



How We Talk about COVID-19, briefing 25 March 2020

Anti-Poverty Week supports the Australian community to have an increased understanding of poverty and to take action collectively to end it. We are a diverse network of individuals and organisations who share this purpose. Since 2002, we've been active every year in the week around the United Nations Day for the Eradication of Poverty on 17 October. In 2020, APW will run from 11-17 October.

Our key message is: **Poverty exists. Poverty hurts us all. We can all do something about it.** It is one of hope, not despair.

Last year we created a guide [How We Talk About Poverty](#) because it always matters how we talk to - and about - each other. We're in the process of updating it but meantime here are a few tips from [The FrameWorks Institute](#) (with adaptations we've made), specific to the COVID-19 pandemic. Effective and inclusive communication is especially important during this time of crisis. *Us-vs-them* framing is dangerous. It can evoke fear, inflame prejudices, and drive hostility.

Common good framing:

Connect individual action to the common good by using a broad 'us.' **Instead of how to behave, try how this affects us all:**

"When we wash our hands and keep our distance, we protect everyone in our community. Let's come together by staying apart."

Make an explicit moral argument for addressing specific populations' needs.

Our ideals and principles - and our sense of right and wrong - are powerful motivators. Use language that activates shared values early and often in communications. This will have more impact than just bleak facts or upsetting stories.

"The right thing to do is ensure we all have what we need to be well - regardless of who we are."

Look for opportunities to talk about the positive aspects of interconnection. **Instead of connection as threat, try connection as strength:**

"We're being reminded just how connected we all are - and how much we depend on one another. And it's not just the spread of the virus. Now, more than ever, we need to pull together and be kind to one another."

Talking about COVID-19 and Government:

Emphasise that we need and deserve a robust public response to this crisis. Instead of starting and ending with government failure, hold government accountable. Call leaders to action:

"We all rely on government leadership and action to keep our society going. Our leaders must take immediate action to slow the spread of the virus and mobilise the medical equipment and supplies needed to keep us all safe. And they must lead us all through the problems that lie ahead, using the best tools humanity has to rebuild our societies."

Be clear that government action has a distinct role - different from the things businesses, nonprofits, or individuals can do. Instead of calling for others to fill in the gaps, emphasise the roles and democratic ideals that only government can fulfill:

"We are all relying on our public institutions to protect us from physical harm and economic hardship during this pandemic. Businesses, nonprofits, and individuals can all play a part, but only government can channel public resources into the things we all need like vaccines and ventilators. Only government can set and enforce the rules that keep us all safe and well. We need action that makes the biggest difference for everyone and this must be led by government."

3. Don't play the individual blame game. Instead, call leaders to action. Instead of talking about personalities, politicians, or politics, focus on the actions that citizens should hold government accountable for:

"We all need our governments to respond swiftly to new information about the virus and act quickly to protect us. Governments need to deploy every tool at their disposal - and to do it now. Citizens need to do what they've been asked to do, stay informed and engaged, and hold their representatives accountable for doing the right thing."

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