



# Caring for Patients with Addiction & Substance Use Disorder

Patients with substance use disorder (SUD) or addiction have complex care needs. This can make caring for them challenging. As healthcare providers, we are often a first point of contact for people with SUD or addiction.

## What is stigma?

Stigma is a form of discrimination against an identifiable group of people. Stigma about people with SUD might include inaccurate or negative thoughts such as they are at fault for their condition, they are dangerous, or that they lack self-control.

Historically, SUD and/or addiction have been stigmatized. People with these conditions face discrimination in public settings, including healthcare settings, which can create shame for this patient population and prevent them from getting care they need. As leaders and care providers, we can be an advocate for destigmatizing addiction and SUD disorders.

## How to reduce stigma:

Stigma can be reduced in healthcare settings when we as care providers demonstrate **compassion** and **empathy** for our patients struggling with these conditions.

## How can you demonstrate compassion and empathy?

One best practice is the use of person-first language.

## What is person-first language? Person-first language:

- Prioritizes the integrity of the individual as a whole human being
- Removes language that equates people to their condition or that has negative connotations
- Places the person before their condition or disability

## Why does using person-first language matter?

- It builds awareness that addiction and SUD are illnesses
- It shows that a person “has” a problem, rather than “is” the problem
- It avoids individual blame, which can encourage the person to seek treatment
- The terms avoid negative associations, punitive attitudes, and individual shame

Let's prioritize and advocate for person-first language and work together to care for those in our community who struggle with SUD and addiction.

Use...	Instead of...
Person/Patient with Substance Use Disorder Person with alcohol use disorder/Person who misuses alcohol	Addict; User; Junkie Alcoholic; Drunk
Person in recovery or long-term recovery Person who previously used drugs	Former addict Reformed addict
Substance use disorder, drug addiction	Habit
Person who misuses drugs (including illicit & prescription medication)	Abuse
Medication for a substance use disorder Medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD)	Medication-assisted treatment (MAT)
Testing negative (toxicology screening results) Being in remission or recovery; Abstinent from drugs; Not drinking or taking drugs; not currently or actively using drugs (non-toxicology results)	Clean Passing a drug test
Testing positive (toxicology screening results) Person who uses drugs (non-toxicology results)	Dirty Failing a drug test
Newborn exposed to substances	Addicted baby

### Want to Learn More?

**Words Matter CME/CE Activity** available through the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

#### Baton Rouge Health District Partners:

