



# How To: Talk About Addiction Stigma



Changing the narrative on addiction starts with conversations.

## Why It Matters

Stigma is one of the largest drivers of the addiction crisis in the United States, preventing many people from seeking treatment and leading to tens of thousands of preventable deaths each year. Even for people in recovery, prejudice and discrimination continues to impact many aspects of their daily lives.

We need to change the way we talk about addiction. **Words matter.** They convey meaning and help us understand the world around us. We can use our words to help decrease stigma by raising awareness, having honest conversations, and encouraging others to educate themselves on substance use disorder (SUD).

| Hear This   | Say This  |
|---|---|
| What's wrong with using the word "addict"?  | Words like "addict" label people in shameful and judgmental ways. Instead, using terms like "person with a substance use disorder" allows us to recognize that people are people, first and foremost.                                 |
| Using drugs or alcohol is a choice. If someone develops a dependency, it's their fault. | No one chooses to develop a SUD. Addiction is a consequence of many factors, including genetics and trauma. Substance use can lead to profound changes in the brain, affecting a person's self-control and decision-making abilities. |
| If someone relapses, they're a lost cause.  | Addiction is a chronic illness, meaning it requires lifelong management. Maintaining recovery takes time and effort. Sometimes, a recurrence of symptoms can occur. This doesn't mean previous treatment efforts have failed.         |

## Definitions of Terms

**Substance Use Disorder (SUD)** is a treatable mental disorder that affects a person's brain and behavior, leading to their inability to control their use of substances like legal or illegal drugs, alcohol, or opioids.

**Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD)** is the use of FDA approved medications, typically alongside counseling and behavioral therapies, to provide a "whole-patient" approach to the treatment of opioid use disorders (OUD).

**People-First Language (PFL)** puts a person before a diagnosis and describes what a person has, not who a person is.

# Conversation Guide Cont'd



| Hear This   | Say This  |
|---|---|
| People who use Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) are just replacing one drug for another. | While some people recover from OUD without medication, this is not the case for everyone. Every person's experience with addiction is unique, and what works for one person may not work for another. |



## Fast Facts

- In Georgia, all drug overdose deaths increased by 55.9% from 2019-2021.
- Fentanyl related deaths increased by 218.4% from 2019.
- Over half of Georgia residents know someone with an opioid use disorder (OUD).
- Yet, only 36.3% of Georgians would be willing to have someone with an OUD as a close personal friend.
- Sixty percent (60%) of Georgians would not want to live next door to someone with a OUD.
- In the workplace, 64.4% of Georgians would not be willing to have someone with an OUD as a co-worker.
- Eighty-five (85%) of Georgians believe that someone with an OUD should receive treatment instead of being sentenced to prison.

## Let's Connect



Georgia Recovers is a digital media intervention that uses the power of storytelling to share evidence-based messaging to key audiences. Our goal is to change beliefs and attitudes around addiction for a more compassionate Georgia.

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