

STIGMA REDUCTION RESOURCES

Healthcare Provider Quick Guide

PURPOSE Support respectful, person-centered communication and care for people experiencing substance use challenges.

KEY PRINCIPLES

- Put the person first - focus on the individual, not the condition.
- Use respectful, clinically accurate language - avoid judgmental or blaming terms.
- Protect dignity and privacy - create safe, supportive environments.
- Practice cultural humility - respect each person's experiences and perspectives.
- Focus on strengths and goals - support individual priorities and recovery.

PROVIDER PRACTICES THAT REDUCE STIGMA

IN THE PATIENT CONVERSATION

- Ask open-ended questions and listen without judgment.
- Ask what language the patient prefers.
- Discuss substance use directly and matter-of-factly.
- Use collaborative, strength-based language and support patient goals.

IN CLINICAL PRACTICE

- Use objective, clinically accurate documentation.
- Avoid assumptions about motivation, reliability, or adherence.
- Treat SUD as a health condition, not a moral failing.
- Offer evidence-based treatment and connections to care.

WORDS MATTER - QUICK REFERENCE

USE

- Person with a substance use disorder
- Person in recovery / person who uses drugs
- Tested positive / tested negative
- Substance use disorder; drug use; prescription drug misuse

AVOID

- Addict, junkie, user, alcoholic
- Former addict
- Clean / dirty test
- Drug abuse / drug habit

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- [CDC: Stigma - Beyond the Numbers](#)
- [NIDA: Words Matter](#)
- [CDC: Remove Stigma - Talk with Your Patients About SUD](#)
- [Difficult Conversations / Communicating Concern](#)
- [Deconstructing Stigma: Health Care Professional Training](#)
- [SAMHSA: Stigma and Language](#)
- [Language-Matters](#)

Remember: Language matters. Listen without judgment, respect each person's goals, and use words that promote dignity and support.