



# DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

When dealing with the media, it's a good idea to co-ordinate your interview through your organization's public relations department (if applicable). They can provide advice on media relations and help you organize your messages. Here are a few points to keep in mind:

- Respond to media requests as quickly as possible. Ask when the journalist's deadline is – some stories must be completed the same day, in other cases the journalist has several days. For same-day stories, the later in the workday you speak to a journalist the less opportunity you have to contribute to the story and the greater the likelihood that the reporter will be in a rush during the interview. Or, the journalist may have gone to another source and you will miss your opportunity.
- Even though time is of the essence, feel free to tell reporters you will call them back in half an hour if you need time to prepare or simply to collect your thoughts.
- Determine what your two or three most critical messages are and write them out in short, clear sentences. Test-drive your points on a non-expert in the subject to ensure they are clear and jargon-free.
- If necessary, reframe the journalist's question in order to make your key points.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, there is no shame in saying "I don't know." If the question is difficult to understand, ask for clarification. If you need to, feel free to ask for a moment to think about your response to a question.
- Speak plainly, as you would speak to an interested neighbour or relative. Unless the reporter is a health specialist, he or she may not have much background on your issue. Don't use acronyms or jargon.
- If you are unsure the journalist understood a point you made, feel free to ask the journalist to repeat your statement. If you ask, sometimes a reporter may tell you what quote will be used, and what the context is. But a reporter is not obliged to do so. A "free press" means that journalists are free to choose whatever quote they want, without any pressure of having it approved or censored.
- Reporters will not allow you to see a story before it goes public. Again, it goes against the ethics of "free press." But do feel free to ask questions about what they understood from your interview. It is your best chance to ensure accuracy.
- Feel free to suggest other people they might want to talk to. Again, unless they are health specialists, they may not have much background on the issue.
- Don't hesitate to call back after an interview if you think of an additional point you'd like to make or more information that would be useful.
- Going off the record is not recommended.
- The season and the day of the week may affect your chances of getting into the paper. Weekends are usually very quiet news days, and journalists are often looking for story ideas on the weekends. Summer can also be a quiet media time. If you are issuing a news release, look for periods when your topic is likely to be more relevant (for example, research on emergency room crowding and flu shots should be released in winter when hospitals are jammed and looking for solutions). If there is a lot going on in the news (for example, something very important happened that day or the day before), consider delaying your release for a few days.