

Stigma and Addictions: Our Words Matter

The words we use are important as they shape our views of the world around us. Unfortunately, our words can also keep stigma around addictions alive.



Stigma is the negative attitudes or prejudice and behaviours or discrimination related to any attribute, trait or disorder that causes a person to be labeled as different from others. Unfortunately, stigma exists around mental illness and addictions such as substance use disorders and problematic gambling.

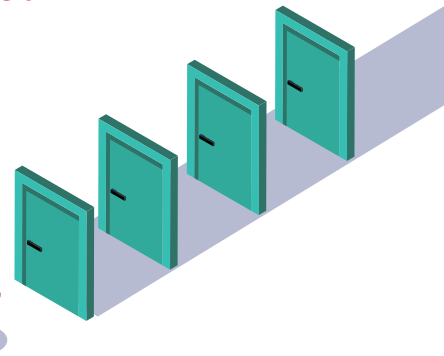
MANY PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS SAY THAT THE STIGMA CAN BE WORSE THAN THE ILLNESS ITSELF.



We are all affected by mental health and addictions, whether personally or through family and friends. Mental health concerns affect more people in Canada than some of the major physical disorders, yet **60% of individuals will not seek help due to the fear of being judged or labelled.**

Stigma can also create **barriers** for people living with, or in recovery from, mental health and addiction issues.

For example, stigma may result in **discrimination** which prevents people from accessing needed services or finding safe housing or employment.



Self-stigma is when a person begins to believe the negative things that others and the media are saying about them, which results in the prejudice being internalized.

For example, people may experience feelings of **guilt, shame** and **low self-esteem** about having an addiction.

Addictions are common and affect people from all walks of life.

Substance use disorders are real medical conditions,

just like other health problems such as diabetes, arthritis, cancer and heart conditions.

Addictions are not a choice or a failure.

Often, people need help to recover.

Commonly used words like ‘**addict**’ or ‘**alcoholic**’ label a person by their condition and can result in people feeling ashamed and put down. People are much more than their health condition.



Choosing ‘**person-first language**’ helps to reduce stigma.

‘Person-first language’ acknowledges someone as being a person before describing their health condition. For example, saying: ‘**a person living with a substance use disorder**’ or ‘**a person experiencing an addiction**’.



Say this



- Substance use
 - Substance use disorder
 - Problematic substance use
 - Substance misuse
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- A person living with addiction
 - A person experiencing an alcohol use disorder



Instead of

Substance abuse

Struggling from addiction /
Suffering with alcoholism



We all deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. Treat others how you would like to be treated if you were in their situation. If you have a loved one or co-worker who is experiencing a substance use problem, support their choices and encourage them as they take steps towards getting well.

Help is available and recovery from addictions is possible.

To find out more and for free, confidential help in the NWT, visit: **www.hss.gov.nt.ca**
or call the toll-free 24/7 NWT Help Line at **1-800-661-0844**.