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NIAAAPressOffice@mail.nih.gov**Words matter: language can reduce mental health and addiction stigma, NIH leaders say****WHAT:**

In a perspective published in *Neuropsychopharmacology*, leaders from the National Institutes of Health address how using appropriate language to describe mental illness and addiction can help to reduce stigma and improve how people with these conditions are treated in health care settings and throughout society. The authors define stigma as negative attitudes toward people that are based on certain distinguishing characteristics. More than a decade of research has shown that stigma contributes significantly to negative health outcomes and can pose a barrier to seeking treatment for mental illness or substance use disorders.

Thirty five percent of people with serious mental illness in the U.S., and nearly 90% of people with substance use disorders, do not receive treatment. The perspective authors point to evidence that stigma-related bias among clinicians can contribute to a treatment-averse mindset and to flawed clinical care, including failure to implement proven methods of treatment. Further, when a person with a mental illness or substance use disorder continues to experience stigma, they may begin to internalize it. This “self-stigma” can lead to lower self-esteem and feelings of self-worth and can become an ongoing source of distress that may exacerbate symptoms and create barriers to successful treatment.

Conversely, efforts to reduce stigma may reduce the psychological burden it places on individuals and can be an important component of removing barriers to care. The authors highlight numerous studies showing that using scientifically accurate language and terms that centralize the experience of patients with mental illness and substance use disorders is one key component to reducing stigma. They argue that a shift in language is crucial for mobilizing resources toward mental health and addiction services and eroding the prejudices that keep people who need those services from seeking or receiving them. Though stigma is difficult to eliminate, they contend that changing the language we use to describe these conditions can make a significant and immediate difference for the people experiencing them.

ARTICLE:

ND Volkow, JA Gordon, and GF Koob. [Choosing Appropriate Language to Reduce the Stigma Around Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorders](#). *Neuropsychopharmacology*. DOI: 10.1038/s41386-021-01069-4 (2021).

WHO:

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About the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA): NIDA is a component of the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIDA supports most of the world's research on the health aspects of drug use and addiction. The Institute carries out a large variety of programs to inform policy, improve practice, and advance addiction science. For more information about NIDA and its programs, visit www.nida.nih.gov.

About the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA): The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), part of the National Institutes of Health, is the primary U.S. agency for conducting and supporting research on the causes, consequences, diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of alcohol use disorder. NIAAA also disseminates research findings to general, professional, and academic audiences. Additional alcohol research information and publications are available at www.niaaa.nih.gov.

About the National Institutes of Health (NIH): NIH, the nation's medical research agency, includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIH is the primary federal agency conducting and supporting basic, clinical, and translational medical research, and is investigating the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit www.nih.gov.

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