

Recommended Language & Rationale

1 of 3

Recommended language (based on consensus, research, and/or expert opinion)	Stigmatizing language	Rationale & related research (if applicable)	Notes
1. Substance use disorder, addiction (if clinically accurate) 2. Use (for illicit substances); misuse, used other than prescribed (for prescription medications) 3. Harmful, hazardous, problematic, or risky use	Abuse, Drug problem, Habit/ Drug habit, Dependence	Neutral, non-judgmental language	There are contradicting views for "misuse" and "hazardous, risky, or harmful use" (some people just prefer "use"). Some sources also include "non-medical use."
Person with a substance use disorder ("person with opioid/alcohol use disorder" if relevant, "patient" if in a clinical setting)	Abuser, Addict, Druggie, User, Junkie	Neutral, non-judgmental language. Several studies compare "abuser/abuse" to "person with substance use disorder" and confirm that person-first language is less stigmatizing	<i>Opioid Epidemic</i> by Sharfstein & Olsen discourages the use of "client" & "patient" in favor of "person, participant, & individual."
Has a [X] use disorder	Addicted to [X]	Neutral, non-judgmental language. Several studies compare "abuser/abuse" to "person with substance use disorder" and confirm that person-first language is less stigmatizing	N/A
Person with alcohol use disorder; related: harmful or hazardous alcohol use	Alcoholic, Drunk	Neutral, non-judgmental language. Several studies compare "abuser/abuse" to "person with substance use disorder" and confirm that person-first language is less stigmatizing	N/A
Substance-free; related: no longer using [X substance]	Clean	Dirty/clean is associated with filth, not a medical condition. Invokes punitive bias and shame.	N/A
Testing negative for substance use	Clean (toxicology screen)	Dirty/clean is associated with filth, not a medical condition. Invokes punitive bias and shame.	N/A
Adherent	Compliant	Neutral, non-judgmental language	N/A

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2 of 3

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Withdrawal management	Detox	Detox gives a connotation that a person needs to be cleansed from their substance use.	Since "detox" is more recognizable to a lay audience, it is acceptable to write "withdrawal management ('detox') to clarify
Person who tests positive for substance use	Dirty	Dirty/clean is associated with filth and not a medical condition. Invokes punitive bias and shame.	N/A
Testing positive for substance use	Dirty (toxicology screen)	Dirty/clean is associated with filth, not a medical condition. Invokes punitive bias and shame.	N/A
Baby with neonatal opioid withdrawal/ neonatal abstinence syndrome; related: newborn exposed to substances	Drug addicted infant, addicted baby, born addicted	Person-first, neutral language doesn't put moral judgment on the mother, and keeps the focus on clinical solutions	N/A
Use of [X substance]	Drug of choice or abuse	Neutral, non-judgmental language	N/A
Person arrested for drug violation; related: person with criminal legal involvement	Drug offender	Person-first and neutral, non-judgmental language	N/A
Person in recovery or person in long-term recovery	Ex-addict, former/ reformed addict	Neutral, non-judgmental language. Several studies compare "abuser/abuse" to "person with substance use disorder" and confirm that person-first language is less stigmatizing	<i>Opioid Epidemic by Sharfstein & Olsen also includes "in remission"</i>
Medication as a tool for treatment	Medication as a crutch for recovery	Medications are treatment tools for other diseases; substance use disorder should not be treated differently	Related terms include "abstinence-only" or "drug-free," referring to treatment programs that do not use medications
Non-adherent	Non-compliant	Non-judgmental, neutral language	N/A

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3 of 3

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Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD), medication for Alcohol Use Disorder	Opioid replacement/substitution/maintenance therapy, medication assisted treatment	Treatments for other diseases are not labelled “medication assisted treatment,” so substance use disorder should not be treated differently. “Replacement” suggests that patients are trading one substance use disorder for another	<i>Opioid Epidemic</i> by Sharfstein & Olsen also recommends replacing “methadone clinic” with “opioid treatment program (OTP)”
Resumed or experienced a recurrence of substance use or substance use disorder symptoms	Relapse, lapse, slip	Neutral, non-judgmental language	N/A
Recovery management	Relapse prevention	Neutral, non-judgmental language	N/A
Well, healthy, in recovery	Sober	Neutral, non-judgmental language	N/A
Maintained recovery	Stayed clean	Neutral, non-judgmental language (see rationale for “clean”)	N/A
Person who is using [X substance]	Untreated addict	Neutral, non-judgmental language. Several studies compare “abuser/abuse” to “person with substance use disorder” and confirm that person-first language is less stigmatizing	Level of consensus around “actively using” is unclear, though it is often used in public health.