



## Tool: Essential steps in organising a press conference

Note: This document is provided for information purposes only. Health professional associations making use of this resource should revise and modify it for use in their specific circumstances.

### 1. Define the association's goal with regard to the press conference, including the expected results.

A press conference can be a time consuming and labour intensive event to plan and implement. Because it can be a big production, it should only be used to support key/special announcements, to address significant issues and/or to provide access to a prominent individual.

A press conference should be considered if you need to:

- Provide more information than can be provided in a press release.
- Emphasize points you might not otherwise have an opportunity to make.
- Set the record straight, particularly if your organisation has received negative publicity or is dealing with a very sensitive or perhaps controversial topic.
- Address the large number of phone calls your organisation is receiving on the topic.
- Involve a number of partners supporting this key initiative.

### 2. Articulate the main message(s) and identify who would be the best person(s) to deliver it (them).

### 3. Plan the press conference.

- a. When will it be held (date and time)?
- b. Where will it be held (location/venue)?
- c. Who will serve as the moderator?
- d. Who will serve as spokesperson(s)?
- e. Who will be invited (media and other guests)?
- f. What material will be made available to the media (i.e. press kit)?
- g. What will it cost?

#### Basic definitions

**Press conference:** An event organized for the purpose of sharing important announcements with the media. It allows an opportunity for the media to interact with spokespeople.

**Technical briefing:** An event that allows subject matter experts to convey technical information. The briefing is meant to provide important facts and explain more complex topics in a way that allows the audience to better grasp and understand them.

**Media advisory:** A written statement to attract the media to an event, usually a press conference. It includes information related to the organisation that is holding the press conference or event, the issue to be addressed, and the date, time and venue of the event.

**Press release:** A communication written specifically for the media with the intent of informing them of something which the association considers newsworthy.

**Press kit:** A folder or an envelope which brings together all the background information related to the announcement or newsworthy topic being highlighted.

**Embargo:** A request that the provided information not be published until a certain date and time or until certain conditions have been met.

#### 4. One week before the press conference:

- a. **Invite the media** – Issue a media advisory. Depending on your setting, you may opt to access your media contacts by post, fax or email or to purchase the services of a newswire service. You may also choose to make personal phone calls to media representative(s) that you know support the work of your association.
- b. **Invite other guests** – Other guests may include key members of the association, representatives of key stakeholders you work with and/or who support your work. They may be invited by telephone or by written invitation sent by email, fax or post.
- c. **Confirm the availability of the moderator and spokesperson(s).**
- d. **Draft and/or obtain all speaking notes** – It is important to ensure that the speeches to be delivered during the press conference are complementary to one another and that all key message(s) are being conveyed. All speaking notes should be reviewed and approved by all relevant parties before they are delivered. Speaking notes are sometimes included in the press kit as they can be a key source for quotes in a journalist's article.
- e. **Develop an event scenario:** In consultation with the moderator and spokesperson(s), determine the following:
  - **the speaking order**
  - **the time to be allocated for each presentation** – Speeches should have a maximum duration of 3 to 5 minutes each, allowing spokespeople to convey 3 to 5 key messages each.
  - **the format and time to be allocated for question period** – Determine if questions will be taken after each presentation or once all of the presentations are completed. An estimated 15 minutes is normally allocated for the audience to ask questions.
  - **the number and timing of photo opportunities** before, during or after the event
  - **whether or not a technical briefing is required** – The technical briefing can serve as the press conference itself or can follow a press conference, allowing participants to acquire a more in-depth understanding of the announcement. The duration of the technical briefing may vary depending on the complexity of the topic being discussed. However, it should not exceed 30 minutes.
  - **the format, available spokespeople and time to be allocated for follow-up interviews** – While a number of post-press conference interviews may be arranged in advance of the event, it is important to allocate at least 15 minutes for on-site interviews first, as they took the time to attend your event.
  - **whether or not a spokesperson briefing is required** – You may want to hold a preparation meeting with all involved parties 30 minutes to one hour before the press conference to review the program and key messages.

\* Please note that a press conference should last no longer than 45 minutes to one hour, including question period and the interview session.

- f. **Ensure that the audio visual equipment needed for the press conference is available and is fully functional.** If you are expecting radio and television media outlets to attend,

you may require an audio feed. Depending on the venue and/or room setup, photographers and television camera operators may require a riser to ensure they are able to capture images of featured spokespersons.

- g. **Prepare a press release** – Summarise the news item, the key message(s), and information about the association. Be sure to also include the name and telephone number of a contact person who can receive and screen media requests and confirm individuals to speak to the issue.
- h. **Prepare the press kit** – Assemble the background information which will be made available to the media on site and/or online. It may include: the media advisory, the press release, a list and biography of the press conference moderator and speaker(s), speaking notes, background documents about the topic and/or your organisation (e.g. position statement, clinical practice guideline, statistics, promotional brochure, etc.).

#### 5. The day before the press conference:

- a. **Issue a reminder** – Update the media advisory by adding the word “Reminder” in large bold letters and reissue the document to your media contacts or via the news wire.
- b. **Follow-up with individual media outlets** with a phone call and confirm whether or not they plan to attend and enquire about whether or not the journalist will be accompanied by a camera crew or photographer.

#### 6. The day of the press conference:

- a. **Send the press release** to all media contacts.
- b. **Set-up the room** – Arrive at the venue at least one hour before the press conference in order to arrange the room. If you are expecting television crews and photographers, be sure to plan for adequate space for their equipment.
- c. **Set up the head table** – Arrange the seating for the press conference moderator and speaker(s). You may want to place a name card in front of each spokesperson to clearly identify them for media representatives. Have a glass of water accessible to each spokesperson. Have extra copies of their speaking notes at the podium or at their seat. Also, ensure to display prominently the name of your association and those of any key partners in the area that the cameras will focus on (e.g. on the podium, as a backdrop).
- d. **Set up the registration desk** – At the entrance of the room, set up a table where all participants will be asked to register, including the media. This is where media representatives should be able to obtain the background information (i.e. press kits and other resources). Note that these materials may be available before the press conference, but you may wish to consider doing so only after the event is over. The second option may be preferable, particularly if speaking notes are included in the media kit, as some media outlets may opt not to remain on site for the press conference. Instead, they will use the contents of the press kit to produce their article in an attempt to be first to report the news.
- e. **Be sure to start and end the press conference on time.**

- f. **Have the moderator open, manage and close the press conference.** He/she is responsible for welcoming everyone, explaining the event scenario, introducing and thanking the speaker(s), and managing questions received during question period.
  - g. **Record the event:** You may wish to record the event for your own records or for possible media use.
- 7. After the press conference:**
- a. Coordinate individual media interviews. (Note: Not all spokespeople accept to grant interviews after the press conference. This should be made clear to media outlets, ideally before or during the event).
  - b. Call all journalists who participated in the press conference to thank them for attending.
  - c. Ensure that the press conference material is sent/made available to all media who did not attend.
  - d. Ensure to respond to all requests from the media.

Please note that technology has had a significant impact on the media in the past few years. While revenues are decreasing for many media outlets, the demand for more information, more quickly increases. Most media outlets can no longer afford the time or resources (travel and accommodation) to send their journalists to attend a traditional press conference. For this reason, “virtual press conferences” have become popular. The virtual press conference essentially consists of holding a media event using videoconferencing and/or teleconferencing services. All media kit information, including PowerPoint presentations, photos and videos, should be made available online.