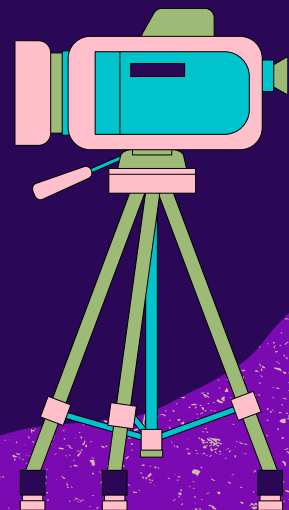


EATING DISORDERS: RESPONSIBLE MEDIA GUIDE

The media plays an important role in the conversation around Eating Disorders. This guide offers tips and suggestions on best practices in order to make this discussion as safe and effective as possible for everyone involved.

This resource was created in collaboration for Eating Disorders Awareness Week 2023.



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THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR ROLE

People affected with eating disorders, and those working to support them at home and in our healthcare system, are pushing for change. With the last estimate of Canadian prevalence coming 11 years ago in 2012 – indicating 3% or around 1 million Canadians are affected – more recent global data suggest a prevalence rate that is much higher.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has brought Eating Disorders back into the media spotlight in recent years, a change we openly welcome; there are still too many occurrences that represent the issue in a manner that trivializes and stereotypes. As we represent those who are actively engaged in the education, prevention and treatment of disordered eating and related body image issues across Canada; we ask you to join us in acknowledging the severity of this topic.

After all, outside of deaths due to the toxic drug supply, Eating Disorders have the **highest mortality rate amongst all mental health and addictions issues.**

February 1st to 7th every year in Canada is Eating Disorders Awareness Week. This platform gives us the opportunity to share our experiences and expertise with you, journalists, reporters, editors, producers, publishers, and storytellers in the media.

While we do not presume to dictate your business, we have developed this resource of suggested media guidelines to help encourage and support you in creating a balanced portrayal of this life-threatening disorder in your future projects. We look forward to working together to create a more responsible media environment for all Canadians.



Body Brave, Bulimia Anorexia Nervosa Association, Eating Disorders Nova Scotia, Eating Disorder Support Network of Alberta, Jessie's Legacy, National Eating Disorder Information Centre, National Initiative for Eating Disorders, Sheena's Place, Waterloo-Wellington Eating Disorders Coalition, and Vancouver Island Voices for Eating Disorders



EATING DISORDER QUICK FACTS

What are Eating Disorders?

- Eating Disorders are serious biological, psychological, and socially-influenced conditions with potentially life-threatening consequences.
- Eating Disorder diagnoses listed in the [DSM-5](#) include Binge Eating Disorder, Bulimia Nervosa, Anorexia Nervosa, Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder, Pica, Rumination Disorder, Other Specified Feeding or Eating Disorder, and Unspecified Feeding or Eating Disorder. For more information about each diagnosis, visit [nedic.ca](https://www.nedic.ca)
- Additional conditions that are not yet recognized in the DSM-5, but present regularly in community, include orthorexia and diabulimia.
- Binge Eating Disorder is the most common Eating Disorder, followed by Bulimia Nervosa, then Anorexia Nervosa.

How do Eating Disorders develop?

- Contrary to popular belief, Eating Disorders are not a choice and they are not a “vanity disorder”. This myth can increase stigma and shame, discouraging affected folks from seeking treatment and support.
- Eating Disorders are about more than just food and weight. They are also about coping with difficult emotions, oppressive or traumatic circumstances, feelings of self-worth, and control.
- Food restriction (as a result of dieting or food insecurity) can trigger the onset of an Eating Disorder for folks who are at a heightened risk due to biological, social, and psychological factors.
- Eating Disorders can develop in people who haven't been exposed to media images; cases in people with congenital blindness have been documented.

How serious are Eating Disorders?

- Eating Disorders have the second highest mortality rate of all mental health and addictions issues, after deaths due to the toxic drug supply.
- The most common causes of death are: suicide, and cardiovascular failure as a result of behaviours such as restriction, self-induced vomiting, and the use of diet pills and laxatives.
- Eating Disorders are tremendously debilitating: cognitive functioning, emotion regulation, judgement and the ability to carry out everyday activities can be severely compromised. Individuals with Eating Disorders consistently report having a low quality of life, with their social, emotional and work lives seriously impacted.

