | 1:00 pm – 2:30 pm

SUMMARY

On October 27, 2021, the Centre of Excellence on PTSD hosted a webinar to present and discuss a newly developed resource that aims to improve media coverage of Veterans' mental health conditions and suicide. The resource, titled [Media Guidelines for Reporting on Veterans, with a focus on PTSD and suicide](#), was co-developed with Dr. Rob Whitley of the Douglas Research Centre at McGill University.

The webinar aimed to:

- 1 → Share findings from a recent case study of media coverage related to Afghanistan war Veteran, Corporal Lionel Desmond (Whitley & Carmichael, 2021).
- 2 → Provide audience members with the opportunity to learn about the purpose and intended impact of the *Media Guidelines* on Canadian journalism.
- 3 → Present a panel discussion about research findings and media guidelines among stakeholders, including those with lived expertise as well as representatives from academia and the journalism industry.
- 4 → Share ways to improve communication between journalists and Veterans during interviews.
- 5 → Inform future Canadian journalists who will be covering Veterans' issues.

REGISTRANTS AND ATTENDEES



128 registrants



50.7% attended the event



94% English speakers
6% French speakers



approximately **86%** of evaluation respondents said the panel discussion was their favourite part of the event.

Missed the webinar? [You can watch the recording.](#)

SPEAKERS

The event featured a discussion of the [Media Guidelines for Reporting on Veterans, with a focus on PTSD and suicide](#), by Dr. Rob Whitley of the Douglas Research Centre, as well as a panel discussion including stakeholders with a range of expertise relevant to the webinar topic.



Rob Whitley
Researcher:
Douglas Research Centre,
McGill University



Gavin Adamson
Associate Professor:
School of Journalism,
Ryerson University



Walter Callaghan
PhD candidate,
Medical Anthropology:
Department of Anthropology,
University of Toronto



Laryssa Lamrock
Strategic Advisor, Families:
Centre of Excellence on PTSD



Panel Moderator
Jennifer Finestone
Registered Psychotherapist

KEY MESSAGES

- 1** → The way the media portrays Veterans has significant implications for the mental health of Veterans and their Families.
 - Media coverage can affect Veterans' perceptions of themselves and their mental health as well as public attitudes toward Veterans. By extension, this can affect the relationships of Veterans and their Families with their communities.
- 2** → Journalists can improve the quality of their reporting on Veterans by engaging Veterans and their Families directly for stories that relate to Veterans' mental health. They can achieve this by:
 - Avoiding a single, representative 'Veteran perspective,' or consulting the same Veteran organizations for multiple stories. Veterans are diverse, and so are the organizations that represent them.
 - Including the unique perspectives of different Veteran Family members.
- 3** → It is important for Veterans participating in a media interview to be informed about the interview process.
 - Journalists should inform Veterans about their intended direction for the story, and what may happen to the final product.
 - Veterans should feel comfortable asking journalists about the interview and article development processes prior to consenting to an interview.
- 4** → Many journalists are open to receiving guidance on how best to represent Veterans' experiences. This includes openness to Veterans' preferences for the direction and/or tone of the discussion, as well as suggestions for specific resources, such as the [Media Guidelines for Reporting on Veterans, with a focus on PTSD and suicide](#), that support interview participants' perspectives.
- 5** → When interviewing Veterans, it is important for journalists to avoid asking questions about potentially traumatic events. The participant will discuss the events that they feel comfortable sharing.
- 6** → It is important that journalists tell Veterans' stories at different times of the year - not just around Remembrance Day. Stories should also feature different generations of Veterans, serving in each branch of the Canadian Armed Forces.

To learn more about the webinar and view materials shared with the audience, including the *Guidelines for Reporting on Veterans with a Focus on PTSD and Suicide*, visit the [event page](#) on the Centre of Excellence on PTSD's website. You can also visit our webpage for [the Veterans and the Media research project](#).