

# WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

Coverage written or broadcasted about substance use or mental disorders, treatment, and recovery by independent and objective reporters helps to garner interest and success for your National **Recovery Month: Prevention Works, Treatment is Effective, People Recover (Recovery Month)** event. Through publicity, the message that prevention works, treatment is effective, and recovery is possible, will spread to a larger audience and help gain recognition for your event, organization, sponsors, and partners.

**Recovery Month**, sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA’s) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT) part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), supports SAMHSA’s Strategic Initiatives. **Recovery Month’s** goal is to increase public awareness of substance use and mental disorders, support health reform implementation, and offer recovery support through an individual, program, and system approach. The observance also celebrates the millions of Americans in recovery and honors those working in the field that helped and empowered them in reclaiming their lives.

This year’s **Recovery Month** theme, **“Join the Voices for Recovery: Recovery Benefits Everyone,”** emphasizes that all Americans have the opportunity to access provisions within the Affordable Care Act and Mental Health Parity and Addictions Equity Act (MHPAEA), aimed to improve physical and emotional health while ensuring people will receive the care they need at a more reasonable cost. Additionally, public awareness will increase access for those in need of essential substance use and mental health treatment and recovery support services, including behavioral health treatment. Use this document to understand the basics of media outreach, creating relationships, and speaking with the media.

## What Does the Media Look For?

For your **Recovery Month** event to reach the most people possible, plan to spend a portion of your time on media outreach. The press is eager to receive new story ideas, so engage them to help get your messages about **Recovery Month** across to the public.

The media, including television, radio, print, and online outlets, considers the following factors when deciding whether to cover a story or event:

- **Hot Topics** – Health reform has been a widely publicized topic over the past few years. Use this year’s theme, **“Join the Voices for Recovery: Recovery Benefits Everyone,”** which focuses on health reform and the benefits of widespread health insurance, as a platform to spark community interest and attract media coverage for your event.
- **Impact** – Using compelling and current statistics to illustrate influence will increase interest in your event. Emphasize to the media that addiction is the Nation’s number one health problem, and that according to the **2009 National Survey on Drug Use and Health**, 22.5 million people aged 12 or older were classified with substance use dependence, and 11 million people 18 years or older were diagnosed with a serious mental health problem. The Affordable Care Act gives Americans more freedom and control over their health care, as well as new benefits that ensure people will receive the care they need at a more reasonable cost.
- **Proximity** – Make sure you target the most appropriate outlets. For example, national outlets most likely won’t cover a small town-hall event, but your local paper probably will. Remember to tailor your event and outreach efforts so that the media understands how substance use and mental health disorders affect your community. Cite local statistics, available from your **Single-State Agency (SSA)**. Promoting your event within community and faith newsletters can help small venues reach a larger audience.
- **Timeliness** – For a weekly newsletter, events that have occurred since its previous issue may be considered timely or appropriate, whereas for broadcast outlets, a reporter might only cover “breaking news” live at the event site. Be sure to time your outreach accordingly.



If you hold a community forum or roundtable discussion, consider planning it around another local event, such as a festival, business conference, or gala, for credibility, increased exposure, and resources. To enhance public interest in your forum, choose a well-known moderator to keep the discussion focused and on track. Other panel members could include:

- Public officials and civic leaders;
- Local treatment providers;
- Substance use prevention and mental health specialists;
- Health professionals;
- Employers;
- Educators;
- Family members; and
- Individuals in recovery.

### What are the Basics of Media Outreach?

The first step in working with the media is to research and identify the news outlets you would like to cover your event and **Recovery Month** messages. Don't forget to look up community calendars, daybooks, and "week-ahead" columns that could include your **Recovery Month** event in their event listings. Many of these sources may be exclusively online, so use a search engine if you can't find them in print editions. You can identify any reporters who have covered issues surrounding substance use and mental health, health reform, or local events in the past. You can find contact information by using pay services, such as [Cision](#) or [BurrellesLuce](#), to see if there is a directory on the outlet's website, or by calling the main number and asking if they have a company directory available.

The Affordable Care Act gives Americans more freedom and control over their health care, as well as new benefits that ensure people will receive the care they need at a more reasonable cost. Below you can find some general provisions on the new law, some of which are effective immediately, while others will be enacted by 2020. Refer to "Fast Facts About Health Reform, Substance Use and Mental Disorders, Treatment, and Recovery" for more information.