Who develops Eating Disorders?

- Based on prevalence data from international research, at any given time, an estimated 840,000 to 1,750,000 people in Canada have symptoms sufficient for an eating disorder diagnosis. The highest estimate, 2.7 million people, applies a global prevalence rate of 7.8% to Canada's population.
- There is no “look” to an Eating Disorder. Eating Disorders are as diverse as the people they affect, including people of all ages, genders, races and ethnicities, abilities, body shapes and sizes, income levels, abilities, and more.
- Experiences of oppression (e.g. racism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, fat phobia) increase a person’s likelihood of developing an Eating Disorder. It’s crucial to look at the ways in which intersecting forms of oppression influence a person’s development and experience of an Eating Disorder.
- The majority of individuals with Eating Disorders are not underweight. In fact, most are a “normal” weight or slightly heavier. You cannot determine if someone has an Eating Disorder, or what type of Eating Disorder they have, based on how they look.
- Assumptions and stereotypes about who develops Eating Disorders are incredibly harmful, as they prevent those who don’t fit the stereotype from receiving support - either because they don’t self-identify as needing help or because health professionals are less likely to recognize their symptoms. For example, individuals in marginalized populations, such as 2SLGBTQIA+ and B/I/POC communities, are more likely to struggle with Eating Disorders and often face more barriers to treatment.

Is Eating Disorder treatment available?

Treatment pathways

- Effective Eating Disorder treatment can look different for everyone. "Evidence-based" treatment can include a combination of talk therapy (e.g., Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, Dialectical Behavioural Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) and sometimes medications for specific Eating Disorders and concurrent mental health challenges. Furthermore, inpatient and/or residential treatment may also be required.
- It's important to note that many treatment modalities that have not been validated as "evidence-based" (e.g., land-based healing, music therapy, psychodrama and improv, etc.) can be just as effective and more culturally relevant.
- Furthermore, approaches like peer support, support groups, and guided self-help can positively contribute to a person's support system.

Factors impacting treatment access

- Timely access to treatment for Eating Disorders in Canada is difficult. There are frequently waitlists for publicly-funded treatment, ranging from weeks to years, and private treatment options are unaffordable for most.
- In some regions, publicly-funded treatment may not be specific to Eating Disorders nor offer all levels of care (e.g., from inpatient to outpatient to community).
- Gender-affirming and culturally-sensitive treatment and support options are also lacking in most regions across Canada.
- Training and resource gaps in primary care contribute to missed opportunities for a timely assessment. Many individuals are not diagnosed or receive treatment; or access treatment at an older age where they can face more complications as they work towards recovery.
- All these factors influence help-seeking and access to treatment. It is estimated that only 27% of individuals with Eating Disorders will seek treatment and remission rates to current treatment approaches for Eating Disorders is only approximately 50%, with 50% of cases becoming severe and enduring.
- With access to appropriate and timely treatment, recovery from an Eating Disorder is possible.

PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. CAPTURE A WIDE RANGE OF EXPERIENCES

Centre people with diverse identities, whose perspectives are often overlooked

- Common depiction of Eating Disorders often focus on young, white, middle-upper class women. However, Eating Disorders are as diverse as the people they affect and accurate representation is important for improving public awareness and individuals' access to care.
- Diversify representation to include Black, Indigenous, and people of colour; older adults; men; people in fat and larger bodies; transgender and gender-nonconforming people, people with disabilities, and people with lower socioeconomic status (e.g., poverty, food insecurity, lack of access to clean drinking water, etc.).

Dismantle stereotypes

- Avoid using:
 - before and after pictures;
 - pictures of emaciated individuals;
 - stereotypical images of "Eating Disorders" or "mental illness" (i.e. empty plate, forks on a plate, measuring tape, scales).
- These images perpetuate false stereotypes about who is impacted by Eating Disorders, which can actively prevent folks from seeking or receiving support.
- People aren't their eating disorder, they have an eating disorder. Catch generalizations and locate people's experiences within their experience instead of referencing "people with eating disorders" or "people with [diagnosis]".
- Using language like "they chose to exercise every day" unintentionally reinforces the myth that Eating Disorders are lifestyle choices.

