

The NZME editorial Code of Conduct and Ethics

Overview

An NZME journalist plays an important role – as observers and messengers, we are responsible for the ‘first draft of history’. With that comes critical responsibilities to ensure our journalism is fair, accurate and balanced – and that we conduct ourselves and present our work honestly and with integrity, and to a world-class standard.

Our principal responsibility is to the truth – and to our communities and audiences. By being a member of ‘New Zealand’s newsroom’, we commit to this Code to ensure our journalism is of the highest quality possible and earns the trust of our audience in all that we do – no matter the platform or the story. Trust is hard-earned and easily lost.

We believe that the freedom of the press and dissemination of editorial content is a cornerstone of a healthy, thriving democracy. We approach our work fearlessly, knowing that not all that we do will be popular or welcome in some quarters – journalism, by its very nature, involves casting light into dark corners.

We also adhere to the NZME Code of Conduct and Ethics, the NZ Media Council Principles, the Broadcasting Standards Authority principles, and special codes such as suicide, terror and youth reporting protocols and relevant laws such as the Family Court Act 1980, Criminal Procedure Act 2011, Contempt of Court Act 2019, Defamation Act 1992 and Copyright Act 1994.

This code is broken down into specific sections covering:

1. ACCURACY

2. INDEPENDENCE

3. OPINION

4. EDITING

5. DIVERSITY

6. CONDUCT/INTEGRITY

7. COMPLEMENTARY CODES/PRINCIPLES

8. SCOPE

NZME.



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NEWS

1 **Accuracy**

Our principal responsibility is to the truth – and to our communities and audiences. We must always strive to get it right. The truth is sacrosanct – we seek it out, and do not passively report.

Check and double-check facts, quotes, and figures. If you are uncertain, go back to the source for clarification.

We want to be first – but primarily, we must be accurate. Aside from major, breaking news, few stories need to be rushed. We work with haste where required – but we work to ensure copy is clean of grammatical and spelling errors and facts are verified. Before hitting publish – or broadcasting a story – we consider how we would handle a challenge or denial.

Fairness and balance

We must ensure we are impartial – we take no sides and we aim to be fair to all sides. A party might approach us for a story, but it does not make them the party in the ‘right’. Find out – and be wary of – motives of sources including those who come to us with a story tip.

We give all parties a reasonable time to comment and respond to assertions and allegations, especially for stories that involve conflict or where the facts are disputed.

A ‘reasonable time’ will vary, depending on the issue and topic. If we know the story is exclusive, parties will be given a longer lead-in time to comment than – for example – a breaking news story. A single, unanswered email or phone call is generally insufficient. Where we are continuing to seek comment, we say so in the story.

We ensure, wherever possible, that we speak to parties directly. The preferred method is verbal – over the phone or face to face. Emailed questions should only be used as a final resort. We aim to resist attempts by third parties to have our journalists email questions to subjects.

Regardless of how we ask questions, we ensure that the interviewee is given all relevant facts and assertions to respond to – we will not supply broad-brush questions, or withhold relevant information, facts and/or allegations.

Extra care and consideration is given to people who rarely, or never, deal with the media. A call from a journalist can be daunting – we handle these conversations and interactions politely and professionally.

A critical point regarding balance: In cases where we are covering a new angle on an ongoing issue, we do not have to give equal space to all sides of the issue. It will be important to note that there is contention or debate, but chapter and verse is not required. Nor do we need to contradict established facts when we are giving background.



Headlines and captions

Headlines and captions are the shop window for our journalism. They must always be accurate and reflect the content of the article or image. They should neither be dull nor misleading. Headline writing is an art and will be treated with the same care and responsibility as the body of the article.

Photographs, videos

Photographs and video are important elements in our storytelling toolkit. Together with associated headlines and captions, they should be accurate and presented within context. They must not intentionally misrepresent events. We will not make alterations calculated to change the meaning of a photograph or video.

We label digitally manipulated video, images, illustrations and graphics if this is necessary to avoid misleading readers.

We will include warnings where we publish photographs or video that may be graphic or distressing to some audience members.

