

Are you using stigmatizing language?

Wisconsin Voices For Recovery is a statewide organization that represents and connects people in or seeking recovery from addiction, their family, friends, allies and service providers. We provide connections and advocacy opportunities in order to strengthen recovery across Wisconsin. Together we work to increase access to recovery services, increase the capacity of current and upcoming Recovery Community Organizations (RCOs), reduce addiction and recovery stigma, and support the integration of peer support providers into the workforce.

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Find out now!



CHANGE *Stigmatizing Language*

⚠️ AVOID ⚠️	Change To:	Why?
Substance Abuse	Substance Use/Substance misuse	The term “abuse” was found to have a high association with negative judgments and punishment. (Cruelty or violence)
Drug habit/Habit	Substance addiction	“Habit” may undermine the seriousness of the disease.
Drug abuser Drug user	Person with substance use disorder	Person-first language. The change shows that a person “has” a problem, rather than “is” the problem.
Dope fiend Addict Junkie	Person with Opioid use disorder OR Person addicted to substances OR Person in active substance use	Person-first language. The change shows that a person “has” a problem, rather than “who the person is”.
Pill popper	Person who misuses prescribed medications	Person-first language. The change expresses that the individual has challenges with taking medications as prescribed by a physician.
Alcoholic	Person with alcohol use disorder	Person-first language. The change expresses that the individual experiences a physical inability to not consume alcohol.
Drunk	Person who engages in unhealthy or hazardous alcohol use	Person-first language. The change expresses that the individual has challenges with adhering to healthy and/or safe alcohol consumption.
Addicted baby	Newborn exposed to substances	Babies can’t be born with addiction because addiction is a behavioral disorder-they are born manifesting a withdrawal syndrome.
Former addict	Person in recovery OR Person in long-term recovery	This changes shows that a person is in remission from the disease of addiction.
Reformed addict	Person who previously used drugs	The word “reformed” suggest that a person is in agreement with the views of reformers. This change expresses a person’s past substance use and individual’ .
Clean	Negative test results OR Abstinent from drugs	Use clinically accurate, non-stigmatizing terminology the same way it would be used for other medical conditions.
Dirty	Positive test results OR Person who uses drugs	Use clinically accurate, non-stigmatizing terminology the same way it would be used for other medical conditions.
Opioid substitution replacement therapy	Medication for Opioid use disorder	It is a misconception that medications merely “substitute” one drug or “one addiction” for another.
Medication assisted treatment (MAT)	Medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD)	The term MAT implies that medication should have a supplemental or temporary role in treatment. Using “MOUD” is value neutral and refers to a specific treatment for a specific disorder.

Stigma has no bias on age, color, race, ethnicity, or gender!

Adapted from: Words Matter - Terms to Use and Avoid When Talking About Addiction | National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) (nih.gov)
<https://www.drugabuse.gov/nidamed-medical-health-professionals/health-professions-education/words-matter-terms-to-use-avoid-when-talking-about-addiction>