

# Language Matters

**When in doubt, use person-first language.**

Person-first language is language that acknowledges someone as a person before describing their personal attributes or health conditions.

Using person-first, non-stigmatizing language encourages people to seek help.

Avoid Using	Because	Use Instead
'Substance abuse' 'Substance misuse' 'Habit' 'Abuser' 'Junkie'	These words can communicate that the use of substances or addiction represents failure of morals, personality and willpower.	'Substance use' 'Person who uses drugs' 'Person with a substance use disorder' (as applicable)
'Alcoholic' 'Drug user' 'Drug addict' 'Recreational drug user'	These terms label people according to an illness or action, rather than putting their individuality first, which may be experienced as dehumanizing.	'Person who uses substance(s)' 'Person with a substance use disorder' (as applicable) 'Person who occasionally uses substance(s)'
'Ex-user' 'Former addict'	The terms elicit negative associations, punitive attitudes, and individual blame.	'Person in recovery' 'Person with lived experience'