



When We **STOP** Stigma We **SUPPORT** Recovery.

Stigma is a collection of attitudes, beliefs, behaviors and structures that generate negative attitudes about a group of people.

Substance use disorder (SUD) is a term to describe the disease of addiction. It is not a moral failing, a choice, or a character flaw. It is a chronic, relapsing brain disease that is characterized by compulsive drug seeking and use, despite harmful consequences.

SUD is a treatable chronic health condition from which people can and do recover. However, many people with substance use disorders do not seek the treatment they need because of the stigma they face. People with substance use disorders may be viewed more negatively than people with other medical conditions or disorders.

Stigma erodes self-worth, creates social isolation, and reduces access to care.

Kinds of Stigma

1. **Public:** Society's negative attitudes towards a group of people, creating an environment where those addicted are discredited, feared, and isolated. These stigmatizing beliefs are the reasons many individuals avoid or delay seeking treatment.
2. **Self:** Accepting and internalizing negative stereotypes about oneself. Self-stigma can result in shame, guilt, reduced sense of hope, social withdrawal and isolation.
3. **Courtesy:** "Stigma by Association" is directed toward family and friends of those with a stigmatized condition. Courtesy stigma can isolate family members, lead family members to feel guilty, create a sense of shame, and can make the family member less likely to encourage treatment.
4. **Structural:** Laws, policies, and procedures that limit the opportunities of people with substance use disorder or other behavioral health issues. Structural stigma can be found in businesses, organizations, the courts, government, school systems, health care systems and social services.
5. **Stigma Against Medication for Addiction Treatment:** Belief that medications, such as buprenorphine, methadone, and naltrexone : "trade one addiction for another".

For a group of people who already carry such a heavy burden, stigma is an unacceptable addition to their pain.

What Can You Do?

1. **Education:** Learn about the science of addiction, the connection between addiction, mental health, and trauma and the different treatment options.
2. **Change your language:** Use people-first language and language that reflects the medical nature of substance use. Instead of saying "addict" or "abuser", consider using "person with a substance use disorder".
3. **Share stories and experiences:** Invite people to share their stories — positive interactions can change attitudes.
4. **Take the pledge:** Pledge to describe addiction as a treatable disease and use empowering language instead of words that hurt.

To learn more about stigma and take the SMC Goes Purple pledge, visit www.smchd.org/gopurple.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

www.drugabuse.gov/sites/default/files/nidamed_words_matter_terms.pdf
www.shatterproof.org/
www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/stigma/index.html
opioidlibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/NCBH_MAT_MythsVFacts.pdf

