

# Pasifika media guidelines for reporting suicide in New Zealand



LeVa

# Le Va

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*Le Va is part of the*  wisegroup.



# Foreword

Talofa lava, Kia Orana, Malo e lelei, Fakaalofa lahi atu, Bula vinaka, Malo ni, Halo ola keta, Mauri, Fakatalofa atu, Kia Ora.

Our Pasifika media can play a key role in leading safe messaging in reporting suicide to our Pasifika communities.

Suicide prevention is complex and challenging, and no single initiative or organisation can prevent suicide on its own.

That's why these *Pasifika media guidelines for reporting suicide* are part of Le Va's multi-faceted national Pasifika suicide prevention programme, called *FLO: Pasifika for Life*. It's also why we worked with 23 Pasifika media organisations, empowering them to lead their own solutions and address suicide reporting with confidence, cultural competency, and

sensitivity. Through this process, the staff of these Pasifika media organisations also took part in *FLO* suicide prevention workshops, and are now better equipped to prevent suicide in their own families and communities.

In partnership with Pasifika media, we aim to move the conversation from a reactive narrative centered on the loss of life, to an empowered narrative focussed on hope and resiliency. This is a rare chance to ignite communities and create change by nurturing best practice journalism. These guidelines - and the workshops delivered alongside them - mark the start of an ongoing dialogue of mutual support with our Pasifika media to contribute to preventing suicide in our communities.

**Fa'afetai tele lava, meitaki maata, malo 'aupito, fakefetai, fakefetai lasi, fakaauue lahi, vinaka vaka levu.**

# CollaborACTION

We would like to thank the 23 Pasifika media organisations that contributed to the co-development of these guidelines, took part in our FLO workshops, and for their ongoing dedication and support for suicide prevention.

A very special acknowledgement to leading Pacific journalist Sandra Kailahi for her expertise and leadership, and for contributing to the effective uptake of these guidelines.

Thank you also to the Hunter Institute of Mental Health for the permission to use information from the Mindframe National Media Initiative's resource for media (©HIMH- for more information visit [www.mindframe-media.info/](http://www.mindframe-media.info/)), to the Ministry of Health, and to the Waka Hourua national suicide prevention programme for Māori and pasifika communities for their collaborACTION in this work.

**Radio 531PI**

**Niu FM**

**Pacific Radio News**

**Niu FM**

**Radio Samoa**

**Samoa Times**

**Moana TV**

**Dateline Tonga (Radio)**

**Tonga Independent**

**Kakalu 'o Tonga**

**Tagata Pasifika**

**TNews - Television (Pasifika Broadcasting Ltd)**

**Pacific Viewpoint – Television (Pasifika Broadcasting Ltd)**

**Tonga Media Association**

**Radio Tonga**

**Niue Star**

**Radio Tamaohi**

**NZ Kaniva Pacific (Online)**

**Kaniva Tonga (Radio)**

**Samoa Capital Radio**

**Samoa Observer**

**NZ Pacific Newspaper**

**Spasifik Magazine**



Pacific Peoples  
Health

SPASIFIK



Radio Samoa  
aukland 1334am

SUN PIX



KAKALU  
TONGA  
TONGA SIPOTI

PASIFIKA  
BROADCASTING

MOANATV

SAMOA TIMES

This resource outlines key issues and legislation relating to reporting suicide and provides some practical suggestions for best practice reporting. It identifies sources of information that journalists and broadcasters might find useful. It should be used in conjunction with the Media Roundtable's Reporting Suicide guidelines for media.<sup>1</sup>

The guidelines in this brochure have been co-produced and co-designed for Pasifika journalists, broadcasters, and other media who may report or comment publicly on suicide in New Zealand. The development of this resource has been led by Le Va, who also lead New Zealand's first national Pasifika suicide prevention programme— FLO:Pasifika for Life. FLO aims to engage, inform, and equip Pasifika communities with the information, tools, and resources they need to prevent suicide and the harm caused by suicide.

