

# WORDS MATTER to Reduce Stigma

## THIS HELPS, THIS HURTS

### “ADDICTION”

Describes uncontrollable, compulsive drug-seeking, using and behaviors, despite negative consequences.

### “PERSON IN ACTIVE ADDICTION” OR “PERSON WITH SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER”

The words “addict, junkie, or user” are demeaning and define people by their illnesses, including “degenerate gambler.”

### “SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER”

Saying “habit or drug habit” ignores the medical nature of the condition and implies the person can “break the habit.”

### “MISUSE,” “HARMFUL USE”

Saying “abuse” negates the fact that addictive disorder is a medical condition. “Abuse” blames the illness solely on the individual, absolves the drug sellers of wrongdoing, and encourages stigma toward the patient.

### “PATIENT”

“Patient” accurately refers to a person being medically treated for substance use/other addictive disorder, reinforcing that addictive disorders are health issues.

### “ADDICTION-FREE” or “IN REMISSION”

Avoid the terms “clean” or “sober,” since they imply that people with substance use disorders are “dirty.”

### “SUBSTANCE-FREE”

Try not to say “clean” or “positive/negative” for drug test results, since these terms are confusing to people not in behavioral healthcare.

### “PERSON IN LONG-TERM RECOVERY”

The recovery community has been using this language for many years. “Person in recovery,” or “long-term recovery,” describes someone who is not using alcohol or other drugs or taking part in compulsive, addictive behaviors.

### “MEDICATION-ASSISTED TREATMENT”

This is a practical and accurate description of pharmaceutical-based treatments, i.e. methadone, naltrexone, buprenorphine, etc.

## USING PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE ACROSS THE CONTINUUM OF CARE FOR SUBSTANCE USE & OTHER ADDICTIVE DISORDERS

*“...we should acknowledge that the childhood adage, ‘sticks and stones can break my bones, but names can never hurt me,’ is patently untrue. Words, and the meanings with which they are imbued can achieve accuracy and relevance or they can transmit dangerous stereotypes and half-truths. They can empower or disempower, humanize or objectify, engender compassion or elicit malignant fear and hatred. Words can inspire us or deflate us, comfort us or wound us. They can bring us together or render us enemies.”*  
~William White

### ADDICTIVE DISORDERS...

- HAVE INHERITED & SOCIETAL FACTORS
- CAN BE ONGOING & RELAPSING
- ARE MARKED BY CRAVING & EXCESSIVE USE
- CAUSE BRAIN CHEMISTRY CHANGES
- OCCUR WHEN USING ALCOHOL/ DRUGS/GAMBLING REGULARLY AND NEEDING MORE & MORE TO GET HIGH
- CAN BE INFLUENCED BY COMMUNITY, FAMILY & FRIENDS
- ARE HEAVILY STIGMATIZED BY HEALTHCARE & COMMUNITY

LANGUAGE FIRST TEAM