2. FOCUS ON EMPOWERMENT

Build rapport

- When interviewing someone, build rapport with them before asking questions and ease into the questions by saving more complicated and potentially more distressing questions for later in the interview.
- Communicate potential deadlines and set expectations for the scope of the interview.
- Allow the interviewee to direct the interview to the highest extent possible. For example, “Where would you like to begin?” or “What would you like the public to know about Eating Disorders? Feel free to speak from your experience and what you’re comfortable with.” If possible, send them the interview questions ahead of time to allow them to prepare answers and/or edit the questions.

Focus on feelings, not on Eating Disorder symptoms

- It is important to reiterate that Eating Disorders are beyond their physical consequences; they affect people’s social, emotional, mental, and spiritual functioning. Describing how the Eating Disorder made or makes someone feel offers a powerful narrative that enables us to conceptualize well-being as interconnected and holistic. Complimenting, criticizing, or commenting on the individual’s body or appearance can be triggering and come off as inappropriate, even if well-intended.

Respect an interviewee's decisions

- If interviewing someone, be ready to stop if the interviewee is uncomfortable or in distress, and respect the interviewee’s decision on when to continue. Be explicit in which details will or will not be included, and give them the option to review the piece before publishing. If they revoke consent on particular details or overall participation, accept their “no” without pushing back or pressuring the interviewee.

3. CONSIDER THE IMPACT OF YOUR LANGUAGE

Use the language of your subject

- For mindful use of language, follow their lead. Do they use the term “Eating Disorder,” “disordered eating,” or “eating challenges”? What do they identify as/with? When possible, we should be listening to an individual’s preference on how they identify themselves and the Eating Disorder.
- People with lived and living experience may embrace “identity-first language” as a way of centring the Eating Disorder’s impact on their life (e.g., inability to obtain employment) and differentiating their unique experience from someone else (e.g. an individual who binge eats may have different concerns and needs from someone who also purges).

Avoid language that moralizes food

- Insensitive or sensationalist phrasing like “guilty pleasure,” “overindulge,” and “clean eating” can reinforce feelings of guilt and shame around food and eating. These feelings often lead folks to engage in dieting, which is a major risk factor for the development and perpetuation of Eating Disorders.

Be mindful of the details shared

- When specific numbers (e.g., calories, steps, pounds) or detailed descriptions of disordered eating behaviours are shared, readers might start to compare experiences, which can fuel Eating Disorder behaviours and the narrative that a person is not “sick enough” to access and receive help.
- Sharing details about symptoms can be prescriptive for young people (i.e. teaching them how to have an Eating Disorder). You may be drawn to share this information for the “wow” factor; however, sharing too much information can actively cause harm.

Transform blaming or shaming language

- Questions that start with “why” and use “you” language can perpetuate the belief that Eating Disorders are choices and ignore the fact that many people, including individuals living with disordered eating and their caregivers and loved ones, may not know how to recognize Eating Disorders nor how to respond. For example:

Avoid...	Instead ask...
“Why weren’t you eating?”	“What led to your symptoms?” “What made recovery challenging?”
“You could have gotten help earlier”	“What barriers did you face to getting help?”
“Did you lie about your eating/exercise habits?”	“What would have helped you open up about your Eating Disorder?”
“Why didn’t you believe your child at that time?”	“What were the challenges in coming to terms with your child’s condition?”

Don't describe an individual as their disorder

- Using terms like “anorexic” or “bulimic” can imply that a person is their disorder – in other words, there's nothing else important or interesting about them. When speaking broadly about people with Eating Disorders, it's usually less harmful to use person-first language (e.g. “person with anorexia”, “person living with Binge Eating Disorder”) as it humanizes them.
- Similarly, avoid associating celebrity weight loss/gain with “looking anorexic” or “looking bulimic” and so forth; there is no specific “look” to an Eating Disorder, and such labels and headlines would exacerbate stereotypes and assumptions.