- Medicaid, a health program for low income individuals and families, will expand its eligibility to 133 percent of the Federal Poverty Level and all newly eligible parents and adults without children will receive benefits, which include essential substance use and mental health services at parity.
- Insurance companies will be prohibited from denying coverage due to a pre-existing condition for children starting in 2011, and for adults in 2014.
- Starting in 2011, young people, up to age 26, can remain on their parents' health insurance policy.
- Most health plans will cover some important preventive services at no additional cost to you, including counseling for a substance use or mental disorder.

Once you've identified these outlets and contacts, build an electronic media list. Electronic lists are easy to update, and users can merge contacts for effortless delivery of materials via email or mail. Additionally, users can easily track who they've reached out to, and responses received. In a spreadsheet program include:

- Names of media outlets
- Key reporters and their titles and beats
- Contact information, including phone and email address
- If he or she prefers to be contacted
- A “notes” column to list other relevant articles that reporter has written
- Known deadlines and any previous interactions that you've had with the reporter

To make the research easier, set up [Google Alerts](#) online, so that you automatically receive updates on relevant news stories in your area. Scan your local newspaper daily for health and community stories. Remember to update your media list regularly so that you can use it for outreach efforts throughout the year.

## How Do I Follow up on My Press Materials?

Once you have compiled your media list and are ready to begin your outreach efforts, tailor the sample materials in the “[Press Materials for Your Recovery Month Event](#)” piece to effectively reach out to reporters. Make sure to introduce yourself and share why you'd like them to cover your **Recovery Month** event. After distributing your press materials, follow up via phone or email with your media contacts for the official “pitch.” Make your calls short and direct, sounding confident to establish yourself as an expert providing valuable information. Offer to send more detailed information in an email or to arrange an interview with a local expert. It may be helpful to write a brief script so your conversation flows easier—see [one example](#) at the end of this document. It's important to accommodate the media contacts as much as possible.

If you're unable to reach a reporter by phone, forward your media advisory or press release, with a brief note at the top offering to answer additional questions or to arrange an interview. Always provide your contact information in case they need more information. Modify the [sample follow-up email](#) at the end of this document to connect with reporters on your **Recovery Month** press materials.

It's important to build a working relationship with your contacts by staying in touch. This will build your credibility with the reporter and can lead to increased publicity through media interviews.

## What are Key Messages to Communicate?

When speaking with the media, convey the following key points concerning **Recovery Month** and your organization's specific event.

- **For a Specific Event:** On **[date]** at **[time]**, **[organization]** is hosting **[event or activity]** at **[location]** to **[encourage people to learn about how health reform can increase access to treatment for substance use and mental disorders]**. These conditions can affect anyone, including people in **[city]**. It's essential that our community understand the new health reform laws and how they will expand access to treatment and recovery services.
- **To Promote Recovery Month:** **[Organization]**'s activities are part of the **National Recovery Month** initiative celebrated now for 22 years. Sponsored by the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT)**, within the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)**, this month-long observance celebrates individuals and families in recovery, as well as those who work in the field. **Recovery Month** shares that all individuals have the fundamental and inherent value to be accepted and treated with respect, dignity, and worth. In addition, **Recovery Month** spreads the message that behavioral health is an essential part of health and one's overall wellness, and that prevention works, treatment is effective, and recovery from substance abuse and mental health problems is possible.

- Individuals should have access to fully participate in community life, including economic advancement and prosperity; fair and decent housing; quality education; and positive opportunities to benefit from and contribute to material, cultural and social progress. This year, **[organization]** will observe **Recovery Month** by **[include the name and brief description of your Recovery Month activities]**.
- **To Discuss Health Reform:** With the passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010, health care coverage will expand to approximately 32 million Americans who were not previously insured. As health reform is implemented, SAMHSA, through their Health Reform **Strategic Initiative**, will provide valuable information on how the modifications impact insurance coverage for individuals with substance use and mental disorders and how providers deliver services.
- **To Provide Information and Resources:** Visit the **Recovery Month** website at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov> and **[insert organization's website]** for detailed information on substance use and mental disorders, treatment, and recovery. For 24-hour free and confidential information and prevention, treatment, and recovery referrals in English and Spanish, call **SAMHSA's National Helpline, 1-800-662-HELP (4357)**, or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD), or visit SAMHSA's "Find Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment" website, <http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment>. Look into **SAMHSA's ADS Center**, <http://www.stopstigma.samhsa.gov>, which provides information and assistance to develop successful efforts to counteract prejudice and discrimination and promote social inclusion.

