



# LANGUAGE GUIDE

## FOR WORKING WITH PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS

Language is powerful – especially when discussing alcohol and other drugs and people who use them.

The words we choose can have a significant impact on how people are perceived and treated. Using stigmatizing or judgemental language creates barriers and can make it difficult for people who use drugs to access services.

Use this	Instead of this
Substance use Non-prescribed use	Abuse Misuse Problem use Non-compliant use
Person who uses/injects drugs	Drug user Drug abuser 'PWID' 'PWUD'
Person experiencing drug dependence Person experiencing a substance use disorder	Addict Junkie Druggie Alcoholic Suffering from addiction Has a drug habit
Person with a lived experience of drug dependence Person with a lived experience of substance use disorder Person with a lived experience of drug use	Ex-addict Former-addict Used to be a drug abuser Clean



Use this	Instead of this
Person who is not currently using drugs	Clean Sober Drug-free
Person experiencing barriers to accessing services	Lacks insight In denial Resistant Unmotivated Not engaged Non-compliant Chaotic Hard to reach
Person's needs are not being met	Drug seeking Manipulative Splitting
Currently using drugs Living experience of drug use	Using again Fallen off the wagon Had a setback
No longer using drugs	Stayed clean Maintained recovery
Positive/negative urine drug screen	Dirty/clean urine
Used/sterile needle or syringe	Dirty/clean needle or syringe Dirties