You've Got a Friend in Media: How Public Health Partnerships with Media Professionals can Transform News Coverage of Injury, Violence and Trauma

Learning Objectives
At the end of this session, attendees will be able to:
Explain how media coverage of injuries, violence and trauma can help or hurt public health efforts, and understand how partnerships with media professionals can fit into a shared risk and protective factor approach to preventing and reducing injuries and violence.
Assess their agency’s capacity to plan and host a similar workshop in their community, region or state based on available resources, budget, and time, and identify strategies for evaluation.
Assess their agency’s capacity to support a continued and mutually-productive relationship with news media.

Statement of Purpose
Unintentional injuries and violence are often highly newsworthy, and media coverage has a profound effect on how communities understand and address these issues. The Louisiana Core State Violence and Injury Prevention Program (Core SVIPP) and Tulane University’s Violence Prevention Institute (VPI) hosted a workshop for media professionals on reporting sensitive, complex topics related to violence and trauma. The workshop taught media professionals how to reframe their reporting to illuminate the driving forces behind injury and violence, highlight prevention strategies, and encourage productive public discourse.

Methods
Core SVIPP and VPI staff worked together to:
Determine the objectives and scope of the workshop based on trends in local media coverage, program priorities, and available resources and budget.
Research/recruit national experts in the field and local journalists who regularly cover these topics.
Develop content, structure and evaluation approach with expert guidance.
Recruit journalists, editors, station managers, and other members of the news media to attend.
Coordinate logistics for the event.

Results
29 professionals – including those working for online and print newspapers, TV and radio stations, documentary films, and public relations and advertising agencies – attended. Preliminary evaluation results show most participants rated the overall workshop as “very good” or “excellent.” All participants would recommend the training to their newsroom colleagues. Responses suggest media professionals are interested in learning more about applying this approach to news coverage. Additional topics of interest include: interviewing traumatized sources, applying a public health lens to coverage, and taking a solutions-oriented approach to additional types of injury- or violence-related stories, including mass casualty events, natural disasters and civil unrest.
Conclusions

Media professionals have demonstrated strength in humanizing story subjects, elevating overlooked public health problems, and pushing elected officials to take action on headlining issues. However, the pressure of deadlines and limited access to/awareness of public health data or effective interventions can result in stories that leave people feeling hopeless, helpless or unaffected. Public health can assist the media in contextualizing injuries and violence and provide evidence-based prevention strategies. Compelling solutions-oriented stories can galvanize community- and systems-level change to address shared risk and protective factors for injury and violence.

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