Permission from an editor/newsroom leader is required to publish videos and photographs that may be considered graphic or distressing. In breaking news situations involving serious injury or fatalities, we are careful not to publish images or information that identifies deceased or injured persons. We take particular care in respect of images of vulnerable people (such as children, the elderly, or those who are unwell).

Sourcing images and videos from social media is acceptable with the permission from an editor/newsroom leader, who will give the matter careful consideration. We recognise that social media can be a public platform, but we must be also conscious of copyright and other legal issues.

Fair dealing with a video or other copyright work (other than a photograph) for the purposes of reporting current events may be justified within the bounds of the Copyright Act 1994. Our journalists and editors will seek legal advice if they are in doubt.

Data journalism/use of statistics

Data journalism is a highly effective practice to present complicated issues and trends with clarity and precision. Data-led stories can be tricky. Our journalists consult our data experts and editors for advice and guidance when dealing with, and presenting, statistics – especially for polarising and political issues. We ask ourselves: Are we clear about what the data is saying, and can it be challenged or interpreted differently? All major datasets and angles will be reviewed by the data journalism team or a senior editor before publication.

Graphics must be sourced from trustworthy sources and attributed as such. They must be scaled correctly to avoid giving a distorted representation of data.



Artificial Intelligence

NZME newsrooms will make use of AI technology where appropriate and when we can verify accurate content that meets our trust and quality standards. The use of such technology and content will always be first approved and overseen by editors and/or other senior staff.

Embargoes

We respect embargoes – while also working closely with sources and contacts to ensure, wherever possible, we can report and reveal information first. If we have obtained the information from elsewhere, we are not bound by the limitations of an embargo.

Corrections/clarifications/apologies

As a famous retailer once said, it is the “putting right that counts.”

If we get a fact, or facts, wrong, we correct the record at the earliest possible opportunity, ensuring – wherever possible – that the clarification/correction is given similar prominence as the original error.

If we determine that a correction is required to a story, that correction must adequately remediate the error or issue.

Corrections and clarifications for digital material will be appended to the original report. If an original report has been removed in its entirety, the correction/clarification needs to be published as a new URL and give as much clarity and context as possible.

Editors will consider using a dedicated space in their newspapers or websites to publish corrections and clarifications.

Apologies will be appropriate in certain situations and outcomes – but only with the approval of a senior editor.

If we receive a complaint about a story that NZME has sourced externally, an editor or newsroom leader must be advised immediately and they will direct the complainant to the source of the story

and consider whether the story should be taken down, pending the resolution of the complaint. We will also promptly advise the story source of the complaint.

If our journalists are aware they have made an error – even in the absence of a complaint – then they are required to inform an editor or newsroom leader as soon as possible.

While there is no “right to be forgotten” in New Zealand, people will sometimes request their names to be removed from historic stories – often court reports – because of the negative connotations for them in modern-day New Zealand. All such requests will be referred to the NZ Herald editor/NZME managing editor.

Dealing with formal complaints/legal threats

Complaints about our content or a breach of the code of ethics should be addressed to formalcomplaints@nzherald.co.nz. We will respond to complaints politely, professionally, promptly and within applicable Media Council or Broadcasting Standards Authority (BSA) deadlines.

All formal complaints and legal threats/correspondence will be passed to editors/newsroom leaders in the first instance. Legal threats will be referred to the NZME legal team. Our journalists will not engage directly with a formal complainant, lawyer, or a legal letter correspondent unless requested to do so by a senior editor.

Our editors and newsroom leaders will be responsible for dealing with formal Media Council and BSA complaints with help and assistance from our journalists and the NZME legal team where applicable.

Our journalists are required to retain notes and recordings of all interviews – and any other relevant information – for a period of at least two years. Our journalists are instructed to never hand notes, images, or recordings to any outside third-party without seeking legal advice.

We aim to respond to complaints within five working days – sooner if possible. The Media Council gives us 10 working days to respond to official complaints and the Broadcasting Standards Authority gives us 20 working days to respond. These are deadlines, not targets.

All published corrections and apologies will be appended to the original article in the NZ Herald archive.

