# WORDS MATTER

## Terms to use, terms to avoid, and why

### Talking About Yourself or Others with Substance Use Disorder

| USE | INSTEAD OF |
|---|---|
| **Person with a substance use disorder**<br>– Person with opioid use disorder (OUD)<br>– Person with alcohol use disorder | • Addict<br>• User<br>• Substance or drug abuser<br>• Junkie |
| **Person who misuses alcohol / has unhealthy alcohol use** | • Alcoholic<br>• Drunk |
| **Person in recovery**<br>– Person who previously used drugs | • Former addict<br>• Reformed addict |
| **Testing positive** (on a drug screen) | • Dirty<br>• Failing a drug test |
| **Being in recovery or remission**<br>– Not drinking or taking drugs, except as medically ordered | • Clean |
| **Newborn exposed to substances**<br>– Baby with neonatal abstinence syndrome | • Addicted baby |

→ Using person-first language shows that SUD is an illness and the person with SUD "has" an illness, rather than "is" the problem/illness

→ The terms avoid negative associations, punitive attitudes, and individual blame

→ Use medically accurate terminology as we would for other medical conditions

→ Using stigmatizing language may decrease a person's sense of hope and self-efficacy for change

### Talking About Using Substances

| USE | INSTEAD OF |
|---|---|
| **Substance use disorder (SUD)**<br>– Opioid use disorder (OUD)<br>– Alcohol use disorder | • Habit<br>• Addiction |
| **Use** | • Abuse |
| **Overuse** (for prescription medications) | |

→ "Habit" implies that a person is choosing to use substances or can choose to stop, this is inaccurate

→ Describing SUD as a habit makes the illness seem less serious than it is

→ The term "abuse" was found to have a high association with negative judgments and punishment

### Talking About Treatment

| USE | INSTEAD OF |
|---|---|
| **Medication assisted treatment (MAT)**<br>– Medication treatment for OUD<br>– Medication for a SUD | • Opioid substitution<br>• Replacement therapy<br>• Substituting one drug for another |

→ It is a misconception that medications merely "substitute" one drug or "one addiction" for another, it is replacing missing chemicals in the body

**Erie County Opiate Epidemic Task Force**

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