

#StigmaPledge

For some Australians living with mental ill-health, the impact of unsafe, negative, stereotypical and stigmatising language can be just as distressing as the symptoms of their condition.

There is a range of unsafe language, terms, myths and stereotypes that are commonly referenced as part of political discourse such as ‘political suicide’, ‘suicide economy’, ‘crazy decision’, ‘political madness’ and ‘psychotic polly’, among others, that can have a harmful effect on those living with mental health issues.

Use of terms and language like this can ultimately prevent people from reaching out for help and support, as well as foster negative attitudes and stigma associated with mental health conditions and suicide.

StigmaWatch is delivered by SANE Australia and is funded by *Mindframe*, an initiative of Everymind. StigmaWatch promotes accurate and responsible representation of mental illness and suicide in the media, ensuring coverage reflects understanding, fair representation and reduces stigma.

One way to support this work is to check your own word choices – not just when you’re discussing mental health, but when describing other areas of life, such as political candidates or public policy.

Here are some guidelines from *Mindframe* to highlight how language can be altered to combat stigma.

Issue	Problematic	Preferred
Descriptions of candidate behaviour that imply existence of mental ill-health or are inaccurate	✗ Terms such as ‘mental patient’, ‘nutter’, ‘lunatic’, ‘psycho’, ‘schizo’, ‘deranged’, ‘mad’	✓ The person’s behaviour was unusual or erratic
Terminology used out of context adds to misunderstanding and trivialises mental ill-health	✗ Terms such as ‘mental patient’, ‘nutter’, ‘lunatic’, ‘psycho’, ‘schizo’, ‘deranged’, ‘mad’	✓ Reword any sentence that uses psychiatric or medical terminology incorrectly or out of context
Descriptions of suicide that further reinforces stigma	✗ ‘Political suicide’, ‘suicide economy’ ‘suicide mission or bid’	✓ Reword any sentence that uses suicide in a trivial manner
Colloquialisms about treatment or mental ill-health can undermine people’s willingness to seek help	✗ Using words such as ‘happy pills’, ‘shrinks’, ‘crazy pills’ ‘mental institution’ ‘insane’, ‘insane asylum’ ‘loony bin’	✓ Accurate terminology for treatments e.g. antidepressants, psychiatrists or psychologists, mental health hospital