Sources

Names make news. Wherever possible, story subjects and sources will be named.

In cases where a source wishes to remain anonymous, it is even more critical that the information they provide is verified. We will inform our audience that the information has come from an unnamed source.

We will protect the name and/or identity of any source who has provided information on the basis of an undertaking to provide confidentiality. This includes whistleblowers.

If requested – and so long as there are legitimate editorial grounds – our journalists may share the name of a confidential source with their editor or newsroom leader. However, protecting the confidentiality of sources, by both the journalists and supervisor, is paramount.

Our journalists are encouraged to examine sources' motivation in giving them information – why does the source want it in the public domain? What do they stand to gain from it? While this does not mean we do not cover a topic or issue, it does mean extra context or balance may be necessary. In this era of text messages, social media, and emails, our journalists are required to make sure their sources are legitimate and not an 'imposter'.

Two sources are always better than one. Three are even better – and so on. We will never quote sources in the plural when there is only one.

We will never quote a source saying one thing 'on the record' when they are saying something different 'off the record'.

We will never submit a story to a source or a story subject for approval pre-publication. We can and should check facts or clarify comments if these are in doubt.

We watch out for hype. We treat claims such as "biggest", "best", and "worst" with scepticism

Quotes

Direct quotes are sacrosanct and will never be altered, unless there is a redundant word or clause that can be replaced with the likes of an ellipsis (...). Indirect quotes and speech should be an accurate summary of what an interviewee has said.

We commit to never changing the meaning of a quote. We ensure that quotes are balanced within the context they were given and nothing is taken out of context.

Where necessary, we will record and report a person's tone - for example, smiling, laughing - so that readers are aware of the context of what has been said.

If a quote can be taken to mean different things, we clarify intent.

Privacy

We respect people's right to privacy, but will not allow that right to interfere with the pursuit of information in the public interest.

We consider it is in the public interest to scrutinise and report on people who seek influence, power and attention.

We will treat personal grief in a respectful manner.

We will not obtain or commission information through any illegal or deceitful access to the telephone conversations, messages or email communications of any person.

With a senior editor's approval, we will use content deemed to be in the public domain from social media platforms (subject to compliance with copyright laws). If we wish to use content not deemed to be in the public domain, we will first seek permission to use it.

Our journalists have the right to report/film/photograph/record from a public place, and we will communicate that right when necessary in a calm, professional manner.

2 Independence

We will be independent and impartial and not bow to improper internal or external influences.

Our editorial team guards its independence zealously - it is a critical component in ensuring high-quality, trusted journalism and the foundation for our editorial and business success. Our editors make independent editorial decisions which are based upon one absolute - the truth and our duty to our audience and communities. We are not swayed by any parties.

Unless you have editor approval, we do not allow sources or interviewee subjects to vet an article before publication for 'copy approval' - unless you have approval from an editor in extremely rare circumstances. Where technical information needs to be clarified/confirmed, the relevant paragraph or passages of an article may be provided.

Sponsored content will be clearly marked as such, with agreed parameters between senior editors and the commercial team.

Where an editorial staff member feels compromised - or they are concerned about a potential conflict - they are encouraged to raise this, in the first instance, with their editor.

3

Opinion

We promote freedom of expression, freedom of speech and freedom of the press. By publishing balanced opinion on a wide range of topics, we place our platforms at the centre of debate and discussion. We balance the right of the individual with the public's right to know.

It is critical that we differentiate, clearly, between news and opinion. Opinion articles on our websites will be clearly labelled as such in headlines and in the body of the article.

Unlike social media, we are not an echo chamber or an open platform. It is an individual editor's call as to what they wish to publish - we know a healthy democracy thrives when a broad church of ideas is aired, but we also reserve the right to not publish some pieces.

Our columns, commentary and opinion pieces follow the Media Council's rules and recommendations, especially ensuring they are honestly held opinions, based on facts.

We have a duty to provide opinion that does not reinforce negative stereotypes, but which provokes intelligent debate over sensitive issues such as race or gender.