## How Do I Prepare for an Interview with the Media?

If the opportunity arises, use the following tips to prepare for a successful interview:

- **Research the outlet and reporter before your interview.** Read or watch previous stories the reporter has developed to get a sense of their style. Think about what type of questions the reporter tends to ask.
- **Prepare any supplementary materials in advance of your interview.** You may wish to share graphs, photos, spokespeople biographies, or information from the "**Fast Facts About Health Reform, Substance Use and Mental Disorders, Treatment, and Recovery**" document located in this toolkit, with the reporter in advance to enhance your interview.
- **Practice before your interview with a colleague or friend.** Rehearse what you intend to say during the interview and ask for feedback. To ensure your points are accurately portrayed, avoid using jargon and instead use short, catchy sentences that are easily understood.

The day before your interview, confirm the subject, time, location, and anticipated length of the interview with the reporter. Keep in mind that the primary goals of the interview are to communicate the **Recovery Month** key messages, the logistics of your event, if applicable, and your perspective on treatment and recovery. Once the interview begins, it's useful to restate the question in your response so that the answer is a complete thought, and can be quoted independently. This also will ensure that your messages are clear. Use the following techniques to ensure a successful interview:

- **Bundling** – To ensure your messages are concise and clear, quantify your information and tie it together giving the reporter verbal clues to follow. For example, you may say "SAMHSA has a series of key initiatives that continue to improve the delivery and financing of prevention, treatment, and recovery support services. **Recovery Month** supports these initiatives by..." This tactic will allow all your key messages and thoughts to come across polished and succinct.
- **Bridging** – A reporter may ask you a question that tries to distract you from your key messages or anticipated topics. Instead of directly answering, use the opportunity to tie it back to your points by "bridging" your response or reform the question in terms most favorable to you. For example, you may respond to an irrelevant question by stating "Yes, that's one perspective, but what is important to understand is..."
- **Blocking** – In some instances, reporters may ask you a question that you don't know the answer to or may not want to answer. Never say "no comment," as it looks as if you are trying to hide something. Explain why you can't answer the question, and "bridge" to other discussion topics or offer to research the topic or put the reporter in contact with someone who may be able to answer the question. Follow up to ensure the reporter has received the answer.

In addition to the above techniques, keep in mind the following during an in-person interview:

- **Eye contact** – If you are on camera, remain focused on the reporter instead of staring directly at the cameraperson. Try not to be distracted by any commotion surrounding you.
- **Body language and voice inflection** – Effective body language and voice inflection are even more important than actual words when it comes to how messages are received. Sit up or stand up straight and use gestures sparingly. Also, you may want to vary your pitch by raising your voice slightly to emphasize key points.
- **Dress properly** – Although there are some exceptions (such as a walk/run), try to dress neatly and conservatively. A professional style ensures that the reporter and audience take your messages seriously.

These tips will help make a phone interview successful:

- **Location** – Try to call from a quiet place with no background noise. For a clearer and stable connection, call from a land line, not a cell phone.
- **Basic etiquette** – Remember to greet your interviewer with a smile on your face. Even if the person at the other end can't see you, this affects the tone and quality of your voice.
- **Ask questions** – Since there will be no visual cues to react to, it's important to ask questions to ensure they understand the messages you have conveyed.

## How Do I Effectively Publicize My *Recovery Month* Event?

In addition to traditional media outreach, other tactics can be used to effectively reach the general public.

- **Connect with your community through social networks.** Social networking websites, such as [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), are great free online tools. Refer to the “[Developing Your Social Network](#)” document in this toolkit to learn how to share your story and resources with people.
- **Send a mass email to your friends, colleagues, and supporters** of your organization to raise awareness of substance use and mental disorders and to promote your event. You can request that recipients create an email chain by forwarding the message or event invitation to others.
- **Begin a phone-tree** by calling five colleagues or friends to tell them about your event. Ask each of them to call five others to continue the cycle.
- **Post flyers or leave brochures** at libraries, doctor's offices, pharmacies, cafes, stores, and local businesses, but be sure to request approval before doing so. Involve your friends, family and others interested in your cause. Consider asking them to wear a t-shirt or carry a tote bag with your organization or event logo on it. Make sure volunteers share educational information with the public on substance use and mental disorders by distributing brochures or flyers, and advertising your event logistics.
- **Contact other local organizations and social service agencies** to help spread the word. Neighborhood organizations, youth centers, senior citizen centers, places of worship, and local hospitals can make an announcement at their meetings, in newsletters, or distribute information about your event to others in your community.

