

Skill-BUILDER: Engage the local media



As paediatricians, you are among the most trusted voices within your community. Your public support for policies aimed at protecting child health can lead to tangible change. Engaging with local media outlets can help amplify your message and promote awareness at a regional level. This guide will equip you to plan for and acquire media attention and coverage in your local areas.

Objectives

It is important to have clear objectives regarding why you want media coverage and how it will help your campaign. For example, do you want people to come to an event or sign a petition? Do you want to raise awareness about an issue? These objectives will allow you to think about your ideal audience and keep your key messages clear and concise.

Audience

Who do you want to reach? Think about the type of media they are most likely to read or watch.

Key message

What do they need to know? Think about the main message you need to get across and try expressing it in just one sentence.

Voice

Be clear about whose opinion you are representing. If you are speaking as an individual, be specific that you are representing your own views (backed up by your professional experience), and not those of an organisation you work for or are associated with. If you are speaking on behalf of an organisation, ensure that you have consent to do this, and clarify your key messages with the organisation's media team.

Outlet

When choosing a local media outlet, you should first look at what other campaigns they have done, and research their journalists. To find journalists interested in your issue:

- Do an online search for your local news outlets and then make a note of key individuals, journalists or presenters
- Use social media – find out which topics media outlets and key individuals are communicating about, and who they are tagging
- Create and keep a list of all the journalists and news outlets you want to contact.

Grabbing attention

In order to get media coverage for your campaign you will need a 'hook', something that helps it stand out as new, interesting, surprising or of public interest. To find your hook, think about whether your story does at least one of the following:

- Presents new research or statistics
- Links to a key date or current trend
- Is tied to an event – for example delivering your petition to a local politician

Communicate your message

Writing a press release is an excellent way to communicate your overall message and hook. You can find more information on [how best to write a press release](#). Once you have your release, you can email this to individual journalists, news agencies, and the 'news desks' and 'forward planning desks' of newspapers, TV stations and radio.

Many journalists prefer to be contacted by email. However, to give your story the best chance of getting coverage, you can also pick up the phone and 'pitch'. Here are some tips:

- Be confident: practise before you make the call
- Be clear and concise – get to the point quickly (think about how you structure a clinical handover to get key messages across)
- Keep a record of your calls – who you contacted, when, and the outcome

Preparing for a media interview

Once the media outlet or newspaper agrees to share your story, they may want to interview you. Before accepting an interview, you should first determine:

- Will it be live or pre-recorded?
- Where will the interview take place? Or is it a call/virtual?
- How long will it last?
- Who else are they speaking to? (Are they speaking to a patient or another clinician before you?)
- What sort of questions will be asked? You can ask for a list of suggested questions.
- Who will be conducting the interview?
- How is the outlet going to use your interview (in writing, on social media, or on the radio?)

To prepare for a media interview, you should go back to your key messages – the most important things you want the audience to know. Prepare some responses to potential questions from journalists (including the tricky ones) and get comfortable saying your key messages and responses out loud – practice makes perfect.

Remember you might get asked for information that you can't respond to e.g. for patient confidentiality or in another organisation. It is ok to say 'you would have to speak to X organisation'.

During the interview

- Be clear – use language that anyone will be able to understand
- Speak at a measured pace. Remember to pause between messages.
- Use statistics, examples and stories to back up your messaging
- Have key messages and details written down and at hand to refer to
- Remember your unique selling point 'as a paediatrician, 'I see X impact on patients' or 'families always tell me...'

More and more interviews are taking place over Teams, Zoom or another online source.

- Keep your background uncluttered and light source (window/light) in front of you
- Look at the camera on your device NOT your screen
- Place your device at the correct height (straight ahead of you) and switch off notifications