



September 2016

## **NUJ parliamentary submission to the Health Committee inquiry into suicide prevention**

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) is the representative voice for journalists and media workers across the UK and Ireland. The union was founded in 1907 and has 30,000 members. We represent staff, students and freelancers working at home and abroad in the broadcast media, newspapers, news agencies, magazines, books, public relations, communications, online media and as photographers.

The union would like to share information that is relevant to the inquiry as the remit stated the committee would like to find out about examples of best practice and have highlighted media reporting of suicide and associated guidelines.

The NUJ has played a leading role in highlighting the need for journalists to deal with the issues of mental health and suicide in a sensitive and thoughtful way. Reporting suicide carries a responsibility for writers and editors in regard to the most vulnerable and exposed members of society. It is essential to understand the serious implications that the language we use can have on those affected.

### **NUJ guidelines**

The union has published a range of materials including:

- NUJ guidelines on reporting mental health, mental illness and death by suicide (2014)  
<https://www.nuj.org.uk/documents/nuj-guidelines-for-responsible-reporting-on-mental-health/>
- Media and suicide guidance for journalists (2003)  
<https://www.nuj.org.uk/documents/the-media-and-suicide-guidance-for-journalists-from-journalists/>
- NUJ Leeds branch information (2015)  
<http://www.leeds.gov.uk/docs/CoveringSuicide.pdf>

### **Comprehensive information for NUJ members**

The guidelines (published in November 2014 and January 2003) have been promoted to all NUJ members and are available on the union's website.

The NUJ guidelines on reporting mental health, mental illness and death by suicide were prepared by the NUJ in Scotland with significant input from Dr Sallyanne Duncan, senior lecturer in journalism at the University of Strathclyde.

The Scottish government also supported the guidelines with funding and with input from a range of stakeholders which included Choose Life, See Me and the Samaritans.

The January 2003 guidelines are also relevant and useful for media workers; the document was produced as a joint publication between the NUJ, the International Federation of Journalists and the PressWise Trust.

### **NUJ example from Leeds**

The NUJ branch in Leeds has been working with the city council to produce practical guidelines for journalists who have to create journalistic material about suicide (November 2015). The local guidelines cover four specific topics – the importance of sensitivity, aspects of suicide, the implications for journalists and suggestions about destroying some of the myths around those who take their own lives.

During the drafting process the guidelines were shown to journalists and to the Samaritans, the police, prison service and specialist bereavement organisations.