## What Do I Do After My *Recovery Month* Event?

Coverage following the event is just as significant as your initial efforts, so publicizing your **Recovery Month** event should continue after your event concludes. Due to the changing economic and media landscape, media outlets today have fewer staff available to attend events. Even if the media doesn't attend on site, send a [press release](#) with pictures to the outlets that expressed interest in your event as soon as possible afterwards. To increase your chances of garnering media coverage, include the number of participants, prominent attendees, or the amount of money raised at your event.

You should begin crafting subsequent campaigns around the success of your **Recovery Month** event and continue increasing awareness by:

- Posting your event materials, photos, or videos on the **Recovery Month** website, <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>, with your event listing to show the purpose and outcomes. Help spread the success of your event with others by sharing your outcomes through **Recovery Month's** website or social media outlets: [Facebook page](#), [YouTube channel](#), and [Twitter account](#). Refer to the “[New Media Glossary](#)” and “[Developing Your Social Network](#)” documents in this toolkit for ideas on how to use these online tools.
- Sharing your **Recovery Month** efforts by completing the “[Customer Satisfaction Form](#).”
- Sending your promotional materials electronically to [recoverymonth@samhsa.hhs.gov](mailto:recoverymonth@samhsa.hhs.gov) or to:

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
 ATTN: Consumer Affairs  
 Center for Substance Abuse Treatment  
 1 Choke Cherry Road, Second Floor  
 Rockville, MD 20857

## Additional *Recovery Month* Resources

For further information on **Recovery Month**, substance use and mental disorders, treatment and recovery, use the following resources:

- **SAMHSA's National Helpline – 1-800-662-HELP (4357)**, or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD) – Provides 24-hour free and confidential information about substance use and mental disorders, prevention, treatment, and recovery referrals in English or Spanish.
- **SAMHSA's “Find Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment” Website** (<http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment>) – Contains information about treatment options and special services located in your area.
- **The Recovery Month Website** (<http://www.recoverymonth.gov>) – Contains all the materials from this toolkit and a wide variety of relevant resources.
- **SAMHSA's ADS Center** (<http://www.stopstigma.samhsa.gov>) – Provides information and assistance to develop successful efforts to counteract prejudice and discrimination and promote social inclusion.

**Inclusion of websites and event examples in this document and on the *Recovery Month* website does not constitute official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.**

# SAMPLE PITCH EMAIL

**SUBJECT:** Panelists to Discuss Increased Access to Treatment for Substance Use and Mental Disorders in **[City]**

Hi **[Insert name]** –

I read your recent article about **[topic of article]** and thought you might be interested in covering one of the most important health care issues facing our country today: substance use and mental disorders.

To raise awareness of these conditions, **[name of organization]** is hosting **[name of event]** on **[date]** at **[time]** at **[location]**. The event is part of **National Recovery Month: Prevention Works, Treatment is Effective, People Recover (Recovery Month)**, sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). If you're available, we'd love for you to attend!

During **Recovery Month**, communities nationwide join together to help people understand that substance use and mental disorders are treatable, just like chronic diseases, such as diabetes or high blood pressure. Also, with the newly implemented health care laws, treatment and recovery support services are now more accessible to millions nationwide.

I've included the media advisory detailing our upcoming event below. **[Insert spokesperson name and title]**, will be available at the event for photo opportunities and to discuss how health reform will impact insurance coverage of substance use and mental disorders. Please let me know if you need more information, or would like to schedule an interview.

Thanks in advance for your time and consideration.

Best,  
**[Insert your name]**

## SAMPLE PITCH CALL SCRIPT

Hi **[Insert name]** –

My name is **[your name]** and I am with **[name of organization]**. Do you still cover **[beat the reporter covers: health care, community events, etc.]** and do you have a few minutes to chat?

My goal is to bring awareness about the positive impact that substance use and mental disorders treatment and recovery support services can have in our community. **[Name of event]**, will be held on **[date of event]** to raise awareness of substance use and mental disorders in **[city]**. The event is part of **National Recovery Month: Prevention Works, Treatment is Effective, People Recover (Recovery Month)**, which is sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

If you're interested, I have additional information I'd like to send you – is your email address still **[reporter email address]**?

I will send the information over to you shortly, and please feel free to contact me with any questions. I'll include my contact information in the email.

Thanks for your time, and I hope to talk to you again soon.