

Category: Communications	
Title: Media and Issues Management Policy	Reference Number: COM_110
Approved by: PHSA Senior Executive Team	Last Approved: December 10, 2012 Last Reviewed: February 25, 2014

1. PURPOSE

This policy has been developed to ensure a coordinated and consistent approach throughout the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) to all media interaction. The policy provides a clear description of responsibilities and key procedures to be followed in anticipation of and in response to all media inquiries to ensure timely, effective and consistent interactions.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies equally to all persons associated with PHSA, including all PHSA employees or any of its affiliated programs, executives and all other management and supervisory employees, physicians with privileges at any PHSA facility, contracts engaged by PHSA, students and volunteers, hereafter collectively referred to in this policy as “staff”.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

PHSA Communications Department

When PHSA was established, a number of corporate functions common in all of the Agencies were integrated for efficiency purposes. Communications is one of the integrated departments, and PHSA’s broad mandate requires comprehensive communications support tailored to its unique structure.

Media relations and issues management are two activities that are often intertwined and guided by the same set of procedures outlined by PHSA and the Ministry of Health Communications. Both of these departments’ goals are the same—to provide information that is timely, accurate, official, and consistent. In order to establish a standard policy for the release of information and to maintain a centralized channel of communications with media and BC Government Communications and Public Engagement, PHSA has established this policy.

The PHSA Communications Department consists of a team of Agency-based and centrally located Communication Officers, Communications Managers, Communication Specialists, a Senior Director of Agency & External Communications, a Director of Corporate Communications, and a Chief Communications Officer (CCO). Agency-based team members report to the Senior Director of Agency & External Communications, ensuring integration of communications across PHSA while at the same time working to meet the specific communication needs of each Agency.

4. DEFINITIONS

The terms “communications” and “communications activities” span several service areas, including issues management; media, client/patient, stakeholder, community and government relations; corporate communications; online communications (websites, intranets and social media); and marketing and advertising (branding, print and electronic materials). They can also include internal or stakeholder communications if one or more of the previous mentioned activities are involved in communicating to a

broad internal or stakeholder audience. Sponsorships can also be included if it includes communication activities such as marketing, advertising, and public relations.

The term “Communications Representative” refers to the member of the PHSA Communications Department who has been designated as the first contact for staff of a given PHSA Agency/program/department/service. In some cases, this individual works at the Agency/program location, and in other cases, he/she is based at the PHSA corporate office.

The term “Agency” refers to all PHSA Agencies, programs, departments and services.

The term “initiative” refers to a singular, or group of strategic services, programs and/or activities that are led and/or funded by PHSA or one of its Agencies.

The term “marketing” refers to a set of business practices designed to promote, and present, an organization’s products or services in ways that build effective stakeholder relationships.

The term “advertising” refers to the activity of attracting public attention to a product or service through paid or free announcements in print, broadcast, or electronic media.

The terms “media relations” and “media management” refer to processes involved in working with the media for the purpose of informing the public of PHSA’s and its Agencies’ missions, policies, services and patient care.

The term “issues management” refers to a process that assists PHSA and its Agencies detect and respond appropriately to emerging trends or changes in the environment. These trends, which may turn into an issue, usually evokes the attention of stakeholders of which the media are usually central.

The term “issue note” refers to a document that is written for the Minister of Health. It contains background information and key messages that the Minister and staff can use when questioned about the topic contained in the document.

The term “briefing note” refers to a document that provides perspectives on a policy or program implication. This document can be used to provide background, or it can request the reader to make a decision on the topic.

5. POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Staff must refer all media requests to their designated Communications Representative and should not respond to a media inquiry before consulting with the Communications Department.

5.1 Issues Management

The Communications Department is responsible for identifying potential stakeholder and/or media issues as early as possible as well as developing and implementing issues management strategies to ensure media relations are managed in a coordinated and effective manner.

Staff are required to immediately report a contentious issue or an issue that is likely to result in media attention to the Communications Department in addition to Risk Management and Human Resources.

Subject area or content experts within Agencies are responsible for supporting the Communication Department through the timely provision and review of content.

Agencies must advise their Communications Representative in the early planning stages when they are planning communications to stakeholders that may require the Communications Department to follow up with stakeholders or which may attract significant media interest.

