


# WHY THIS MATTERS

All Americans are impacted.

1 in 5 

adults in the U.S. experience mental health challenges in any given year

1 in 20 

adults experience a co-occurring mental illness and addiction each year

1 in 7 

individuals experience addiction at some point throughout their lifespan

1 in 2 

individuals know someone impacted by addiction

Addiction and mental illness – and their related deaths – are covered frequently by local and national news, oftentimes including stigma-inducing language and imagery. **This must stop.**

Addiction and mental illness can be tragic – but people, families and communities recover. Telling the whole story is important; **fair and accurate media coverage** should use only respectful, person-centered language and imagery.

By not sensationalizing drug use, addiction and mental illness, the media has the power to improve public understanding and counter existing misperceptions, prejudice, and negative beliefs. As with other chronic health concerns, the community benefits by learning that **prevention works, treatment is effective, and recovery is real.**

20.2 million

Americans (8.2% of the U.S. population) identify as a person in recovery from a drug/alcohol use problem


30.8 million

Americans (12.5% of the U.S. population) identify as a person in recovery from a mental health issue<sup>1</sup>

# WANT MORE INFORMATION?

## ADDICTIONARY

Comprehensive glossary of agreed-upon terms concerning addiction and recovery to encourage consistent use of language. Discriminatory and stigmatizing terms are identified and proposed, scientifically grounded alternatives are provided.

 [recoveryanswers.org/addiction-ary/](https://recoveryanswers.org/addiction-ary/)

## CHANGING THE NARRATIVE

Scientifically grounded information related to substance use and addiction developed by reporters, researchers, academics, and advocates to help journalists and opinion leaders present such issues in a humane manner. The information is from expert sources, up to date, and fact-checked.

 [changingthenarrative.news](https://changingthenarrative.news)

## ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRIES COUNCIL (EIC)

Empowering the entertainment industry and news media to effectively communicate about health and social issues by providing educational materials, research, and training.

 [eiconline.org](https://eiconline.org)

## NATIONAL RECOVERY MONTH

Recovery Month is an international observance held each September to celebrate the millions of people in recovery from mental health and substance use. This site serves as the central location for recovery month events and assets that make our celebrations possible.

 [nationalrecoverymonth.org](https://nationalrecoverymonth.org)



## CITATIONS

<sup>1</sup>Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2019). 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Methodological summary and definitions. Rockville, MD: Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

<sup>2</sup>Ashford, R. D., Brown, A. M., & Curtis, B. (2018). Substance use, recovery, and linguistics: The impact of word choice on explicit and implicit bias. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 189, 131–138.

<sup>3</sup>Barry, C. L., McGinty, E. E., Pescosolido, B. A., & Goldman, H. H. (2014). Stigma, Discrimination, Treatment Effectiveness, and Policy: Public Views About Drug Addiction and Mental Illness. *Psychiatric Services*, 65(10), 1269–1272.

<sup>4</sup>Pescosolido, B. A., & Martin, J. K. (2010). "A Disease Like Any Other"? A Decade of Change in Public Reactions to Schizophrenia, Depression, and Alcohol Dependence. *Am J Psychiatry*, 10.



join the conversation:

#LanguageMatters



# YOUR CHOICES, OUR LIVES

A Quick Guide to  
Fair and Accurate  
Media Coverage of  
Addiction &  
Mental Illness



# EDITORIAL DECISIONS FRAME THE CONVERSATION

& shape public attitudes about  
addiction and mental illness

Stigma has the power to kill. Individuals and families often suffer in shame and silence. **Fair and accurate media coverage** plays a critical role to mitigate stigma.

## How the media can help:

- 1 **Emphasize humanity over condition and avoid “othering”**  
mental health is a natural part of the human experience, and persons affected should be discussed with empathy, not shamed or alienated
- 2 **Use person-first language**  
refer to someone with a behavioral health challenge as “a person with a mental health disorder and/or substance use disorder” instead of – “an addict,” “an alcoholic,” or “a schizophrenic”
- 3 **Avoid clichéd imagery**  
avoid using pictures of hypodermic needles, straitjackets, and other imagery that reinforce negative stereotypes

# IMAGE CHOICE

Keep in mind there are many potentially stigmatizing labels and images that are used without regard, and oftentimes even with good intention. In addition to words, the images chosen when reporting on addiction and mental illness matter. Please choose your words and imagery carefully to ensure **fair and accurate media coverage**.

# WORD CHOICE

Positive		Negative
✓ Person with a Substance Use Disorder		✗ Addict or Alcoholic
✓ Alcohol and Drug Use	😊	✗ Alcohol and Drug Abuse
✓ Recurrence of Use		✗ Relapse
✓ Death by Suicide	😞	✗ Committed Suicide
✓ Person in Recovery		✗ Clean/Sober
✓ Person with a Mental Health Disorder		✗ Crazy

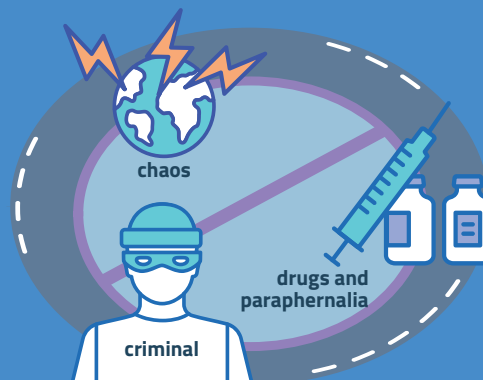
Data suggests that using **POSITIVE LANGUAGE** increases **Public Support** for:

- Effective substance use & mental health disorder policy
- Additional funding for substance use & mental health disorder services
- Interactions and engagements with those who are affected by substance use & mental health disorders<sup>1,2,3</sup>

**The recovery community** – people in recovery from mental health and substance use disorders, loved ones, families of loss and allies – **is mobilizing to share the message of recovery.**



Please do not use sensationalized labels and images:



Please use recovery-oriented labels and images:

