

# Maternal Mortality Media Training & Communications 101



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# Lost Mothers

An estimated 700 to 900 women in the U.S. died from pregnancy-related causes in 2016. We have identified 134 of them so far.

*by Nina Martin, ProPublica, Emma Cillekens and Alessandra Freitas, special to ProPublica  
July 17, 2017*

## LOST MOTHERS

# The New U.S. Maternal Mortality Rate Fails to Capture Many Deaths

Since 2007, the government had held off on releasing an official estimate of expectant and new mothers who died from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. It waited for the data to get better. But the new, long-anticipated number falls short.

by Nina Martin, Feb. 13, 12:40 p.m. EST

# The New York Times Magazine



FEATURE

## Why America's Black Mothers and Babies Are in a Life-or-Death Crisis

The answer to the disparity in death rates has everything to do with the lived experience of being a black woman in America.

Childbirth is killing black women in the US, and here's why



CBS NEWS / August 5, 2018, 10:06 AM

## Maternal mortality: An American crisis



# Objectives

1. Understand the benefit of working with the news media
2. Understand what makes “news”
3. Learn how to prepare key messages
  - Review template for maternal mortality/ MMRC key messages
4. Review health communication best practices and resources
5. Learn techniques for responding to interview questions
6. Understand the importance of addressing inequities in maternal mortality, particularly affecting Black and Native communities, in state-level prevention messaging



# News media basics

# Why work with the media?

- They are here to stay.
- It's a responsibility, and an opportunity.
- Their reach spans much further than ours.
- Working with them can be a “win-win” when done right.

## Purpose of the Media

- Deliver accurate news
- Inform, educate and entertain
- Provide contrasting viewpoints
- Act as a watchdog
- Make money- it's a business



## Who are they?

- Print, radio, broadcast, blogs
- International, national, regional, local
- Trade publications- e.g. for healthcare professionals
- Fewer healthcare/science journalists

# What are they looking for?

- Quick responses, on deadlines
- News
  - What happened?
  - Why now?
  - What are the findings?
- Local angles
  - What county? What hospital?
- Context & perspective
- Access to YOU, the expert

## You may be a newsmaker when:

- You release findings/recommendations
- Your paper is published
- You're speaking at a local event
- You're an invited guest in your official capacity





**Preparing key messages**

# Data can inform, inspire, and invoke action

- Data for data's sake is not enough- should be communicated in a meaningful way
- The right message to the right person at the right time can change attitudes and beliefs, and inspire people to take action.



# Think about Target Audience and Key Message(s)

- Who does this matter to beside me?
  - Media/ the public, other stakeholders
- What's your goal in getting information out?
- What makes a key message?
  - Why is this important?
  - What is the implication?
  - What is new about this?
  - Why now?



# What's the bottom line?

- Use inverted pyramid (reverse of peer-reviewed articles)
- Start with the key findings
- Then elaborate on message, other background
- Anticipate interests, questions and concerns



# What information do media want?

- Numbers in perspective (first, worst, biggest, trend up or down)
- Resulting effects- what does this mean for my audience?
- Compelling true stories- first person experience
- Contrary expert points of view; is there controversy?



# Develop Reactive Q&A

- Answer the hard questions before they are asked
- What are common misperceptions to address?
- Determine who the spokesperson will be and do some prep/practice ahead of time



# Potential tough questions

- Why don't you release data on facilities with deaths? (Privacy issues)
- Can you share data by county?
- Can you address the lack of diversity represented on the MMRC?
- What are you doing to eliminate racial disparities?
- Why are injury deaths not included in your data?
- What more should be done in [state] to protect pregnant women?
- How can my viewers/readers protect themselves and their loved ones?
- Why are you not doing XYZ?

# Maternal Mortality/ MMRC key messages



## Key Messages: Maternal Mortality- High level

- Too many mothers die every year in the U.S. [and insert state] due to pregnancy-related complications. Many of these deaths could have been prevented.
- While thankfully most women in the U.S. experience healthy pregnancies, we are committed to better understanding what causes maternal deaths when they do happen.
- With a more complete picture of the problem through our Maternal Mortality Review Committee, we can work with CDC and others to identify the best solutions to eliminate disparities, end preventable maternal deaths, and improve the health outcomes of women over all.

