

HOW TO TALK ABOUT PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS

The media is one of the greatest influences on how most people view drugs and the people who use them. There are a lot of assumptions and sometimes half truths, which can spread misinformation and cause fear. If you're reporting on drugs and/or the people who use them, it's important to keep this in mind.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been stories published that have further stigmatized people who use drugs and have perpetuated harmful stereotypes.

A goal for your piece should be that the public feel empathetic towards people who use drugs, see them as community members, have some ideas on how the community is responding to the situation, and how they can help.

Some considerations when you're reporting should be:

- Reach out to people who use drugs and the organizations that work with/support them, not just organizations that offer drug treatment programs
- Refrain from sharing unnecessary personal information that could impact peoples' perceptions of the person
- Do not assume to know what drugs the person may or may not use
- Do not assume that a person who uses drugs is addicted to them
- Consider the context in which the story is being reported and provide that wherever possible
- Always remember that you are not a subject matter expert on drugs and people who use them, so try to approach your story from a place of learning and sharing knowledge

Focus on the ways people who use drugs contribute to their communities by highlighting the activism and projects they do

“They always mention theft and meth. According to the news, we’re all criminals!”

Focus on community by reporting on solutions proposed by people who use drugs

“They are concentrating on how to criminalize the meth problem. That’s just not going to work. You can’t arrest your way out of this problem. There will always be another drug.”

Fact check to avoid stigmatizing myths, provide relevant, factual information that will help keep people safe

“The people that I know that I used meth with, they didn’t go crazy. Not everyone using meth acts like that.”

Focus on the larger systemic issues by drawing the connection between substance use and social issues

“Colonization is still going on and it is going on through the health system and it is going on through the police system.”

Focus on alternative forms of recovery, community driven solutions, and ways the public can help

“The media and the police, they are talking about how to deal with the people, they aren’t talking about how to help the people!”

A CHECKLIST FOR STIGMA FREE MEDIA

What is stigma?

Refers to negative attitudes and beliefs about a group of people due to their circumstances. It is a social process that reinforces power and control.

Stigma harms people who use drugs through discrimination, prejudice, stereotyping, labelling, isolating and judging. It has real impacts that we feel when we walk down the street.

Does this media include:

- Non-stigmatizing language
 - The voice of people who use drugs
 - People who use drugs as community members (and not “other”)
 - Solutions proposed by people who use drugs
 - Examples of ways people who use drugs contribute to community
 - Skills or resources for the public
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Language use

Use:

Person who uses drugs
New drug use supplies
Used drug use supplies
Person in recovery from drug use

Don't use:

Addict, drug user, junkie, substance abuser
Clean
Dirty
Former addict/user

SOME ORGANIZATIONS THAT WORK WITH PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS

Winnipeg

Substance Consulting: substanceconsulting.ca

Overdose Awareness Manitoba: facebook.com/overdoseawarenessmanitoba

Moms Stop The Harm: momsstoptheharm.com

Project Safe Audience: safeaudience.ca

Spence Neighbourhood Association: spenceneighbourhood.org

Central Neighbourhood Association: cnwpg.org

West Broadway Community Organization: www.westbroadway.mb.ca

Main Street Project: mainstreetproject.ca

Aboriginal Health and Wellness: ahwc.ca

Kani Kanichihk: kanikanichihk.ca

Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata: www.mamawi.com

Ndinawe: ndinawe.ca

Nine Circles: ninecircles.ca

Mount Carmel Clinic: mountcarmel.ca

Klinik: klinik.mb.ca

Manitoba Harm Reduction Network: mhrn.ca

Outside Winnipeg

Flin Flon: Play it Safer network

Thompson: Safer Choices Northern Network

MHRN peer groups