Analysis

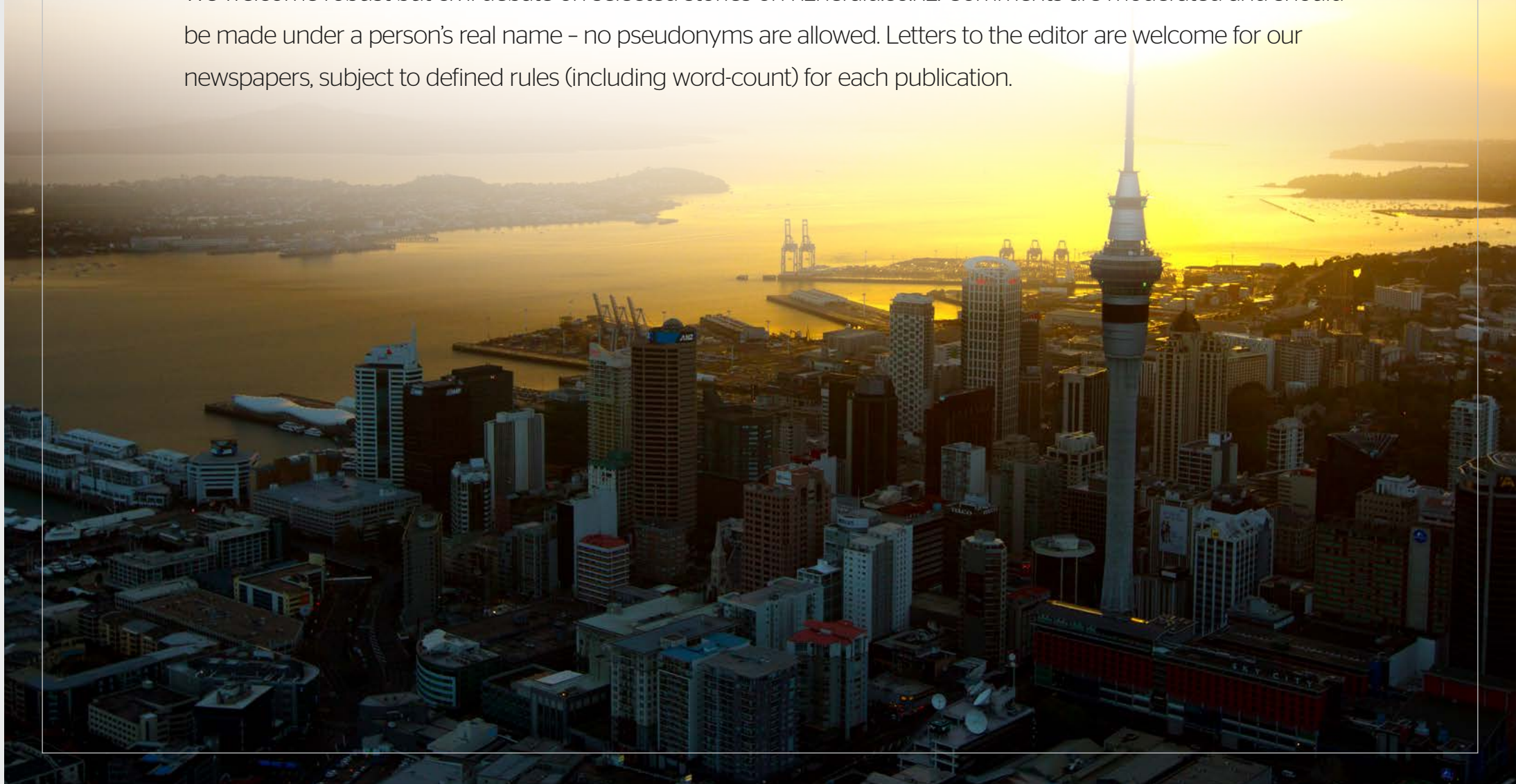
Analytical pieces from journalists experienced on a subject matter are acceptable and welcome, to help explain complicated issues - but these will be clearly labelled. When seeking analysis for articles, we ensure this reflects the opinion of those interviewed, not our own. We will never decide an angle on an issue, and retrospectively find analysts and commentators who will provide quotes to back-up that narrative.

