



Stopping Titles that Overtly Perpetuate (STOP) Stigma Act

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The toll of substance use disorder is staggering. The CDC projects that 89,000 drug overdose deaths occurred in the U.S. in the 12-month period ending October 2020.¹ The economic burden of the opioid crisis in the U.S. was estimated to be at least \$631 billion from 2015 to 2018.² The impact from the **stigma** surrounding substance use disorder (SUD) is harder to quantify, but is equally distressing. Levels of stigma are high among the general public and even among many health care professionals. A national survey showed that two thirds of primary care physicians surveyed viewed people with opioid use disorder as dangerous. People with SUD are perceived as not having the willpower to stop using, or as being morally inferior to people without SUD.³ People with SUD may hide their addiction out of fear of being harshly judged, losing their jobs, or even losing custody of their children.⁴ People with SUD can internalize these negative views, which can lead to treatment avoidance, poor treatment outcomes, and continued drug use.⁵

Research has shown that addiction is a physical disease and that half of the risk for addiction comes from genetics.⁶ **People with substance use disorder are not at fault for their illness.** The language we use can perpetuate stigma – using a stigmatizing term like “substance abuse” leads to harsher judgements versus using person-first language such as “a person with SUD.”⁷ This stigma may lead to discrimination in employment, insurance benefits, and housing.⁸

The STOP Stigma Act

The Stopping Titles that Overtly Perpetuate (STOP) Stigma Act would direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to provide recommendations for name changes for eight agencies and one grant whose names contain stigmatizing language, including the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the National Institute on Drug Abuse. It would also direct the Secretary to provide a cost assessment for the name changes and to provide opportunities for relevant stakeholder groups to provide input on the recommendations. Changing these agency and program names will align the names with the nomenclature preferred by people with SUD and will contribute toward reducing the stigma people with SUD face.

Endorsements

Addiction Professionals of North Carolina; American Society of Addiction Medicine; Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness; Behavioral Health Association of Providers; California Consortium of Addiction Programs & Professionals; Faces and Voices of Recovery; The Kennedy Forum; NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals; National Association for Behavioral Healthcare; National Council for Mental Wellbeing; Shatterproof



¹ Ahmad FB, Rossen LM, Sutton P. "Provisional drug overdose death counts." National Center for Health Statistics. 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>

² Davenport S, Weaver A, Caverly M. "Economic Impact of Non-Medical Opioid Use in the United States." Society of Actuaries. October 2019.

<https://www.soa.org/globalassets/assets/files/resources/research-report/2019/econ-impact-non-medical-opioid-use.pdf>

³ McGinty E and Barry C. "Stigma Reduction to Combat the Addiction Crisis — Developing an Evidence Base." New England Journal of Medicine. April 2, 2020.

https://www.nejm.org/doi/10.1056/NEJMp2000227?url_ver=Z39.88-2003&rfr_id=ori%3Arid%3Acrossref.org&rfr_dat=cr_pub++Opubmed

⁴ Adams J and Volkow N. "Ethical Imperatives to Overcome Stigma Against People With Substance Use Disorders." AMA Journal of Ethics. 2020.

<https://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/article/ethical-imperatives-overcome-stigma-against-people-substance-use-disorders/2020-08>

⁵ Volkow N. "Stigma and the Toll of Addiction." New England Journal of Medicine. April 2, 2020.

https://www.nejm.org/doi/10.1056/NEJMp1917360?url_ver=Z39.88-2003&rfr_id=ori:rid:crossref.org&rfr_dat=cr_pub%20%20pubmed

⁶ Kelly J, Wakeman S, Saitz R. "Stop Talking 'Dirty': Clinicians, Language, and Quality of Care for the Leading Cause of Preventable Death in the United States. The American Journal of Medicine. September 2, 2014.

[https://www.amjmed.com/article/S0002-9343\(14\)00770-0/fulltext](https://www.amjmed.com/article/S0002-9343(14)00770-0/fulltext)

⁷ Zwick J, Appleseth H, Arndt S. "Stigma: How it Affects the Substance Use Disorder Patient." Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy. July 27, 2020.

<https://substanceabusepolicy.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13011-020-00288-0>

⁸ McGinty E and Barry C. "Stigma Reduction to Combat the Addiction Crisis — Developing an Evidence Base." New England Journal of Medicine. April 2, 2020.

https://www.nejm.org/doi/10.1056/NEJMp2000227?url_ver=Z39.88-2003&rfr_id=ori%3Arid%3Acrossref.org&rfr_dat=cr_pub++Opubmed