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OhioMHAS

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Rachael Wummer Kentler
SAMHSA Central CAPT

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR FOCUS GROUPS:
Ohio Opiate Conference
Ohio Recovery Conference
Ohio Promoting Wellness & Recovery Conference (OPEC)
Statewide Prevention Coalition Association
Ohio Substance Abuse Monitoring Network (OSAM)
Participant Surveys at Behavioral Health Agencies
Community Groups and Coalitions That Provided Feedback

WORDS MATTER to Reduce Stigma

THIS HELPS,
THIS HURTS

USING PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE ACROSS THE CONTINUUM OF CARE FOR SUBSTANCE USE & OTHER ADDICTIVE DISORDERS
Addictive Disorders...

- Have inherited & societal factors
- Can be ongoing & relapsing
- Are marked by craving & excessive use
- Cause brain chemistry changes
- Occur when using alcohol/drugs regularly and needing more & more to get high
- Can be influenced by community, family & friends
- Are heavily stigmatized by healthcare & community

Helpful Words to Use:

**Words Matter:** NOW IS THE TIME!

Using Person-First Language Across the Continuum of Care for Substance Use/Addictive Disorders

Substance use disorders (SUDs) are medical conditions, but the general public associates people with SUD and other addictive disorders with poor choices and moral failings. As a result, many people who suffer from addictive disorders are not treated the same way as people with chronic physical health conditions, like heart disease and diabetes. This document proposes person-first language designed to help people access care by de-stigmatizing SUD and addictive disorders.

*WE CAN CHANGE how friends, family and patients are treated.*

**Words are Important. If you want to care for something, you call it a 'flower'; if you want to kill something, you call it a 'weed.'**

—Don Coyhis

ADDICTION

Describes uncontrollable, compulsive drug-seeking, using and behaviors, despite negative consequences.

**Person in Active Addiction**

Or **Person with Substance Use Disorder**

The words “addict, junkie, or user” are demeaning and define people by their illnesses, including “degenerate gambler.”

**Substance Use Disorder**

Saying “habit or drug habit” ignores the medical nature of the condition and implies the person can stop or “break the habit.”

**Misuse,” “Harmful Use**

Saying “abuse” negates the fact that addictive disorder is a medical condition. “Abuse” blames the illness solely on the individual, absolves the drug sellers of wrongdoing, and encourages stigma toward the patient.

**Patient**

“Patient” accurately refers to a person being medically treated for a substance use or other addictive disorder, reinforcing the fact that addictive disorders are health issues.

**Medication-Assisted Treatment**

This is a practical and accurate description of pharma-based treatments, i.e. methadone, naltrexone, buprenorphine, etc.

**Addiction-Free** or “In Remission”

Avoid the terms “clean” or “sober,” since they imply that people with substance use disorders are “dirty.”

**Substance-Free**

Try not to say “clean” or “positive/negative” for drug test results, since these terms are confusing to people not in behavioral healthcare.

**Person in Long-Term Recovery**

The recovery community has been using this language for many years. “Person in recovery,” or “long-term recovery,” describes someone who is not using alcohol or other drugs or taking part in compulsive, addictive behaviors. The Faces & Voices of Recovery national organization champions this language to appropriately describe the individual who is living an addiction-free life.

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