

MEDIA RELEASE

NCSS LAUNCHES BEYOND THE LABEL MEDIA GUIDE TO PROMOTE BALANCED MEDIA PORTRAYALS AND REPORTING INVOLVING PERSONS WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

16 MARCH 2021, Singapore – The 2017 Attitude Study by the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) revealed that only about 1 in 2 adults in Singapore were willing to live nearby or work with a person with mental health condition. The study also found that 1 in 3 expressed the view that mental health conditions stemmed from a lack of self-discipline and willpower. These findings highlighted the challenges to social inclusion and an improved quality of life for persons with mental health conditions. Through focus group discussions and interactions with individuals, social service agencies (SSAs) and partner agencies, NCSS observed that while there have been improvements, persons with mental health conditions still face stigma today.

In addition, NCSS also found that media articles were important in shaping public perceptions towards them. A study on media portrayal of persons with mental health conditions by NCSS and the Singapore Management University analysed closed to 2,000 local media articles published between 2016 and 2019 that were related to the topic of mental health. Findings showed that about 63 per cent of these articles tended to be negative in sentiment. Stigmatising words such as “mentally ill” were widely used.

To address this, NCSS launched the Beyond the Label media guide at a dialogue session attended by representatives of the media, SSAs, partner agencies and persons in recovery. Developed in consultation with representatives from the media, SSAs and persons in recovery, the media guide is a resource for journalists and media professionals, providing guidelines on the portrayals and reporting of mental health issues or writing about incidents involving persons with mental health conditions. The media guide includes information like stigmatising words to avoid, and helplines and resources that can be shared with the public.

“The media plays an important role in influencing public attitudes towards persons with mental health conditions. We hope that this guide will inspire media professionals to work with us to shift the way we speak about mental health issues and persons with mental health conditions. With support and treatment, we know that persons with mental health conditions can lead meaningful lives and inspire others with their resilience and courage. These are also the kind of stories we need to tell, and we hope they will encourage individuals and families to feel comfortable talking about mental health, and seek help when they need it,” said Ms Tan Li San, Chief Executive Officer, NCSS.

NCSS will also adopt an upstream approach by engaging lecturers and students from tertiary institutions with media-related programmes as part of the Beyond the Label community

outreach efforts. In addition, NCSS has also produced a set of infographics on mental health and non-stigmatising phrases when speaking about mental health for the public to share with their friends and family. Find out more at go.gov.sg/btlguide-resources.

Porsche Poh, Executive Director, Silver Ribbon (Singapore), said, "I have seen a change in how mental health is portrayed in the media. It has definitely improved as compared to the 1990s and 2000s. There are also more positive stories about recovery today. It is my hope that with this media guide, media reporting will continue to evolve for the better, lending influence towards destigmatising mental health."

The Beyond the Label media guide can be downloaded from NCSS' website at go.gov.sg/btlmediaguide.

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About the NCSS "Beyond the Label" Campaign

The "Beyond the Label" campaign is a five-year public education effort funded by the Tote Board Mental Health Strategic initiative. It also contributes to two of the three key thrusts of the five-year road map, the Social Service Sector Strategic Thrust (4ST), launched by NCSS in July 2018 – to empower individuals, families and communities as well as forge a more caring, collaborative and impactful social service ecosystem.

National Council of Social Service (NCSS)

NCSS is the umbrella body for over 450 member social service organisations in Singapore. Its mission is to provide leadership and direction in enhancing the capabilities and capacity of our members, advocating for social service needs and strengthening strategic partnerships, for an effective social service ecosystem. Community Chest and Social Service Institute (SSI) are part of NCSS.