## This resource provides useful information on:

- ✕ Terminology related to suicide
- ✕ Pasifika peoples and suicide in New Zealand
- ✕ Legislation – The Coroners Act 2006
- ✕ The power of language – choices for Pasifika media to consider
- ✕ Examples of reporting suicide in the media
- ✕ Promoting help-seeking when reporting on suicide.

# Terminology

<b>Suicidal behaviour</b>	includes a range of behaviours related to suicide and self-harm (including acute self-harming behaviours not aimed at causing death and suicide attempts). Some commentators also include deliberate risk-taking behaviours as suicidal behaviours.
<b>Suicide</b>	is when a person deliberately and consciously acts to end their life.
<b>Suicide attempt</b>	is when a person makes an attempt at suicide but does not die.
<b>Suicide ideation</b>	is when a person has thoughts about ending their life.
<b>Suicidal contagion/copycat</b>	is where suicidal thinking, verbalisations and behaviours spread through a community. Where suicide contagion occurs a suicide cluster can also occur.*
<b>Suicide cluster</b>	is when there are multiple deaths in a community, linked by locality or by psychosocial connections (such as family relationships or friendships).*
<b>Deliberate self-harm</b>	is an act of self-inflicted injury without the intent to die. However, some people who self-harm are at increased risk of suicide.

\* [www.casa.org.nz/resources.html](http://www.casa.org.nz/resources.html)

# Pasifika peoples and suicide in New Zealand

Suicide is a problem around the world. Every 40 seconds a person somewhere dies by suicide.<sup>2</sup> Compared to other OECD countries, New Zealand is ranked the 18th highest suicide rate – and for 15-19 year olds, New Zealand has the highest suicide rate in the OECD.

Provisional figures for New Zealand released by the Chief Coroner (2007-2018) show that, over the last 11 years, an average of 26 Pasifika people have died by suicide each year.<sup>5</sup> Many more Pasifika males than females die by suicide.<sup>6</sup>

The Youth '12 survey of high school students has found that Pasifika students are three times more likely to attempt suicide than New Zealand European students.<sup>7</sup>

Suicide is an issue of legitimate public concern, and the Pasifika media can perform an important role in informing and educating Pasifika communities about this complex issue.

Stories that address likely causes, warning signs, trends in suicide rates, recent advances in treatment, and suicide prevention strategies can provide useful information to support communities wanting to tackle suicide.

Reporting of a specific suicide event requires journalists and broadcasters to exercise good editorial judgment within the framework of statutory constraints imposed by the Coroners Act 2006, and to demonstrate best practice relating to the reporting of traumatic events.

*Reporting of Suicide in New Zealand Media*<sup>6</sup> highlighted the following points around the Pacific population in relation to suicide.<sup>8</sup>

- ✕ In a Pasifika context, suicide is a sensitive subject, and is generally considered to be tapu. As a result, there is often significant shame and stigma attached to the act.
- ✕ Family is an important value for Pasifika communities. Family involved may feel guilty and may feel they are to blame for what has happened. The needs of family members should always be taken into account to avoid increasing feelings of blame and shame.
- ✕ It is important for the media to make sure their facts are correct and they consult with a family member, community elder or family spokesperson before publishing stories of suicide; that is, to ensure the family and the community are always included.
- ✕ The feelings of shame, rejection, grief, loss, and low self-worth that accompany a suicide can contribute to further deaths.
- ✕ Media should avoid focussing on the act of suicide, and should instead aim to emphasise the positive aspects of the person.
- ✕ Media need to be careful that what is reported does not lead to copycat suicides. For example, “threw himself in front of an express train”; “fatal drug overdose”; “suffered head and neck injuries, apparently self-inflicted”; “found hanging from his bunk” are quite explicit and there is a potential for others to re-enact these methods.

# Online

Cyber bullying is using the internet, phone or other technology to hurt somebody, exercise power over them, or embarrass them.

The Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015 addresses cyber bullying.<sup>9</sup> Its purpose is to deter, prevent and mitigate the harm caused by individuals using digital communications and to provide victims of harmful digital communications with a quick and efficient means of redress.

It also states it is against the law to incite or encourage an individual to commit suicide.

## Pasifika young people as digital natives

✕ *Reporting of Suicide in New Zealand Media* explains that many Pasifika young people hide their online activities from their parents. The report points out that this 'under cover' behaviour can intensify any communication difficulties that Pasifika young people and their elders may be experiencing, and can make it more difficult to identify when young people are engaging in risky behaviours.<sup>10</sup>

✕ Good communication is key to nurturing healthy relationships with friends and family.<sup>11</sup> Engaging with social media in a positive way and approaching young people with understanding and acceptance can help to open up more effective communication within the family.

*“We believe the information is crucial”*  
Pasifika media workshop participant



*“This changed everything  
for me. I will not be  
reporting the same.”*

Pasifika media workshop participant

# The Coroners Act 2006

The Coroners Act 2006 places restrictions on media reporting of individual suicides.<sup>12</sup> Details relating to the manner in which the death occurred and the circumstances of the death may not be made public without the Coroner's permission.

Sections 71, 73, and 74 of the Act impose restrictions on making public the details of self-inflicted deaths.

The Chief Coroner considers the Act if the death is reported as an apparent, suspected or presumed suicide.

Anyone who publishes or permits to be published any information that breaches the Act is liable on summary of conviction to a fine of up to \$5,000.

The restriction on publishing or broadcasting should not prevent agencies that provide trauma and post-event support from talking to people affected by suicide or from delivering timely and pragmatic communication.

It is important to ensure support is available to communities in the immediate aftermath of a suspected suicide so that well-meaning but potentially unsafe practices are not undertaken by schools, communities and the media, and appropriate support and advice can be provided.

# The power of language

## Choices for Pasifika media to consider

The following information is suggested based on a combination of Media Roundtable guidelines and Pasifika clinical, cultural and journalistic expertise.<sup>13</sup> The advice below is focussed on preferred language, reporting about suicide, approaching bereaved families, social media, and cultural and spiritual attitudes.

### PREFERRED LANGUAGE

✓ Do	✗ Don't	? Why?
'Died by suicide' 'Took their own life' 'Suicide attempt' 'Made an attempt'	'Successful suicide' 'Completed suicide' 'Unsuccessful suicide' 'Failed suicide attempt'	So we don't present suicide as a desired outcome.
'Died by suicide' 'Took their own life'	'Committed suicide'	So we avoid phrases that associate suicide with crime or sin. Suicide was historically a crime in New Zealand hence the term 'committed' was used. It is no longer a crime and it is not helpful to use the word 'committed' because it can imply blame on the individual for 'committing a crime' and moral shortcomings. It can also impact negatively on vulnerable people or survivors of suicide.
'Increasing rates' 'Concerning rates'	'Suicide epidemic'	So we are not overstating the frequency of suicide and hence sensationalising suicide and potentially creating a sense of panic.

## WHEN REPORTING ABOUT SUICIDE



### Do

- Think carefully about your justification for the story and whether the story is in the public's interest.
- Consider how many stories about suicide there have been recently.
- Understand your legal obligations under the Coroners Act.
- Report suicide in a straightforward manner by providing concise and factual information.
- Consider reducing the prominence of the story and avoiding the word suicide in headlines.
- Be mindful of the impact of eyewitness accounts.



### Don't

- Use language that trivialises, romanticises or glorifies suicide, particularly in material that targets young readers.
- Specify in detail the method.
- Sensationalise the death through language or graphic photographs or images.
- Name the specific location of suicide.
- Disclose explicit content from a suicide note.
- Just focus on the deceased person's positive characteristics.



### Why?

The way in which suicide and suicidal behaviours are reported in the media can influence vulnerable people to make suicide attempts.

Unsafe media reporting may lead to imitative or 'copycat' suicide attempts, facilitate contagious behaviour, or normalise public perception that suicide is a reasonable, understandable and common approach to solving life difficulties.