# Key Messages: Maternal Mortality- Data points

- About 700 women die each year in the United States due to pregnancy-related complications. These deaths are tragic, particularly because so many could be prevented.
- About 1/3 of these deaths occur during pregnancy, another 1/3 at delivery or in the week after, and 1/3 happened 1 week to 1 year after pregnancy.
- There are significant racial and ethnic disparities in pregnancy-related complications and deaths.
- Black, American Indians and Alaska Natives are 2-3 times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than a white woman.
- **Adapt to important state-specific data**

## Key Messages: MMRC Specific

- Maternal Mortality Review Committees (MMRCs) offer the best opportunity for better understanding and preventing maternal mortality.
  - This is a process by which a multidisciplinary committee at the state or city-level identifies and reviews maternal deaths that occur within one year of pregnancy.
- MMRCs include representatives from public health, obstetrics and gynecology, maternal-fetal medicine, community-based organizations, nursing, midwifery, forensic pathology, social work, mental health and behavioral health.
  - Add info on who makes up your MMRC, diversity of representation
  - History of your MMRC and how far its come

# Key Messages: MMRC Specific

- MMRCs:
  - Facilitate an understanding of the drivers of maternal mortality and morbidity and associated disparities;
  - Determine what interventions at the patient, provider, facility, system and community level will have the most impact; and
  - Implement initiatives in the right places for the families who need them most.

# Key Messages: MMRC Specific

- Benefits of state MMRC:
  - Keep issues local and timely
  - Make recommendations for action in the context of their own state.

## Key Messages: MMRC Specific

- We have access to multiple sources of information that provide a deeper understanding of the circumstances surrounding each death to develop actionable recommendations to prevent future deaths.
  - Add info on your process for gathering information and releasing results/recommendations
- Provide your most recent local data and resulting recommendations
- Include lessons learned and challenges moving forward
- Mention state partnerships to bring data and recommendations to action to address maternal mortality, such as Perinatal Quality Collaboratives (PQCs)

# Key Messages: Case Examples

- Consider providing case examples to help with understanding preventability
  - Example- IL Maternal Morbidity and Mortality Report published Oct 2018
  - Chicago Tribune coverage

Black moms in Illinois 6 times more likely to die from pregnancy-related conditions

During her pregnancy, “Jasmine,” a black woman in her 20s, went to the emergency room eight times, according to an Illinois Department of Public Health report released Thursday. She complained of pain in her foot and calf. After delivering a healthy, full-term baby, she still experienced leg pain and was told to use ice packs.

# Health Communication Resources



# Plain Language Resources

- <https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/developmaterials/plainlanguage.html>

The screenshot shows the CDC Health Literacy website. The header includes the CDC logo and the text "Centers for Disease Control and Prevention" and "CDC 24/7: Saving Lives, Protecting People™". A search bar is located in the top right corner. The main navigation bar is dark blue with the text "Health Literacy". Below this, a breadcrumb trail reads "CDC > Health Literacy > Develop & Test Materials > Guidance & Tools". Social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Email, and Print are visible. The left sidebar contains a home icon and a list of menu items: "Health Literacy Basics", "Find Training", "Create a Health Literacy Plan", "Collaborate", "Guidelines, Laws, & Standards", "Develop & Test Materials", "Guidance & Tools", "Plain Language Materials & Resources" (highlighted), "Testing", and "Visual Communication Resources". The main content area features the title "Plain Language Materials & Resources" and a paragraph explaining that plain language makes it easier for everyone to understand and use health information. It mentions the "Plain Writing Act of 2010" and its requirement for federal agencies to use plain language. Below this is a section titled "Plain Language Resources" with a bullet point for "Everyday Words for Public Health Communication". A callout box on the right contains a graphic with the words "Headings", "Purpose", "Chunks", "Organize", "Familiar", and "Active Voice" and a text box that says "Keep the reader in mind as you make decisions about organization, word choice and presentation."

CDC Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
CDC 24/7: Saving Lives, Protecting People™

Health Literacy

CDC > Health Literacy > Develop & Test Materials > Guidance & Tools

Health Literacy

- Health Literacy Basics +
- Find Training +
- Create a Health Literacy Plan +
- Collaborate +
- Guidelines, Laws, & Standards
- Develop & Test Materials -
- Guidance & Tools -
- Plain Language Materials & Resources**
- Testing
- Visual Communication Resources

## Plain Language Materials & Resources

Plain language makes it easier for everyone to understand and use health information. Although plain language is a familiar idea, many organizations don't use it as often as they should. The [Plain Writing Act of 2010](#) requires federal agencies to train staff and use plain language when they communicate with the public.

### Plain Language Resources

- [Everyday Words for Public Health Communication](#)  
*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*  
Everyday Words for Public Health Communication offers expert recommendations from CDC's Health Literacy Council and other agency communicators on how to reduce jargon and replace problematic terms to improve comprehension. "Everyday Words" provides:
  - Substitute terms,
  - Real-life examples of difficult public health passages
  - Revised wording

Headings  
Purpose  
Chunks  
Organize  
Familiar  
Active Voice

Keep the reader in mind as you make decisions about organization, word choice and presentation.

# Cross-Cultural Communication Resources

- [Tools for Cross-Cultural Communication and Language.](#) Resource by CDC.
- [A Guide to Build Cultural Awareness about American Indians and Alaska Natives.](#) Resource developed by SAMHSA.
- [Walk softly and listen carefully: Building research relationships with American Indian and Alaska Native communities.](#) Resource by the National Congress of American Indians.