Campaigns

We may take an editorial position, raise funds and advocate for social or legislative change in pursuit of making Aotearoa a better place. We will clearly state our editorial position and remain open to opposing views.

Comments

We welcome robust but civil debate on selected stories on nzherald.co.nz. Comments are moderated and should be made under a person's real name - no pseudonyms are allowed. Letters to the editor are welcome for our newspapers, subject to defined rules (including word-count) for each publication.



4

Editing

Our editors, news directors and producers have critical roles to play in checking stories for accuracy, style, clarity, grammar, and spelling. At all times, our journalists follow newsroom protocols and processes around the planning, filing and production of stories.

We deal with each other collaboratively, for the sake of trusted and high-quality journalism. Editors, news directors and sub editors are expected to ask questions of journalists – to test facts, assertions, and balance.

Attribution

Our stories will, in normal circumstances, carry the name of the author and/or the creator/provider of the material. If an NZME writer is at an event or location (for example, an overseas rugby test) we will say so.

We will always reveal the source of text, photographs, other images, and videos. Graphics will always have data sources.

If we are quoting a rival media organisation, we say so – but wherever possible we will take the time to verify that information for ourselves.

Stories from partners and other news agencies will be by-lined and appropriately sourced. This includes work from any publicly funded yet editorially independent partnerships.

Fabrication/plagiarism

We will never fabricate ‘facts’ or plagiarise others’ work.

5

Diversity

We tell the unique and diverse stories of Aotearoa. Our platforms reflect New Zealand’s multicultural fabric. In our reporting, we will not place unnecessary emphasis on gender, religion, minority groups, sexual orientation, race, social status, physical or mental ability, unless it is a central theme to the news story (for example, a person being banned from a job because they have a hijab).

A person who changes gender is transgender and should be referred to by the gender identity they identify with.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi

We celebrate the Treaty of Waitangi as the founding document of New Zealand. We will strive to ensure that the Māori voice, world view, and language, where appropriate, are an essential part of our coverage and that our workforce reflects the face of modern Aotearoa. We embrace tino matatau (excellence), manaakitangi (duty of care) and pono (integrity) in everything we do.

We promote understanding of Māori culture and tikanga, and do not reinforce negative stereotypes of any race through our content.



6

Conduct/integrity

We will act professionally and respect the law of the land. We do not pay interview subjects for stories – this could compromise the reliability of the information provided and lead to the truth being embellished.

Gifts

Our journalists will never solicit free products, gifts or services such as travel. Trivial gifts offered may be accepted but must not influence content decisions. Any offer of a substantial gift or service will be immediately communicated to the journalist's leader and recorded in NZME's gift register.

Our journalists will not guarantee editorial coverage of any nature on the basis of a payment, gift or invitation. Travel assignments approved by a senior editorial manager may be undertaken with agreement to feature a destination, event or product launch but reports will be independent of third-party influence. Our platforms will publish appropriate disclosures, outlining the editorial policy in regards to funded travel arrangements and other such assignments.

Our journalists will not profit from information they receive in their journalistic capacity nor use their position to obtain any financial or other benefit for themselves or their families or associates.

As per the NZME Code of Conduct and Ethics, employees must not give, seek or accept in connection with the operation of NZME any gift, entertainment or other personal favour or assistance which goes beyond common courtesies associated with accepted commercial practice.

The purpose of this is to ensure that the offer or acceptance of a gift cannot create an obligation or be construed or used by others to allege favouritism, discrimination, and collusion or similarly unacceptable practices.

For the avoidance of doubt, any gift received by an NZME Employee (or series of gifts from the one party), which exceeds \$100, or might otherwise as a matter of judgement, fall outside the paragraph above must be reported to the Chief Financial Officer with full details of the background of the gift.

Conflict

Where a journalist has a significant personal interest in an issue or event we will disclose such interest in any relevant articles written or broadcast made by the journalist.

Our journalists will not participate in community or political activities that compromise their work or the credibility and objectivity of our platforms.

