

### WHAT IS STIGMA?

- STIGMA IS ANY ATTITUDE, BELIEF OR BEHAVIOUR THAT DISCRIMINATES AGAINST PEOPLE.

**WHEN IT COMES TO SUBSTANCE USE, STIGMA IMPACTS PEOPLE WITH LIVED AND LIVING EXPERIENCE, AS WELL AS THEIR FAMILIES.**

- Stigma often emerges in the form of derogatory language that shames and belittles people. Such language can lead to a cycle of behaviours and attitudes that isolate and marginalize people who use substances.

Some people internalize the stigma surrounding substance use, causing them to feel ashamed and to struggle with feelings of worthlessness. Other people's negative attitudes towards them can amplify and further reinforce these feelings.

International studies by the World Health Organization show hazardous alcohol and drug use disorders are among the most stigmatized conditions

### STIGMATIZING LANGUAGE

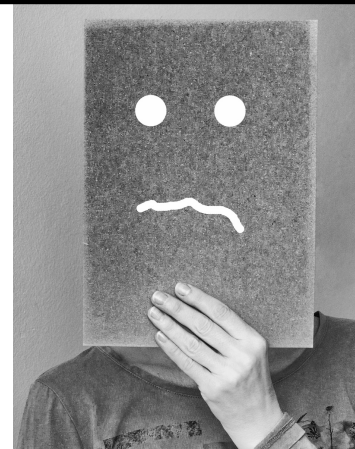
Stigmatizing language and disrespectful behaviour affect the way people see themselves and how they are treated by society as a whole. It is important to remember that a substance use disorder should be treated as a medical condition. Shifting language to more accurately reflect the nature of the health condition can lead to wider support of life-saving interventions.



### WHAT DOES STIGMA LOOK LIKE?

*STIGMA ISOLATES AND SEPARATES PEOPLE WHO USE SUBSTANCES OR HAVE SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS*

- WE REINFORCE STIGMA WITH THE WORDS WE CHOOSE, HOW WE TREAT OTHERS AND HOW WE VIEW OURSELVES.
- MOST OF US ENCOUNTER STIGMA IN OUR DAILY LIVES AND WE CAN AMPLIFY OR EXTEND IT WITHOUT MEANING TO. THE ATTITUDES WE HOLD WITHOUT BEING AWARE OF THEM INCLUDE ASSUMING PEOPLE CHOOSE TO LIVE WITH SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS.





## SAY THIS, NOT THAT!

BY CHANGING THE WORDS YOU USE, YOU CAN HELP BREAK DOWN NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES ONE CONVERSATION AT A TIME.

AVOID USING LANGUAGE LIKE ASKING SOMEONE IF THEY ARE “**CLEAN**” OR “**DIRTY**.” THESE TERMS CAN DECREASE SELF ESTEEM AND EFFECTIVENESS OF TREATMENT FOR SOMEONE SUFFERING FROM A SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER.

### INSTEAD OF THIS...

ADDICT

USER

SUBSTANCE OR  
DRUG ABUSER

JUNKIE

ALCOHOLIC OR  
DRUNK

FORMER ADDICT

REFORMED ADDICT

### SAY THIS...

PERSON WITH SUBSTANCE  
USE DISORDER

PERSON WITH OUD OR PERSON WITH  
OPIOID ADDICTION (WHEN SUBSTANCE  
IN USE IS OPIOIDS)

PATIENT

PERSON IN ACTIVE USE; USE THE  
PERSON'S NAME, AND THEN SAY  
"IS IN ACTIVE USE."

PERSON WHO MISUSES  
ALCOHOL/ENGAGES IN  
UNHEALTHY/HAZARDOUS ALCOHOL  
USE

PERSON IN RECOVERY OR LONG-  
TERM RECOVERY

PERSON WHO PREVIOUSLY USED  
DRUGS

## IT'S TIME TO CHANGE OUR LANGUAGE.

Stigmatizing language is inaccurate, hurtful and disempowering to vulnerable people and, when internalized, ourselves. As a society, it's time that we shift our language to reflect the evidence and our understanding of substance use and substance use disorders. We can make a difference by using words that respect the dignity of all people who use substances, focus on the medical nature of substance use disorders and promote well-being. We need to stop using stigmatizing slang and too common expressions that are harmful. Instead, we need to implement person first language.

English vocabulary has evolved to include words that are accurate and relevant, while not being harmful to others and ourselves. The time has come for language around substance use and substance use disorders to change — in the healthcare field, our personal relationships and society.

Calling someone an “addict” dehumanizes that person and can link a substance use disorder to their individual identity. A person is not defined by their illness or health condition.

Words Matter!



**\*PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE IS LANGUAGE THAT ACKNOWLEDGES SOMEONE AS A PERSON BEFORE DESCRIBING THEIR PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES OR HEALTH CONDITIONS. PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE DOES NOT IDENTIFY PEOPLE BY SECONDARY OR INCIDENTAL QUALITIES OR CONDITIONS.**

INSTEAD OF “DRUGGIE,” USE “PERSON WHO USES SUBSTANCES.” INSTEAD OF “ADDICT,” USE “PERSON WITH A SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER.”

our words  
matter.



## **#StigmaEndsWithMe**

*YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.*

**HELP END STIGMA SURROUNDING PEOPLE WHO USE SUBSTANCES BY USING PERSONFIRST LANGUAGE IN YOUR DAY-TO-DAY LIFE.**

**TALK WITH YOUR FRIENDS, FAMILY AND COLLEAGUES ABOUT HOW THEY CAN HELP TOO BY STARTING CONVERSATIONS AT THE DINNER TABLE OR BUS STOP, OR BY ENCOURAGING A WORKPLACE TO INTRODUCE A PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE POLICY.**

**TELL FRIENDS ON FACEBOOK AND TWITTER THAT STIGMA AROUND SUBSTANCE USE HURTS, AND WE CAN HELP CHANGE THIS IN THE WORDS WE CHOOSE TO USE AND THE ATTITUDES WE HOLD.**

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