

Language and Reporting Guide

Understanding Drug Addiction: Prevention, Treatment and Recovery — Athens, 4–5
December 2026

Why language matters

Evidence shows that stigmatising terms reduce the likelihood that someone seeks or stays in treatment, and change how clinicians judge the same case. This short guide is for speakers, poster authors, journalists and delegates.

Preferred terms

Use person who uses drugs, person with a substance use disorder, person in recovery. Use return to use or recurrence rather than relapse where you can. Use medication for opioid use disorder rather than substitute or replacement.

Terms to avoid

Avoid addict, junkie, abuser, clean and dirty for test results, and habit. Describe a test as positive or negative. Avoid framing recovery as willpower or failure as a moral lapse.

Images

Avoid stock photographs of needles, foil and hooded figures in alleyways. They reinforce stereotypes and rarely reflect who is actually in treatment. Prefer images of ordinary settings, services and people, used with consent.

Reporting responsibly

When reporting deaths, avoid describing the method or quantity involved. Include where people can get help. Give lived-experience contributors the right to review how their words are used.