

# How YOU can change stigma

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*“The biggest killer out there is stigma.  
Stigma keeps people in the shadows.  
Stigma keeps people from coming  
forward and asking for help.  
Stigma keeps families from admitting  
that there is a problem.”*

Jerome Adams,  
U.S. Surgeon General

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The statistics surrounding death from opioid addiction are just staggering. And it’s everywhere; because opioids are so available, every community and nearly every family has been affected.

## **So how do we beat this?**

The first and most important step is to remove the stigma surrounding addiction.

## **Be an advocate – Help remove the stigma of addiction.**

Some of the most damaging components that contribute to stigmatizing addiction include:

- **Labeling** – “... drug abuser, addict, junkie”
- **Negative stereotypes** – “addicts are thieves, dangerous”
- **Othering** – “not normal people”
- **Inequity** in healthcare and society – “high rates of HIV, unemployment, incarceration”
- **Blame** – “they are responsible for causing their problem”

*“Words have a dramatic impact on both clinical care and how medical professional see and treat people with addiction”*

Michael Botticelli  
Public Health Official

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## Words Matter... Avoiding stigmatizing language

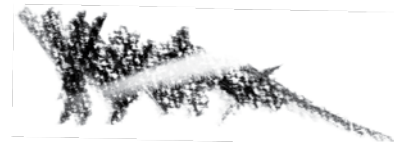
Instead of...	Use	Because....
Abuse	Misuse, harmful use, inappropriate use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blames the illness on the individual</li> <li>• Negates the fact that SUD is a medical condition</li> </ul>
Habit, Drug Habit	Substance misuse, or active addiction.	“Habit” denies drug addiction is a medical condition and implies willpower can stop the habitual behavior
Clean, Dirty (referring to drug test results)	Negative, positive, substance-free	Stigmatizing because it associate illness symptoms with filth
Addict, Abuser, Junkie, Crackhead	Person with a substance use disorder Person in active addiction Person experiencing a drug problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First person language</li> <li>• The change shows that a person has a problem, rather than they are the problem.</li> <li>• Terms are demeaning and label a person by their illness instead of their humanity</li> <li>• No distinction is made between the person and the disease.</li> </ul>
Former addict	Person in recovery or long-term recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person first language</li> <li>• Shows the person has a problem rather than they are the problem.</li> <li>• Avoids eliciting negative associations, punitive attitudes, and individual blame</li> </ul>
Drug offender	Person arrested for drug violation	• Person first, neutral and non-judgmental - factual
Stayed or been clean for a time	Maintained recovery	• Neutral, non-judgmental language (see “clean”)
Sober	Well, healthy, in recovery	• Neutral, non-judgmental language

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