



STIGMA

WORDS CAN BE
WALLS TO RECOVERY



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What is stigma?

Stigma refers to negative attitudes and beliefs about a group of people based on a perceived discredited characteristic that is projected onto the group. These characteristics usually involve a moral judgement which is often inaccurate. This can lead to intentional or unintentional discrimination against individuals in the stigmatised group.

An individual may belong to more than one stigmatised group. For example, someone who uses substances could also have a mental health problem – both are heavily stigmatised.

What is the impact of stigma?

Stigma can have a major impact on the quality of life of people who use substances, people who are in recovery, and their friends and families.

Experiences of stigma can lead to profound social isolation and rejection by family and friends. It can drive people away from communities and support services, leading to poorer health outcomes. It can also create barriers to accessing specialist services and increases likelihood of relapse. The continued stigmatisation of people who use substances will undermine efforts to help them to tackle their condition and enable recovery.



Why our words matter

Choosing our words carefully is an important first step toward reducing the cycle of stigma surrounding people who use substances. What we say and how we say it can have a profound impact on those around us. By using compassionate words in place of negative ones, you can make it easier for someone to speak up, to feel heard and understood, or to receive help.

Language matters when talking about substance use. This includes the terminology used by service providers. Certain words and phrases have implicit connotations which exacerbates stigma. Changing the language we use as a service provider is important for addressing stigma given that stigma has been shown to be a barrier to treatment, support and social reintegration. It is in everyone's interest to tackle stigma.

Our **words matter** and a **small change** can **help reduce** the cycle of **stigma**

Guidelines for using non-stigmatising language

- ✓ Use people first language
- ✓ Use language that promotes recovery
- ✓ Avoid the use of slang

Our words matter so consider.....

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| ✓ Person who uses substances | ✗ Drug User or Addict |
| ✓ Person experiences problems with substance use | ✗ Abuser or Junkie |
| ✓ Person experiencing barriers to accessing services | ✗ Unmotivated or Non-Compliant |

1 (Global Commission on Drug Policy Report, 2017)



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