## WHEN REPORTING ABOUT SUICIDE (cont.)



Do

- Encourage public understanding of the complexity of suicide.
- Explore the risk factors and protective factors associated with suicide.
- Give context by including accurate suicide data and relevant policy and initiatives.
- Promote comments that focus on how suicide can be prevented as well as the lasting impact it has on family, friends and the wider community.
- Provide contact details for support services offering immediate crisis support.
- Consult with reputable experts for advice about the impacts of reporting a specific case.
- Consider reporting 'mastery of crisis' stories (people who considered suicide then rejected it) focused on hope.
- Think about keeping yourself and your colleagues' safe – reporting on suicide can be traumatic.



Don't

- Simplify the cause of death by attributing it to a single cause.
- Imply the death was spontaneous or preceded by a single event.



Why?

The media has an important role to play in influencing public awareness about preventing suicide.

Covering suicide accurately and sensitively can raise awareness of suicide prevention, challenge public misconceptions and myths, encourage people to talk about suicide in a safe way, and enhance help seeking for those that might need help.

## APPROACHING BEREAVED FAMILIES AND FRIENDS



### Do

- Follow media codes of practice on privacy, grief and trauma.
- Check the facts – this is especially important if the interviewee is not a close relative and may have taken it upon themselves to make comment.
- Consider carefully about interviewing children, young people or other people who might be especially vulnerable to copycat suicide behaviour.
- Inform all of their right to withdraw consent. Be mindful that a person grieving, traumatised or in shock may have reduced capacity to give informed consent.
- Provide support service contact details to interviewees.



### Don't

- Identify with the person you are interviewing and suggest that you know how they feel because you have experienced the death of a relative or friend.
- Use images or language that will add to the pain of the bereaved family.



### Why?

Bereaved families and friends that have lost a loved one to suicide are vulnerable and can be at greater risk of suicide or suicidal behaviour themselves.

## SOCIAL MEDIA



Do

- Promote online help and information services – if your story is online, provide direct links to online support services.
- Monitor your social media pages for a number of days for any unsafe or concerning comments that your audience may post.
- Encourage parents to talk to their children about the risks of social networking.
- Inform parents/caregivers that removing technology from young people can be counterproductive.



Don't

- Promote memorial sites, which can glorify the deceased and give the impression of 'celebrity' to others.
- Blame social media for suicide.



Why?

Social networking sites can facilitate wide reach of potentially unsafe messages regarding suicide, particularly for young people. They can also facilitate social connection and increase awareness of suicide prevention programmes, crisis help lines, and other support and educational resources.

## CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL ATTITUDES



Do

- Seek advice about the cultural and religious implications of the story.
- Give a balanced view of cultural and religious attitudes to suicide – these may be contradictory; a strong belief in the sanctity of life against the feeling of bereavement.



Don't

- Assume that you have knowledge of cultural and religious values and attitudes; these can change.



Why?

Knowledge of the cultural and religious context can ensure that reports of a suicide are not offensive or lead to further distress for the bereaved.

## Examples of reporting on suicide

### **Pacific media**

**Cyber Bullying might see tougher laws to protect victims - Tagata Pasifika, 11 April 2013**

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8rRxecazRg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8rRxecazRg)

**Tongans have the highest suicide deaths among NZ's Pacific communities – Tagata Pasifika, 15 July 2013**

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKJbeVKPzUo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKJbeVKPzUo)

**Suicide Statistics – Tagata Pasifika, 1 September 2017**

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=8LcNGoENi0A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8LcNGoENi0A)

### **Mainstream media**

**Suicide rate remains 'stubbornly high' – RNZ, 20 August 2014**

[www.radionz.co.nz/news/national/252584/suicide-rate-remains-'stubbornly-high'](http://www.radionz.co.nz/news/national/252584/suicide-rate-remains-'stubbornly-high')

