

#PersonFirst Pledge – Positive, Person-first Language in Behavioral Health

The language used to describe concepts, communities, and human beings is of the utmost importance. Stigmatizing and negative language used to describe individuals who use substances, have a substance use disorder, or are in recovery can have an impact on their physical and mental health. As professionals, community stakeholders, family members, and individuals we can have a dramatic impact on the way the world views, treats, and discusses substance use and recovery. The first and easiest step to take is changing the words and labels we use on a daily basis – in all areas of our lives!

The #PersonFirst pledge signifies your commitment to using positive, person-first language at all times, and being a champion for the use of such language by your colleagues and peers.

I, _____, pledge to use positive, person-first language at all times when discussing or speaking about individuals who use substances, have a substance use disorder, or are living in recovery. I understand the impact my language choices can have on the lives of others and commit to being part of the campaign to end the use of stigmatizing language.

Date: ____/____/____

Signature: _____

Organization: _____

Positive, Person-First Language	Stigmatizing Language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Person with a substance use disorder (SUD) ● Person who uses drugs (PWUD) ● Substance use / substance misuse ● Person in recovery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Substance Abuse / Substance Abuser ● Addict, Alcoholic, Junkie ● Recovering “addict, alcoholic, substance abuser, junkie, etc.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Person with justice-involvement; person that is justice-involved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Criminal, Felon, Convict
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Person experiencing homelessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Homeless
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Positive / Negative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clean / Dirty
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SUD / OUD pharmacotherapy ● Medications for addiction treatment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Medication Assisted Treatment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Neonatal abstinence syndrome / Neonatal opioid withdrawal syndrome 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Addicted baby
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recurrence of use / recurrence of symptoms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relapse

 Recovery Dialects	<i>Mutual Aid Meetings</i>	<i>In Public</i>	<i>With Clients</i>	<i>Medical Settings</i>	<i>Journalists</i>
Addict	✓	STOP	STOP	STOP	STOP
Alcoholic	✓	STOP	STOP	STOP	STOP
Substance Abuser	STOP	STOP	STOP	STOP	STOP
Opioid Addict	✓	STOP	STOP	STOP	STOP
Relapse	✓	STOP	STOP	STOP	STOP
Medication Assisted Treatment	STOP	STOP	STOP	STOP	STOP
Medication Assisted Recovery	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Person w/ a Substance Use Disorder	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Person w/ an Alcohol Use Disorder	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Person w/ an Opioid Use Disorder	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Long-term Recovery	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pharmacotherapy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Language matters but can change depending on the setting we are in. Choosing when and where to use certain language and labels can help reduce stigma and discrimination towards substance use and recovery.



 SOURCE: Ashford, R. D., Brown, A. M., & Curtis, B. (2018). Substance use, recovery, and linguistics: The impact of word choice on explicit and implicit bias. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 189, 131–138.