

## Professor Jane Pirkis



Professor Jane Pirkis is the Director of the Centre for Health Policy, Programs and Economics at the University of Melbourne. She has undertaken a broad program of work on the epidemiology of suicide and mental health problems, and has conducted a number of large-scale evaluations of suicide prevention initiatives and mental health programs. She has a particular research interest in suicide and the media, and co-chairs the International Association for Suicide Prevention's Suicide and the Media Task Force.

### **Media reporting in the aftermath of a suicide**

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Many countries around the world have developed guidelines to encourage sensitive and measured media reporting of suicide, and the World Health Organization recently joined forces with the International Association for Suicide Prevention to update its international guidelines. These guidelines are not about censorship; they recognise that journalists have a role to play in educating the public about suicide and its multi-faceted causes, but call for caution in reporting individual cases because of the substantial body of scientific evidence that suggests that irresponsible media reporting of suicide can lead to copycat acts. Using examples from various countries, this presentation will consider these guidelines in detail. It will describe the type of advice that they typically give to media professionals in the aftermath of a suicide (e.g., encouraging journalists to be moderate in their coverage, refrain from providing details about exactly how the person died, and provide helpline information). It will disaggregate the overall evidence base for the copycat phenomenon, and consider the various study findings as they relate to specific suggestions included in the guidelines. It will also describe selected approaches that have been taken to engaging with media professionals in the development and dissemination of guidelines. In addition, it will describe activities that have been undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of these guidelines, both in terms of improving reporting practices and reducing suicide rates.