Our journalists will disclose family connections or personal/work relationships - present or past - that may cause an ordinary reader to consider whether the journalist can report impartially.

Presentation

We will dress and act appropriately for a role that throws up myriad opportunities to be dealing with the public, including the requirement to be present at public forums (for example, court hearings, council meetings and other events). Our people will make themselves aware of cultural nuances or traditions and, where possible, follow protocol, for example; tikanga protocol at hui or tangi.

Funerals are public events but if family have requested we stay away, we will obey this unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Interviews

We will clearly identify ourselves as journalists representing our news organisations at the beginning of any inquiry or interview, unless authorised by a senior editorial manager to do otherwise in the case of compelling public interest.

The electronic recording of interviews is permissible. Recording of telephone interviews between a journalist and a source will comply with relevant laws.

We honour 'off the record' commitments - but will ensure there is a clear understanding of what is meant by 'off the record'. For example, is it information to never be used? Or information that can be used but not to be attributed to the interviewee (extra care and checking will be required in these circumstances).

Mental health

As well as looking after our own mental health - and making use of the professional services provided by NZME whenever these are required - we will take into account the mental wellbeing and health of story subjects.

In particular, we will exercise care and sensitivity for those who are victims of crime or families of deceased people. We will be sensitive with anyone displaying signs of mental distress and consult with our editor or newsroom leader for further guidance and support.

Children and Young People

Particular care will be taken in reporting on, or about, children and young people. We acknowledge the requirement of Article 3 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child that in all actions concerning children the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

When interviewing minors, a consenting adult should be present. Extra special care is required in these circumstances.

Of particular note, we take extra care around any cases involving the Family Court and Oranga Tamariki and the automatic suppressions in the Family Court Act applicable to a "report of a proceeding".

Media/other opportunities

Our journalists are often asked to appear on panels or make comment as experts in their specialist fields. Permission for these appearances will be sought from their editor or the Managing Editor. We are of the view that such media appearances are positive for building NZME's editorial endeavour and brand, but there may be important boundaries to discuss.

On occasion, our journalists are also approached to write books or take part in documentaries and such-like. Permission for these activities will be sought from a senior newsroom editor or the Managing Editor.

Approval of a senior newsroom editor and or the Managing Editor will be sought for all outside freelance work. Freelance work will never involve a direct NZME competitor, nor conflict with this Code.

Our journalists must never endorse a commercial product.

Editorial team members will not make any comment to media or other third-party sources about any stories or issues involving NZME and/or the NZME newsroom and/or individual NZME people. All

media requests for comment will be referred to the NZME GM Communications and the Managing Editor.

Social media use

We recognise social media is an important distribution and promotion channel for our journalism. It can also be a minefield.

Our journalists are to be cognisant that NZME is their employer, not Twitter or any other social media platform and to bear this in mind when using social media channels. Social media will not be used to reveal any inside information about NZME, including stories the newsroom is working on. We should not be scooping ourselves.

Our journalists are directed to engage with other social media users as if they were talking to them face to face in the street.

Our journalists do not opine on stories and topics they are covering as an impartial, independent reporter. This includes comments about political parties and MPs. Unless the journalist is a columnist with clearly held views, our journalists are required to refrain from openly supporting or denouncing political figures or parties.

We are courteous and patient on social media and do not engage in pile-ons. We do not engage with trolls.

7 Complementary codes

- [NZME Code of Conduct and Ethics](#)
- NZME Social Media Policy
- [New Zealand Media Council Principles](#)
- [Broadcasting Standards Authority - Broadcasting Standards Codebook](#)
- [Media Guidelines for Reporting on Suicide](#)
- [Terrorist and National Security Event Media Protocols](#)
- [Media and Reporting Protocol - Youth Court](#)

8 Scope of this Code

This Editorial Code of Ethics (“Code”) governs NZME Limited and its subsidiaries’ (together “NZME”) editorial operations, and the conduct of directors, editors, journalists and any other contributor to any NZME-owned publication, whether an employee, consultant or independent contractor, when they represent NZME. The code applies to all journalistic platforms – including digital, print, and audio/radio news.

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