



Language

Matters!



Try and avoid

Consider using

Why

Drug abuse
Drug misuse

Drug use
Substance use

Terms like *drug abuse* and *drug misuse* are subjective. They can feel judgemental and stigmatizing.

Drug user
Opioid user
Injecting drug user

Person who uses drugs
Person who uses substances
Person who uses opioids
Person who injects drugs

Person-first language is recommended. It honors the humanity of the person and accurately identifies the behaviour without labelling or stigmatizing.

Addict

Person with a substance use disorder

Substance use disorder is a medical diagnosis. The term *addict* is colloquial and can be stigmatizing.

Clean

Abstinent
Not currently using drugs
Not currently using substances

The term *clean* can feel judgemental and stigmatizing because it implies that people who use drugs are dirty.

Opioid crisis

Overdose crisis
Illicit drug toxicity crisis

The term *opioid crisis* can be misleading. Canada is not seeing increased rates of opioid use. Rather we are seeing increased rates of overdose (also referred to as *illicit drug toxicity*) due to widespread contamination of the illicit drug supply with fentanyl, benzodiazepines and other substances.

As cultural norms and understandings change so too does the language we use. This resource may be updated periodically to reflect the diverse ways people who use substances describe their identities and experiences.

While some individuals and communities may use words like *drug user*, *addict* or *clean* to describe themselves, outsiders should avoid using these words unless invited to do so.



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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BC CDC [Language matters: Create a safer space with less stigma](#)

Canadian Public Health Association [Language matters: Using respectful language in relation to sexual health, substance use, STBIs and intersecting sources of stigma](#)