**Further changes to suicide reporting proposed – RNZ, 4 August 2015**

[www.radionz.co.nz/news/political/280474/further-changes-to-suicide-reporting-proposed](http://www.radionz.co.nz/news/political/280474/further-changes-to-suicide-reporting-proposed)

**Backing for suicide reporting rule change – RNZ, 5 August 2015**

[www.radionz.co.nz/news/national/280516/backing-for-suicide-reporting-rule-change](http://www.radionz.co.nz/news/national/280516/backing-for-suicide-reporting-rule-change)

**New Zealand suicide reporting has changed, here's what you need to know – Stuff, 18 May 2016**

[www.stuff.co.nz/national/80143183/New-Zealand-suicide-reporting-laws-due-to-change-heres-what-you-need-to-know](http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/80143183/New-Zealand-suicide-reporting-laws-due-to-change-heres-what-you-need-to-know)

**Pasifika suicide disparity – One News, 9 May 2017**

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=PMQagCqg5is](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PMQagCqg5is)

**Youth suicide prevention starts with building resilience young: PM's chief science adviser – Stuff, 26 July 2017**

[www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/95122704/youth-suicide-prevention-starts-with-building-resilience-young-pms-chief-science-advisor](http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/95122704/youth-suicide-prevention-starts-with-building-resilience-young-pms-chief-science-advisor)

**Whanau-based answers key to fixing grim suicide stats – RNZ, 29 August 2017**

[www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/morningreport/audio/201856464/whanau-based-answers-key-to-fixing-grim-suicide-stats](http://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/morningreport/audio/201856464/whanau-based-answers-key-to-fixing-grim-suicide-stats)

**Training to create gatekeepers for suicide prevention in South Canterbury – Stuff, 23 February 2018**

[www.stuff.co.nz/timaru-herald/news/101713239/training-to-create-gatekeepers-for-suicide-prevention-in-south-canterbury](http://www.stuff.co.nz/timaru-herald/news/101713239/training-to-create-gatekeepers-for-suicide-prevention-in-south-canterbury)

**Strong demand for new suicide prevention courses – RNZ, 26 March 2018**

[www.radionz.co.nz/news/national/353362/strong-demand-for-new-suicide-prevention-courses](http://www.radionz.co.nz/news/national/353362/strong-demand-for-new-suicide-prevention-courses)

# Promote help-seeking

Information about crisis support should be included in reporting to ensure people who may be vulnerable and at risk know where to access help.

## Crisis helplines

**Need to Talk** – 1737

**Healthline** – 0800 611 116

**Age Concern NZ** – 04 801 9338

**Tautoko Suicide Crisis Helpline** –  
0508 828 865 (0508 TAUTOKO)

**What's Up** – 0800 942 8787

**Depression Helpline** – 0800 111 757

**Samaritans** – 0800 726 666

**Youthline** – 0800 376 633

**OUTLine NZ** – 0800 688 5463

**Lifeline** – 0800 543 354 (0800 LIFELINE) or free text 4357  
(HELP)

## Websites

**Le Va suicide prevention knowledge bank**

[www.leva.co.nz](http://www.leva.co.nz)

**The Lowdown** – Free text 5626 [www.thelowdown.co.nz](http://www.thelowdown.co.nz)

**LifeKeepers – national suicide prevention training**

[www.lifekeepers.nz](http://www.lifekeepers.nz)

**FLO Talanoa – free Pasifika suicide prevention education workshops**

[www.leva.co.nz/training-education/flo-talanoa](http://www.leva.co.nz/training-education/flo-talanoa)

**Aunty Dee – free online structured problem-solving tool**

[www.auntydee.co.nz](http://www.auntydee.co.nz)

## APPENDIX ONE: The Coroners Act 2006

### *Section 71*<sup>14</sup>

#### *Restrictions on making public details of self-inflicted deaths*

- ✘ (1) This section applies in respect of a death if –
  - (a) the death occurred in New Zealand or on or from an aircraft or a ship specified in section 14(1); and
  - (b) the death was self-inflicted or there is reasonable cause to suspect that the death was self-inflicted.
  