# Involve Community Members

- Consult / establish relationships with community leaders and members.
- Respect and incorporate science representative of the community.
- Share a vision of hope.
- Honor the power of storytelling.
- Respect the power of words.
- Seek reciprocity and balance.
- Reflect critically and deeply.
- Be accountable for our actions.
- Assure that the stories are owned by the people.

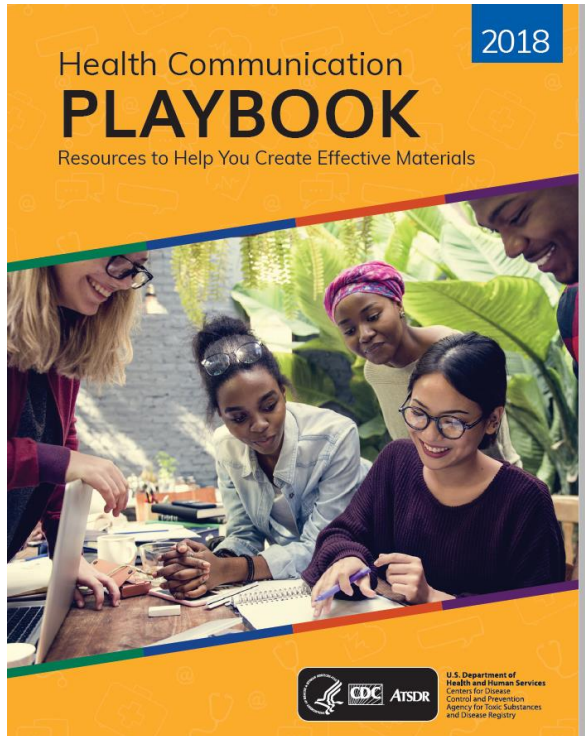
**Opportunities to be proactive**

# Tools to proactively engage the media

- Sharing embargoed copy of report
- Press release or statement
- In-person press conference
- Telephone media briefing
- Satellite media tours
- Scheduled media interviews
- Video news releases
- Digital Press Kit
- Social media (+ directly engages the public)



# Health Communication Playbook



- NCEH/ATSDR Clear Writing Hub:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/clearwriting/>
- Includes templates for key messages, fact sheets, press releases, and more!

# Media Interviews

# Media Interview Tips

- This is generally one-way communication, NOT a conversation
  - You are not talking to the reporter, you are talking to your audience
- Assume you are “on the record”
- Start and end with your key message
- Use clear and simple language
  - Avoid jargon and acronyms
- Stick with what you know and what is in your lane
  - Don’t speculate or speak for another group
  - Don’t say “No comment”- use a bridging phrase



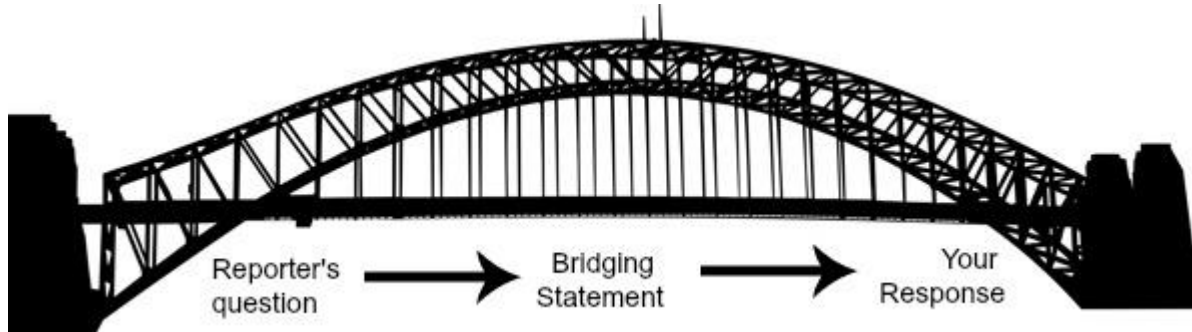
# Media Interviews Tips

- Let your personality come through
- Be empathetic
- Remember media are reporting on people, not just statistics
- Give examples, stories, or analogies where possible
- You are in control- stay calm and confident
- Be comfortable with silence; ask if reporter has another question
- Prepare and practice!



# Transition Techniques

- Acknowledge reporter's question appropriately > use bridging phrase > then transition to your key messages



# Bridging Phrases

- I don't have an answer to that at this time, but we will share more information as we learn more...
- Our role is XYZ, our colleagues at ABC may have more information to provide on that...
- I think what you may be asking is...
- That's incorrect, what we have found is...
- What's really important to remember...
- Let me put all this in perspective by saying...
- Before we continue, let me take a step back and say that...
- I think it would be more correct to say...
- It's true that... But it is also true that...

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- Data for data's sake is not enough- should be communicated in a meaningful way
- The right message to the right person at the right time can change attitudes and beliefs, and inspire people to take action.



# Thank you!

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*The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*