4. SUPPORT RESPONSIBLE & POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH ENGAGEMENT

Have a care plan in place for interviewees

- Ask the interviewee about their boundaries prior to the interview: Are there certain topics that are off-limits, or some that are more difficult to talk about than others? Agree to a verbal or non-verbal cue to stop recording, take breaks, or reschedule.
- Let the interviewee know how much time is needed for the interview, so they can engage in protective boundaries surrounding time and self-disclosure.
- Ask if the interviewee has strategies and supports available to them before, during, and after the interview.

Have a care plan in place for yourself too!

- You might experience surprising or distressing emotions. If you're feeling distress or discomfort, it is okay to ask to reschedule the interview and/or take breaks. While being mindful of confidentiality, consider debriefing with a friend or colleague. Seek resources and help if you need further support.

Provide a list of accessible and trauma-informed resources at the end of your story

- Eating Disorders are intimately tied to experiences of marginalization and social inequities. Your resource list should be credible, culturally-relevant, and account for different interlocking experiences.
- [NEDIC's telephone helpline and live chat](#) could be shared as a starting point that is anonymous, confidential, and available across the country.

5. HONOUR THE KNOWLEDGE FROM LIVED & LIVING EXPERIENCES

- Recognize co-creation, including interviewing someone else/finding new data that supports your narrative rather than twisting someone's story. Ask yourself, “does this person’s experience fit the larger narrative that I am exploring/looking for?” If not, it is critical to recognize this and interview someone else rather than twisting or adjusting their experience to fit your narrative.

6. EMPHASIZE & CELEBRATE THE POSSIBILITY OF RECOVERY

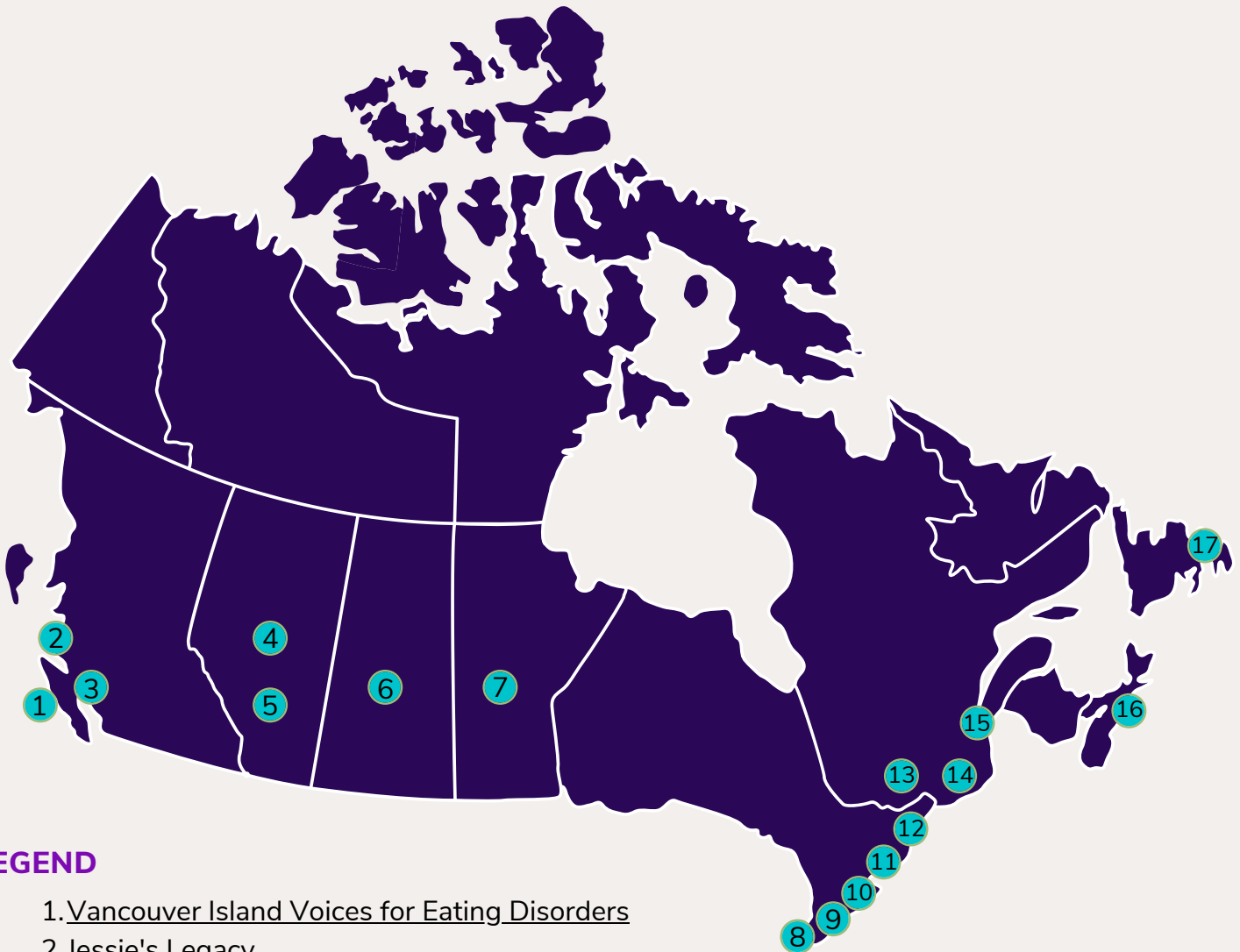
- It’s important to communicate how serious Eating Disorders can be without sensationalizing them or participating in “trauma porn.” Avoid reporting celebrities with Eating Disorders in gossip magazines or columns as headlines – this can erase the severity and seriousness of disordered eating and/or Eating Disorders.
- Using a strengths-based perspective to frame healing and recovery is just as important as highlighting the severity of Eating Disorders. Describing hope and resilience can help minimize the risk of diminishing people with lived and living experiences to their symptoms and illness.