- (2) No person may, unless the person is granted an exemption under section 71A or has permission under section 72, make public –
  - (a) the method or any suspected method of the self-inflicted death; or
  - (b) any detail (for example, the place of death) that suggests the method or any suspected method of the self-inflicted death; or
  - (c) a description of the death as a suicide.
  
- (3) Despite subsection (2)(c), –
  - (a) a person may make public that the death is a suspected suicide; and
  - (b) a person may describe the death as a suicide if the coroner has completed a certificate of findings under section 94 stating that the death was a suicide.

## **Section 73**<sup>15</sup>

### **Definitions for sections 71 and 74**

✘ In sections 71 and 74 –

**make public** means publish by means of –

- (a) broadcasting (within the meaning of the Broadcasting Act 1989); or
- (b) a newspaper (within the meaning of the Defamation Act 1992); or
- (c) a book, journal, magazine, newsletter, or other similar document; or
- (d) a sound or visual recording; or
- (e) an Internet site that is generally accessible to the public, or some other similar electronic means

**particular**, in relation to a death, means a detail relating to the manner in which the death occurred, to the circumstances of the death, or to an inquiry into the death.

## **Section 74**<sup>16</sup>

### **Coroner may prohibit making public of evidence given at any part of inquiry proceedings**<sup>12</sup>

✘ If satisfied that it is in the interests of justice, decency, public order, or personal privacy to do so, a coroner may prohibit the making public of –

- (a) any evidence given or submissions made at or for the purposes of any part of the proceedings of an inquiry (for example, at an inquest); and
- (b) the name, and any name or particulars likely to lead to the identification, of any witness or witnesses.

Section 75 allows for any person, including the media, who is dissatisfied with a Coroner's ruling concerning reporting restrictions to seek a review through the High Court.

### **Section 75<sup>17</sup>**

#### ***Review of decisions relating to publication of details, evidence, etc***

- ✕ (1) This subsection applies to a person affected by –
  - (a) a refusal to authorise the making public of particulars of a death under section 71A from a restriction applying to the publication of details of self-inflicted deaths; or
  - (b) a prohibition under section 74.
- (2) A person to whom subsection (1) applies may apply to a High Court Judge for a review of the refusal or prohibition.
- (3) Until the Judge reaches a decision on the application, the refusal or prohibition concerned continues in effect.
- (4) The Judge may (as the case requires), in the Judge's absolute discretion and on any ground the Judge thinks fit, –
  - (a) confirm the refusal, or revoke it and issue an authority; or
  - (b) confirm, modify, or revoke the prohibition.
- (5) An authority may be issued under subsection (4)(a) unconditionally, or subject to conditions the Judge thinks fit.

*“It is more important for us in Pasifika media to dialogue and understand how this is vitally important because it will protect/bind us in the area of reporting suicides. It also gives meaning to how we approach the issue as a Pasifika community.”*

Pasifika media workshop participant

## APPENDIX TWO: Comparing New Zealand sources of data on suicide

In addition to the Ministry's official statistics on suicide, each year the Chief Coroner releases provisional data on suspected self-inflicted deaths notified to the Coroner.

The following table outlines the key differences between the Ministry's official statistical publication Suicide Facts and the Chief Coroner's provisional data.

<b>SUICIDE FACTS</b> (Ministry of Health) <sup>18</sup>	<b>PROVISIONAL SUICIDE DATA</b> (Coronial Services Of NZ) <sup>19</sup>
Annually by calendar year	Annually from July to June
Deaths which have been determined by a Coroner to be a suicide (including only a few provisional cases still to be determined).	Provisional count of all self-inflicted deaths referred into the coronial system, including active cases before a Coroner where intent is yet to be established by a Coroner.
Subject to minor revisions as the few remaining provisional cases are finalised.	Subject to significant revision as Coronial determinations are completed.
For the above reasons, data is published approximately two to three years after the annual period of interest.	For the above reasons, data is published two months after the annual period of interest.

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