

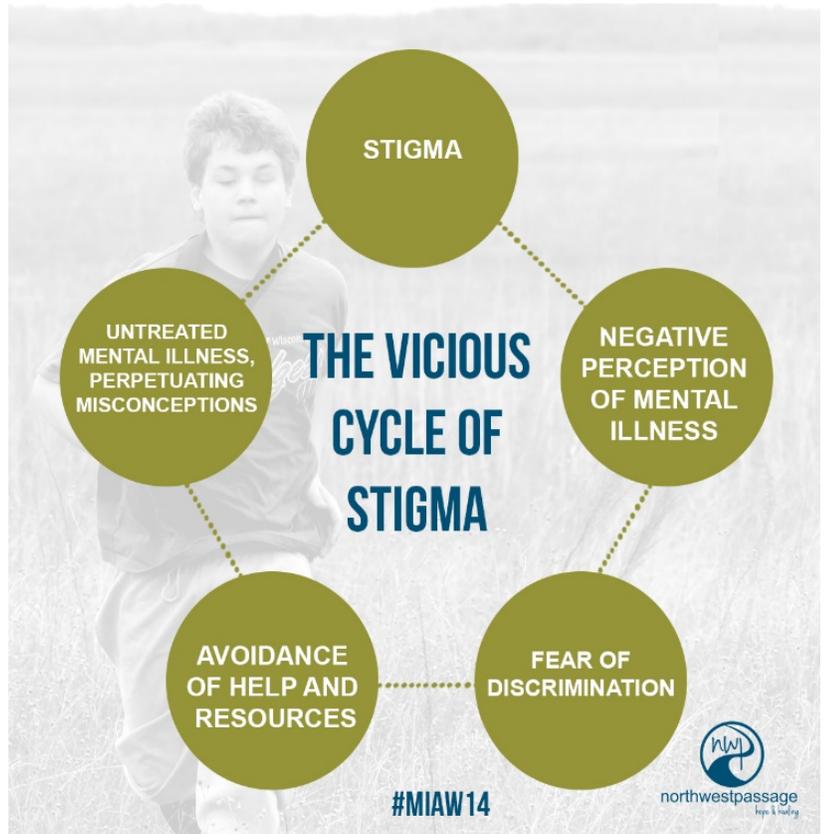
# Stigma

## What is Stigma?

A system of **attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and structures** held by a person or persons, that result in **prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping** for individuals in a marginalized group

Stigma marks an individual or a group with **disgrace, dishonor, and discredit** (*Ending discrimination against people with mental and substance use disorders: the evidence for stigma*)

Studies show that **substance use disorder is one of the MOST stigmatized conditions** and individuals face high levels of social disapproval and discrimination



Northwest Passage. (2014). *The vicious cycle of stigma*.

## Stigma is present at multiple levels

Individuals who experience substance use are more likely to:

## SYSTEMIC

### SELF

Have negative self-perceptions and identity formation, low self-esteem, and low self-efficacy

Have feelings of shame and fear around social and legal consequences

Have reduced access to health care, housing, and employment

Receive suboptimal treatment and have less time spent with them from medical providers

To not seek treatment, drop out of treatment early, and report feelings of fear around disclosing their condition

### SOCIAL

Face negative implicit bias and stereotyping from society

They may be viewed as immoral and lacking self-control

Be viewed as manipulative, violent, unpredictable and poorly motivated by medical providers

(Livingston, Milne, Fang, & Amari, 2012)

# Reduce Stigma through Language

Terms to Avoid	Why	Preferred Terminology
Addict, Abuser, Junkie, User	These terms are demeaning because they label a person solely by his/her illness or behavior and imply a permanency to the condition	Person with a substance use disorder
Clean or Dirty	These words associate symptoms (i.e. positive drug tests) with judgement statements about cleanliness.	Negative, positive, abstinent, substance-free, actively using
Habit or Drug Habit	These terms deny the medical nature of the condition and imply that resolution of the problem is simply a matter of willpower in being able to stop the habitual behavior	Substance use disorder, regular substance use
Opioid Replacement or Methadone Maintenance	These words imply that treatment medications are equal to street drugs and suggests a lateral move from illegal to legal addiction	Medication-assisted treatment, medication-assisted recovery

Barnstable County Human Services. (2016) *The words we use matter: reducing stigma through language.*

## Additional Resources

Faces and Voices of Recovery

<http://facesandvoicesofrecovery.org/>

The Recovery Research Institute

<https://www.recoveryanswers.org/>

SAMHSA

<https://www.samhsa.gov/>

TN Treatment & Recovery Services

<https://www.tn.gov/behavioral-health/topic/treatment-recovery>

## Strategies to Reduce Stigma

### 1. Change the language around substance use

- Use person centered speech
- “Substance abuser” or “addict” becomes “person with a substance use disorder”
- The word “abuser” has strong negative connotations and associations with punishment
- Change in terminology reflects the medical condition rather than personal failing and/or choice

### 2. Increased exposure to individuals in recovery- “putting a face on addiction”

- Demonstrates negative attributes are not specific to or representative of people who use substances
- Increases comfort between different groups
- Decreases feelings of “us” vs. “them”
- Humanizes those with substance use problems

### 3. Increase education around substance use, treatment, and recovery

- Dispels myths, provides factual information and resources

### 4. Decrease punitive measures while increasing support and treatment resources

- Individuals are more likely to disclose substance use to medical providers, and receive care, if they do not fear legal recourse

## References

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[http://www.drugpolicy.org/sites/default/files/DPA\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_Stigma\\_and\\_People\\_Who\\_Use\\_Drugs.pdf](http://www.drugpolicy.org/sites/default/files/DPA_Fact_Sheet_Stigma_and_People_Who_Use_Drugs.pdf)

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