

Words Matter: Terms to Use and Avoid When Talking about Mental Health and Substance Use

Courtesy: [CDC](#)

Drug/Substance Use

Instead of this...

Drug-users/addicts/drug abusers

Alcoholics/abusers

Persons taking/prescribed medication assisted treatment (MAT)

Persons who relapsed

Smokers

Try this...

Persons who use drugs/people who inject drugs

Persons with substance use disorder

Persons with alcohol use disorder

Persons in recovery from substance use/alcohol disorder

Persons taking/prescribed medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD)

Persons who returned to use

People who smoke

Mental Health/Behavioral Health

Instead of this...

Mentally ill

Crazy

Insane

Mental defect

Suffers from or is afflicted with [condition]

Asylum

Try this...

People with a mental illness

People with a pre-existing mental health disorder

People with a pre-existing behavioral health disorder

People with a diagnosis of a mental illness/mental health disorder/behavioral health disorder

Psychiatric hospital/facility

Mental illness is a general condition. Use specific disorders whenever possible. For example:

- Person with depression
- People with obsessive-compulsive disorder

When referring to people who are experiencing symptoms, but a condition has not been diagnosed or the symptoms may not reach a clinical threshold, consider:

- People experiencing mental distress
- Persons experiencing crisis or trauma
- Persons experiencing persistent high stress or anxiety