



# Media toolkit

## BEST PRACTICES FOR COVERING SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

### UNDERSTANDING STIGMA

Two main factors affect the burden of stigma placed on a particular disease or disorder:

1. Perceived **control** that a person has over the condition
2. Perceived **fault** in acquiring the condition

When we believe a person has acquired their illness through no fault of their own, and/or that they have little control over it, we typically attach no stigma to either the person or the illness.

### WORDS MATTER

**Person-first language:** Person-first language is proven to reduce stigma and improve treatment.

#### APPROPRIATE

Person with a substance use disorder  
Individual experiencing a substance use disorder  
Individual with alcohol use disorder  
Person with opioid use disorder  
Person in recovery, person in long term recovery

#### STIGMATIZING

Addict  
Drug Abuser  
Alcoholic  
Junkie  
former/reformed addict/alcoholic



## Other language to keep in mind:

### ✓ APPROPRIATE

Drug problem, drug habit  
Not actively using, testing negative for substance use  
Actively using, testing positive for substance use  
Resumed use  
Use/misuse  
Treatment/Medication-Assisted-Treatment

### ✗ STIGMATIZING

Addicted  
Clean  
Dirty  
Relapse  
Abuse  
Replacement therapy

## Dependence vs. addiction:

**Dependence** is a physical reliance on a substance to not experience withdrawal symptoms.

**Addiction** is the compulsive use of a substance despite negative social and physical consequences.

Neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS) occurs in newborns exposed to opiate drugs while in the mother's womb. **Babies are born dependent**— not “addicted” — because they experience withdrawal when the substance is stopped.

## PICTURES & VISUALS

### ✓ APPROPRIATE

People struggling  
Happy people (recovery is possible)



### ✗ NOT APPROPRIATE

Needles  
Injecting substances  
Substances being crushed/liquified  
Pills  
People hitting “rock bottom”

