A media interview should be enjoyable and not something to dread or worry about. With the right preparation and guidance, it can be a very positive experience and an excellent way to promote yourself and what your organisation does to a large and interested audience.

It can be easy to allow yourself to get sidetracked in a media interview, especially if you are inexperienced and the reporter is manipulating the situation with difficult questions. That is why it is important that you take the time to prepare before any interview.

The first thing to do is to find out what the reporter is intending to discuss, as this will allow you to establish your key message beforehand. This is the most important message that you want to get across to the audience in the interview.

**To help establish a powerful key message, here are some guidelines to follow:**

- It should be **simple** – the one most important idea you want to convey
- It should be **succinct** – so that it is easy to remember and easy to communicate
- It should be **memorable** – with words or phrases that grab the audience’s attention

It may be helpful to consider what the audience and the journalist want from your message:

- **Give me a Message, Make me Care and give me a Way to Remember it**

When you are posed with a difficult question, do not panic or be alarmed. In these cases, use a ‘bridging technique’.

Try to remember: A-B-C: – **Acknowledge** – **Bridge** – **Contribute**

When asked a question, you respond and **Acknowledge** the question, then **Bridge** to one of your key messages and **Contribute** one of your key messages.

‘Bridging’ is the most important part of this technique. This is because you are about to be subtle and discreet in how you shift the question and turn it around so that it shifts the focus on to one of the key messages that you want to talk about and, at the same time, away from what the reporter wants to talk about.

For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledge</th>
<th>Bridge</th>
<th>Contribute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>That might well be the case in that situation, but....</td>
<td>that situation is very different from the one here today which is....</td>
<td>.....Key Message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I cannot comment on that specifically, but...</td>
<td>let us not forget that...</td>
<td>....Key Message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That may be the case in another event,</td>
<td>however I should say that....</td>
<td>....Key Message</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Difficult Questions

If possible, try and relate a difficult question to a real experience that supports the answer and key message that you want to mention. This will add gravitas to the key message you want to talk about. An experience might include a visit to a part of your country that has been affected by widespread impacts caused by adverse weather, which you have personally seen, or the referral to research and/or statistics that you have personally been working on.

A reporter will find it difficult to challenge the experience you are referring to as part of a question, because it will be something that they cannot challenge at the same level. They would also be accusing you of not telling the truth.

Difficult questions are quite likely to be on a subject that is not easy to explain. So, never use language that will patronise the audience, by saying things like “it’s a bit complicated”. The audience will take their lead from you and if you believe it’s complicated, this implies that it is difficult to understand and, possibly, not worth the audience’s valuable time to try and understand. So, not the outcome you want to produce!

Make sure that you understand the role of your organisation and do not feel pressured to answer questions on issues that are not within the remit of your organisation. If you know that an interviewer may ask questions about related issues that are not the responsibility of the NMHS, make sure you have prepared answers to deal with those types of questions. For example, you could get asked about government policy or to comment on the level of response to a natural disaster. Preparing answers ahead of the interview will help you avoid the ‘no comment’ situation, where an interviewee feels forced into saying ‘no comment’. Audiences often infer that this means that the interviewee is covering something up and lacks credibility.

Please refer to Difficult Questions Annexe for examples of how to answer difficult questions.