

Why This Matters

A substance use disorder is a treatable disease that affects a person's brain and behavior. Drug and alcohol use can cause changes in the brain that lead to compulsive use, despite damage incurred to a person's health and relationships. Genetics, mental illness and other factors make certain people susceptible to addiction (SAMHSA). Stigma is a significant barrier for people seeking treatment. Below are tips for covering substance use disorders in a way that can help destigmatize access to treatment. We encourage our media partners to use discretion when reporting about people who are in highly vulnerable circumstances. This includes being mindful of videos and photographs being used in stories. See this [article](#) from the National Institute on Drug Addiction (NIDA) for more.



Do

- Use "substance use disorder." "Addiction" is an acceptable term to use when writing more broadly about the issue. (AP Stylebook)
- When possible, use person-first language to describe someone who is incarcerated. (AP Stylebook)
- When possible, use b-roll footage and photographs that show people who are accessing health care or mental health services.
- Use "arrested on a charge of" to avoid any suggestion that someone is being judged before a trial. If a charge hasn't been filed, "arrested on suspicion of," or a similar phrase, should be used (AP Stylebook)
- See the Associated Press Stylebook section on Addiction and a newly updated section on Criminal Justice for more guidance.



Don't

- Attempt to interview people who have just been referred to deflection services.
- Use words like "abuse" or "problem" in favor of the word "use" with an appropriate modifier such as risky, unhealthy, excessive or heavy. (AP Stylebook)
- Use words like addict, user, substance abuser, drug abuser, junkie, former addict, reformed addict, habit, abuse, clean or dirty. (NIDA Style Guide)
- Use video footage or photographs showing faces or other identifiable features of people who may be using illegal substances or are being arrested.

Definitions

- **Addiction:** Addiction is a treatable disease that affects a person's brain and behavior. Drug and alcohol use can cause changes in the brain that lead to compulsive use, despite damage incurred to a person's health and relationships. Genetics, mental illness and other factors make certain people susceptible to addiction. (AP Stylebook)
- **Drugs:** Acceptable as a term for both prescribed products and illicit substances. Avoid narcotic or narcotics in general references since narcotics can be prescribed or illegal. Capitalize brand names; lowercase generics. (AP Stylebook)
- **Recovery:** A process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential. Recovery signals a dramatic shift in the expectation for positive outcomes for individuals who experience mental and substance use conditions or the co-occurring of the two. (SAMHSA)
- **Substance Use Disorder:** Occurs when the recurrent use of alcohol and/or drugs causes clinically significant impairment, including health problems, disability, and failure to meet major responsibilities at work, school, or home. (SAMHSA)

Resources

- [Associated Press Stylebook](#)
- [National Institute on Drug Abuse \(NIDA\) Style Guide](#)
- [National Institutes of Health Style Guide](#)
- [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Style Guides](#)
- [ReportingOnAddiction.org \(Resources for Journalists\)](#)
- [NEW! Berkeley Media Studies Group Style Guide on Overdose Prevention](#)
- [2022 Oregon Substance Use Disorder Services and Gap Analysis \(includes statistics on Multnomah County\)](#)
- [Multnomah County Behavioral Health Resources](#)