

# 7 PRINCIPLES FOR AVOIDING BIAS IN WRITING

At CNA, we are committed to using language that avoids bias and promotes inclusivity. To support this goal, we maintain an internal style guide based on APA Style for avoiding bias when discussing historically marginalized people and groups. These seven guidelines from our style guide help ensure our written products reflect our commitment to inclusive language.

1

## BE PRECISE

Avoid inaccurate generalizations, which can appear to stigmatize groups of people. For example, the term *low-income* is imprecise because it provides no information about income levels. Use a more specific term, such as *below the poverty level*.

2

## RESPECT TERMINOLOGY CHOICES

When possible, use the terms that individuals and communities use to describe themselves, their experiences, and their practices. Be sure to use the most up-to-date terms. For example, use the term *Inuit* instead of *Eskimo*, which is a historical misnomer.

3

## MENTION ONLY RELEVANT CHARACTERISTICS

When describing people, mention only necessary details and characteristics. If a person's age, disability, gender identity, racial or ethnic identity, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status is not relevant, don't include this information.

4

## ACKNOWLEDGE PEOPLE'S HUMANITY

Terms such as the *homeless* are dehumanizing because they imply that a characteristic such as housing status determines a person's whole identity. Instead use a term such as *people experiencing homelessness*, which emphasizes that they are people and not an anonymous category.

5

## BE CAREFUL WITH COMPARISONS

When discussing different social groups, be aware that the group mentioned first is often perceived as the implied standard. For example, if a study about outcomes based on race always discusses data related to white people first, it would imply that white people are the normative group. Avoid this perception by alternating which group is mentioned first.

6

## REFER TO ALL GROUPS CONSISTENTLY

Unconscious bias manifests when one group is referred to differently than another group. An example would be a meeting agenda that lists the titles of all the men in attendance but not the women. Be consistent to avoid the appearance of favoring one group over the other.

7

## AVOID BENEVOLENT BIAS

*Benevolent bias* means referring to a person in a seemingly supportive way that reinforces that person's perceived "otherness." Examples include portraying a person as courageous or inspiring just because that person has a disability. Doing so can be viewed as patronizing, implying that it is unusual for people with disabilities to have talents and to contribute to society.