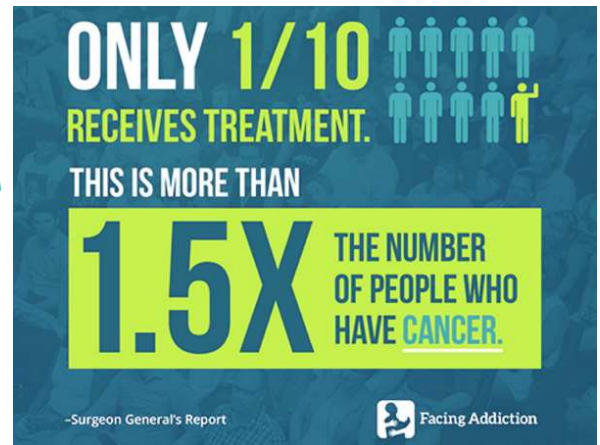


# Improving our language of Substance Use, Treatment, & Recovery: *Our words matter!*



**21 million people**  
*have a substance use disorder*



## The Real Stigma of Substance Use Disorders



In a study by the Recovery Research Institute, participants were asked how they felt about two people *"actively using drugs and alcohol."*

One person was referred to as a **"substance abuser"**



The other person as **"having a substance use disorder"**



No further information was given about these hypothetical individuals.

**THE STUDY DISCOVERED THAT PARTICIPANTS FELT THE "SUBSTANCE ABUSER" WAS:**

- less likely to benefit from treatment
- more likely to benefit from punishment
- more likely to be socially threatening

***...and more likely to be blamed for their substance-related problems***



Facing Addiction in America: The Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health, 2016 <https://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/2016alcoholdrughealth/index.html#fullreport>

Dr. Sarah Wakeman's presentation: "Changing Language to Change Care": [https://www.scribd.com/presentation/376031995/Thursday-Wakeman#fullscreen&from\\_embed](https://www.scribd.com/presentation/376031995/Thursday-Wakeman#fullscreen&from_embed)

Recovery Research Institute and the "Addictionary": <https://www.recoveryanswers.org/addiction-ary/>

NIDA "Words Matter" Handout: [https://d14rmgrwzf5a.cloudfront.net/sites/default/files/nidamed\\_wordsmatter3\\_508.pdf](https://d14rmgrwzf5a.cloudfront.net/sites/default/files/nidamed_wordsmatter3_508.pdf)

Article on AP guidelines: [http://www.slate.com/articles/health\\_and\\_science/medical\\_examiner/2017/06/the\\_associated\\_press\\_removes\\_words\\_like\\_addict\\_and\\_drug\\_abuser.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/medical_examiner/2017/06/the_associated_press_removes_words_like_addict_and_drug_abuser.html)

Changing the Narrative: <https://www.changingthenarrative.news/>

This resource was developed by community members in the Paso del Norte region to support accurate and respectful language when talking and writing about substance use prevention, treatment, & recovery.

For more copies or to provide suggestions or additional content, please contact Holly at [mata.holly@gmail.com](mailto:mata.holly@gmail.com)

## Improving our Language of Substance Use

### Words to avoid

### Words to consider

Substance abuser or drug abuser Addict or alcoholic Junkie	Person with a substance use disorder Person who uses substances Person who uses alcohol (or tobacco, or heroin, or...)
Substance Abuse	Substance use or Substance misuse Unhealthy substance use Non-medical substance use
Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) (MAT is a common term, but feels stigmatizing to some people)	Medication for a substance use disorder Medication-based treatment Pharmacotherapy for an opioid use disorder
"Clean" or "Dirty" when talking about a UA or other toxicology test  "Clean" to refer to a person who is not using alcohol or other drugs	Accurate medical terminology like "positive" or "negative" toxicology results  A person in remission or recovery
"Addicted babies"	Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome

- Use "person-first" language
- Avoid language that stigmatizes
- Review & improve your agency materials
- Respect how people refer to themselves
- Respect the language used in peer support groups

#### For more great resources, check out:

<https://www.changingthenarrative.news/stigmatizing-language>

Use accurate terminology!

*"Being called an addict defines my humanity with one small facet of my identity, essentially erasing the rest of me"*

-Zachary Siegel

[http://www.slate.com/articles/health\\_and\\_science/medical\\_examiner/2017/06/the\\_associated\\_press\\_removes\\_words\\_like\\_addict\\_and\\_drug\\_abuser.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/medical_examiner/2017/06/the_associated_press_removes_words_like_addict_and_drug_abuser.html)

ADDICTION involves escalating use over time, loss of control, & use despite negative consequences

DEPENDENCE involves the presence of withdrawal symptoms if substance is stopped abruptly