7. ENCOURAGE EDUCATION

- Ensure that writers, interviewers, or hosts educate themselves about Eating Disorders by reading content, researching themselves, or talking with individuals about what areas are off-limits or uncomfortable to delve into.
- NOTE: Suicide is the most common cause of death for people with Eating Disorders. [Read this resource](#) to learn more about how to responsibly report on suicide.

GET SUPPORT:






COMMUNITY-BASED EATING DISORDER ORGANIZATIONS ACROSS CANADA



LEGEND

1. [Vancouver Island Voices for Eating Disorders](#)
2. [Jessie's Legacy](#)
3. [Looking Glass Foundation for Eating Disorders](#)
4. [Eating Disorder Support Network of Alberta](#)
5. [Silver Linings Foundation](#)
6. [BridgePoint Center for Eating Disorder Recovery](#)
7. [Women's Health Clinic](#)
8. [Bulimia Anorexia Nervosa Association](#)
9. [Body Brave](#)
10. [Danielle's Place](#)
11. [Sheena's Place](#)
12. [Hopewell Eating Disorder Support Centre](#)
13. [Anorexie et Boulimie Québec](#)
14. [Arrimage Estrie](#)
15. [Maison l'Éclaircie](#)
16. [Eating Disorders Nova Scotia](#)
17. [Eating Disorder Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador](#)

NATIONAL SERVICES

-  [National Eating Disorder Information Centre](#)
-  [National Initiative for Eating Disorders](#)
-  [Looking Glass Foundation for Eating Disorders](#)
-  [Body Brave](#)
-  [Eating Disorders Nova Scotia](#)



SOURCES

Eating Disorders Facts:

- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8315219/>
- <https://nied.ca/about-eating-disorders-in-canada/>
- <https://nedic.ca/eating-disorders-treatment/>
- <https://www.eatwellhealthcentre.ca/post/eating-disorder-facts-statistics-canada/>
- <https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/41-2/FEWO/report-4>
- <https://anad.org/eating-disorders-statistics/>

Eating Disorders & the Media:

- [ED Media Guidelines \(BEAT\)](#)
- [Tips for Responsible Media Coverage \(NEDA\)](#)
- [Sharing Your Story Guide \(NIED\)](#)
- [Mindframe \(Australia\)](#)
- [Media Guidelines \(BodyWhys\)](#)
- [Social media and body image concerns: Current research and future directions](#)
- [The effects of active social media engagement with peers on body image in young women](#)
- [Thin, white, female: How people document eating disorder recovery on Instagram](#)

THANK YOU!

We appreciate the work you do and thank you for continuing to work to do it safely and effectively.