

Non-Stigmatizing Language in Substance Use Research

Choosing appropriate language to describe substance use and the population affected by substance use is critical to improving access to care for people who use drugs. Although several medical journals and government agencies continue to have words such as “addiction” and “abuse” in their title, [the editorial board of the Journal of Substance Abuse](#) acknowledges this as an artifact of the evolution of language surrounding substance use and hopes to encourage authors, reviewers and readers to engage with this changing language of addiction.

CHERISH recognizes that this is an area where practice continues to evolve. CHERISH encourages researchers, healthcare providers, and media professionals to join efforts to reduce negative stereotypes and biases surrounding people who use substances by using the following evidence-based language when writing or talking about substance use, treatment, and people who use drugs. Visit the [National Institutes of Health](#) and [National Institute on Drug Abuse](#) to read more about the importance of using non-stigmatizing language.

Recommended Terminologies	Definition	Words to Avoid or Replace
Substance use disorder (SUD)	Term to describe a constellation of impairments caused by repeated misuse of a substance.	Addiction
Opioid use disorder (OUD)		Addictive disease
Drug use disorder (DUD)		Drug addiction
Heroin use disorder (HUD)		Drug dependence
Prescription opioid use disorder (POUD)		Drug habit
		Misuse
		Non-medical use
		Substance use
		Substance abuse
		Substance misuse
		Substance dependence

Person in recovery	An individual that once had a substance use disorder who is no longer using substances or has reduced substance use to a safer level and reflects a process of change.	Clean Straight
Person with a substance use disorder (PWSUD) Person who uses substances (PWUS) Person who injects drugs (PWID)	An individual with a substance use disorder, opioid use disorder, or someone who is actively injecting drugs.	Abuser Addict Junkie Dope fiend Injection Drug User (IDU) Injection Drug Abuser Intravenous Drug User (IVDU) User
Negative or positive toxicology screening	Results of a toxicology screening that identifies a person who is currently using substances.	Clean or dirty Strung out
Medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD) Treatment Pharmacotherapy Opiate agonist treatment (OAT)*	The use of any medication approved to treat substance use disorders.	Opiate substitution therapy Medication assisted therapy (MAT)
Neonatal opioid withdrawal syndrome (NOWS)	The constellation of withdrawal symptoms in neonates due to prenatal opioid exposure.	Addicted neonates Addicted babies

<p>Person who is incarcerated</p> <p>Person in pre-trial or with charge</p> <p>Justice-involved person, person on parole or probation</p> <p>Formerly incarcerated person</p>	<p>An individual who has been involved with the criminal justice system, spent a period of time incarcerated and/or has been released from a criminal correctional institution.</p>	<p>Criminal Convict Con Ex-con Felon Inmate Offender Prisoner Parolee</p>
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*For methadone or buprenorphine

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