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

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WANT MORE INFORMATION?

ADDICIONARY
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/

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

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

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

CITATIONS
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.

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.

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

Please do not use sensationalized labels and images:

Please use recovery-oriented labels and images:

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.