

Not just words: an anti-stigma language guide

Using the right words has the power to improve health outcomes, reduce stigma and make people feel safe and respected.



say this

- ✓ Person dependant on alcohol
- ✓ A person with alcohol/
substance use disorder
- ✓ Alcohol/substance free
- ✓ Alcohol/substance use/
person at risk of developing
an alcohol use disorder
- ✓ Unwilling to discuss
- ✓ Person with an alcohol use
disorder/alcohol dependant
- ✓ Cost of alcohol use to society



not that

- ✗ Alcoholic/alco/drunk
- ✗ Addict/junkie/abuser/drunk
- ✗ Clean/ex-addict/reformed
- ✗ Abuse/misuse/dirty
- ✗ In denial
- ✗ Alcoholic/high-functioning
alcoholic
- ✗ Cost of alcohol abuse
to society

Media guide

Stigmatising language such as 'user', 'addict' and 'alcoholic' are outdated and damaging and should no longer be used. First person language should be used, i.e. person dependant on alcohol. That said, it is up to individuals as to how they would like to identify, so their own terminology when speaking about themselves should be respected.

Reporters should check 'information' with reputable sources such as the HSE or Health Research Board. For example, it is not correct to say that the costs from alcohol harm only arise from alcohol dependency. Research shows that the costs of alcohol harm are attributable to alcohol use across society.

Imagery

Images of people in compromising conditions - including whilst drunk or unconscious - are stigmatising and should always be avoided.

Articles about alcohol in general should not contain images that glorify/glamorise alcohol use.



Images should tell the human side of the story in a respectful way. Photos of interviewees or services should be used where possible.

Case Studies



Lived experience stories are important in breaking down stigma and helping others to see they are not alone. These kinds of stories should be reported with the sensitivity of the subject - and the subject matter - in mind.



Some people may prefer to share their experiences anonymously and this should be facilitated.



Interview subjects should be offered approval of their own quotes and contributions.



Any article reporting on the harms of alcohol and other drugs should cite independent sources for factual information such as the HSE/HRB and be cautious about using alcohol industry sources, for example Drinkaware.