5.2 Media Relations

The Communications Department is responsible for writing media materials including news releases, media backgrounders, and media statements.

Media releases referring to individual Agency initiatives will be produced on the Agency media release template except in the following situations, where the PHSA media release template will be used:

- When the subject of the announcement is funding of PHSA programs and/or services;
- When the announcement involves two or more PHSA Agencies, and therefore, the initiative is considered a PHSA program, service or initiative; or
- When the announcement refers to any initiative that Agencies are involved in but is spearheaded as a corporate PHSA initiative.

All PHSA media releases will include the PHSA positioning statement, which can be provided by your Communications Representative. Agency media releases will include an Agency positioning statement as well as the PHSA positioning statement.

5.3 Spokespeople

Only authorized spokespersons may release information on behalf of PHSA or its Agencies to the media or the public.

The authorized spokespersons for PHSA are the chair of the PHSA board, the President and CEO of PHSA, and the Chief Communications Officer. The spokespersons for PHSA Agencies are their Presidents and Provincial Executive Directors. Additional authorized spokespersons for PHSA and its Agencies may be designated by the CCO and/or designate.

Any other person who communicates with the media on behalf of PHSA or its Agencies must have prior approval from the Communications Department.

The Communications Department may request staff members who are subject area or content experts act as spokespersons on specific topics and will provide them with media training.

5.4 Coordinating with the Communications Department

Any PHSA staff member receiving a media inquiry must advise their Communications Representative immediately to ensure a timely response.

Any Agency, department or program response to media inquiries must be coordinated with PHSA Agency & External Communications.

Agencies must notify their Communications Representative when new products, services or capacity are approved and there is a need to inform the general public and/or the BC Government.

Documents which are intended to be released publicly including hard and electronic copies must be reviewed and approved by the Communications Department. Once materials are approved, the PHSA Communications department is required to send these materials to the Ministry of Health Communications. Staff who want to release documents publicly must contact their Communications Representative for information about processes and deadlines.

Any PHSA Agency receiving or issuing a grant through a third party that includes communications activities must inform their Communications Representative in advance of the event in order to assess whether communications support is required.

The Communications Department coordinates the appropriate content expert or spokesperson with media and will work closely with Agency-based communications staff when appropriate.

The Communications Department, in consultation with the President and CEO, will advise the PHSA executive team and/or the Board of Directors of significant media coverage in advance.

5.5 Media Visits and Requests

Media visits to PHSA or its Agencies must be coordinated by a Communications Representative and must be handled with regard for the privacy, care and comfort of patients, their families and staff.

Communications Representatives will attend media interviews or provide key messages prior to the interview and will follow up after the interview.

Media visits are defined as visits by employees, students, affiliates or volunteers of media organizations and related businesses for the purpose of reporting, interviewing, photographing, filming, videotaping or otherwise recording activities and comments for release to external audiences.

The Communications Department cannot grant permission for any media visits unless consent from any person of interest to the media has been obtained in advance of the visit.

The Communications Department acts in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, the *Human Tissue Gift Act*, the *Financial Information Act* and any other applicable act or regulation when responding to any requests for release of information, including media requests.

Media are to be provided with PHSA's guidelines for external media.

5.6 After Hours Calls

During regular business hours (8:30 am – 4:30 pm), reporters and PHSA staff can contact their Communications Representative directly.

After hours on workdays, weekends, and statutory holidays, reporters and PHSA staff may call the PHSA Communications pager at 604-871-5699.

On-call Communications staff will ensure they are aware of which executives are on call for media requests and how to reach them.

5.7 Foundations, Research Institutions and Centres

Information released by or about foundations that support PHSA Agencies is the responsibility of the foundations, which may delegate some aspects of such responsibility to Agency Communications staff by mutual consent.

Release of information by or about research institutes/centres affiliated with PHSA Agencies is the responsibility of those institutes/centres which may delegate some aspects of such responsibility to Agency Communications staff by mutual consent.

6. REFERENCES

IA_020 Privacy and Confidentiality Policy
COM_120 Release of Patient Info to Media or Public Policy
Media Permission Form
PHSA Guidelines for Media Organizations

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