

Positive Language Guidelines



LANGUAGE USE

The language used to describe concepts, communities, and human beings is of the utmost importance. Stigmatizing and negative language used to describe individuals who use substances, have a substance use disorder, or are in recovery can have an impact on their physical and mental health. At a minimum, businesses and individuals should consider expunging the following terms in their communications regarding people living with or in recovery from substance use disorders:

- Substance Abuse / Substance Abuser
- Addict, Alcoholic, Junkie
- Recovering “addict, alcoholic, substance abuser, junkie, etc.”
- Criminal, Felon, Convict
- Clean / Dirty
- Medication Assisted Treatment
- Addicted babies
- Relapse

Instead, we ask that you consider the following evidence-based alternatives when conveying your thoughts. You may also reference the easy to share infographic on page 7 of this document.

- Person with a substance use disorder (SUD)
- Person who uses drugs (PWUD)
- Substance use / substance misuse
- Person in recovery
- Person with justice-involvement; person that is justice-involved
- Person experiencing homelessness
- Positive / Negative
- Medication-Assisted Recovery
- Substance use disorder / Opioid use disorder pharmacotherapy
- Medications for addiction treatment
- Neonatal abstinence syndrome / Neonatal opioid withdrawal syndrome
- Recurrence of use / recurrence of symptoms

Also, please keep in mind there are many other potentially stigmatizing and stereotypical labels and language that we often use without regard. We ask that you use your best judgment and person-first language at all times.

TAKEAWAYS:

- Language choice can have dynamic effects on individuals and workplace culture.
- Certain language choices are known through research to trigger either positive or negative perception of people who use drugs and/or are in recovery.



Language Guidelines Infographic



Recovery Dialects

	Mutual Aid Meetings	In Public	With Clients	Medical Settings	Journalists
Addict	✓	STOP	STOP	STOP	STOP
Alcoholic	✓	STOP	STOP	STOP	STOP
Substance Abuser	STOP	STOP	STOP	STOP	STOP
Opioid Addict	✓	STOP	STOP	STOP	STOP
Relapse	✓	STOP	STOP	STOP	STOP
Medication Assisted Treatment	STOP	STOP	STOP	STOP	STOP
Medication Assisted Recovery	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Person w/ a Substance Use Disorder	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Person w/ an Alcohol Use Disorder	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Person w/ an Opioid Use Disorder	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Long-term Recovery	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pharmacotherapy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Language matters but can change depending on the setting we are in. Choosing when and where to use certain language and labels can help reduce stigma and discrimination towards substance use and recovery.



SOURCE: Ashford, R. D., Brown, A. M., & Curtis, B. (2018). Substance use, recovery, and linguistics: The impact of word choice on explicit and implicit bias. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 189, 131–138.