

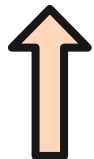
# Land Acknowledgement



I would like to acknowledge that we are all sitting on the unceded and traditional territories of Indigenous Peoples.

I am situated on the territory of the Mi'kmaq (meeg-maw).





# Substance Use Related Language & Stigma

Presented by: *Katie Upham*  
*Harm Reduction Educator*



The Substance User  
Network of the Atlantic  
Region (SUNAR)

<http://sunar.ca>





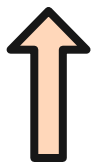
# Addiction Models



## The Moral Model



- Old model of addiction
- We have a choice, so “just say no”
- Addiction = a character defect
- PWUS are weak, lack will power
- Substance use is simply a function of bad decisions
- This lead to STIGMA!
- Makes PWUS have poor image of themselves! Feel like “bad” people.
- We as a society need to change this way of thinking about PWUS





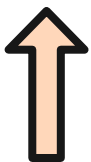
# Addiction Models



## The Disease Model



- Arose in the mid-twentieth century
- SUD is a disease of the brain, an illness
- Suggests SUD comes from a problem in our body and brain--biological & neurological
- Permanent & progressive disease--each return to substance use gets worse, drug use gets worse over time
- Periods of returning to active drug use is a normal part of disease & recovery process
- Naysayers argue it leaves out: environment, how a person was raised & the effects of the society we live in





# A New Way Forward

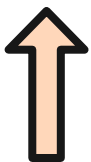
New studies have a more holistic approach:

-  Individual traits
-  Biological factors
-  Social factors
-  Trauma and other life/events
-  Neurological

MUCH better because...

★ This approach recognizes that there are **BENEFITS** in functioning to the person who uses the drug

💡 Also acknowledges that not everyone who uses has a problem



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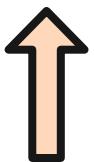
# Stigma

## What is it?

- Dictionary: “A mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality or person.”
- Includes: discrimination, judging, labelling, stereotyping, isolating and prejudice

## Why is it a problem?

- Causes guilt, shame & low self-esteem in PWUS & their loved ones
- Makes the cycle of substance use worse! More pain = more use
- Prevents PWUS from seeking treatment & their loved ones from getting help
- Prevents society from having compassion & empathy for PWUS





# Current way society thinks:

Drugs fit into 2 categories:

1. Harmful & Illegal - heroin, meth, cocaine, etc.
2. Unharmful & legal - alcohol, marijuana, caffeine, nicotine, etc.

These attitudes come from:

- Criminalization
- Poverty
- Racism
- Current drug policy
- Tainted drug supply
- Language





# Types of Stigma



## Social Stigma

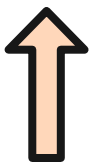
- ❑ Negative attitudes
- ❑ Use of harmful labels
- ❑ Use of negative images
- ❑ Ignoring PWUS or their families

## Structural Stigma

- ❑ Drug policies
- ❑ Not taking requests of PWUS seriously
- ❑ Not connecting PWUS with services
- ❑ Designing services that enhance stigma

## Self Stigma

- ❑ Internalizing social & structural stigma
- ❑ Applying outward stigma to oneself







# Language related to substance use



## Use "People First" Language:

- PWUD, PWUS or PWLLE
- Someone who has a SUD
- Someone in recovery
- Someone who sells drugs

## Also Use...

- Sterile/unused syringe
- Safer use supplies
- Actively using
- Not currently using
- Pos/neg. test result
- Unregulated/illegal drugs



## Consider:

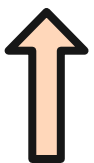
- Overdose  
VS.
- Accidental  
Drug Poisoning

## Try to Avoid...

- Addict
- Clean & sober
- clean/dirty needle
- Addiction
- Drug Dealer
- Abuse or abuser
- Habit
- Relapse/slip
- Illicit drugs

## These are more obvious:

- Crackhead or junkie
- Alcoholic/drunk

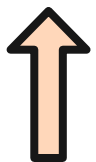




# Language Specific To Clinical/Research Settings



- Connection-seeking behavior vs. attention-seeking behavior
- Person experiencing barriers to accessing services rather than “unmotivated”, “non-compliant” or “treatment resistant”
- Equity-deserving populations vs. marginalized populations
- Participant vs. patient
- 👍 Substance use health
- 👎 Drug-seeking behavior



# Discussion Time!

Questions?

Comments?



♥ Thank-you for having me!

## The Language We Use To Talk About Substance Use Is *Powerful*



When You Say...

Message Heard Is...



## How Can I Make A Difference?

