

## Your Community Guide to Ending Opioid Addiction Stigma

Why is it important to end stigma? When communities come together to reduce stigma around addiction, the results are profound:

- **43% higher treatment success rates** in stigma-free communities<sup>3</sup>
- **Community members are often the first** to notice when someone needs help<sup>2</sup>
- **Your attitudes can directly impact** whether neighbors seek life-saving treatment<sup>1</sup>

Your voice has the power to save lives. Here are some ways.

### Understand What is Addiction

**Addiction is a chronic medical condition, not a moral failing<sup>4</sup>** Just as we wouldn't blame someone for developing diabetes or heart disease, addiction is a health condition that changes brain structure and function.

#### Key truths about addiction:

- Anyone can develop addiction - it affects all demographics equally<sup>5</sup>
- Recovery is possible, millions of Americans are living proof<sup>6</sup>
- Evidence-based treatments are highly effective when people can access them<sup>7</sup>



# Understand the Impact of Stigma

We all want a healthy community, and for that to happen, people facing addiction need to feel comfortable seeking support and treatment. When our community stigmatizes addiction, the consequences ripple through every family and neighborhood:

- **8-year delay** in seeking treatment due to shame and fear<sup>8</sup>
- **Increased overdose risk** as people hide their struggles in dangerous isolation<sup>9</sup>
- **Devestate families and social networks** when stigma divides communities<sup>10</sup>
- **\$4 trillion** in economic costs nationwide due to opioid use disorder<sup>11</sup>

**Every judgmental comment, every closed door, every turned back pushes someone further from the help they desperately need.**

## Four Actions You Can Take Today

### 1. Language Matters

The words we use matter. Research shows that changing language alone reduces stigma by 23% in community surveys.<sup>12</sup>

Instead of	Say This
Addict, Junkie, User, Substance abuser	Person with substance use disorder or Person who uses drugs
Recovering addict, former addict	Person in recovery
Substance abuse	Substance use for illicit drugs and substance misuse for prescription medications
Drug habit	Substance use disorder, opioid use disorder, addiction

### 2. Become a Source of Accurate Information<sup>13</sup>

Combat common myths with the facts.

Myth	Fact
Addiction is a choice	Addiction changes brain structure and function
People can just stop	Addiction requires medical treatment, like other chronic diseases
Recovery rarely works	Most people who receive treatment recover suc- cessfully

### 3. Champion Support Over Isolation

**Social support increases recovery success by 67%<sup>14</sup>** Here's how to provide it:

- Include people in recovery in social activities and community events
- Support recovery-friendly businesses and organizations
- Advocate for recovery housing in your neighborhood
- Learn about local treatment resources to share with others

### 4. Advocate for Treatment, Not Punishment

**Help your community treat addiction as the health issue it is:**

- Support treatment funding in local budgets
- Advocate for drug courts and diversion programs
- Push back against “NIMBY” attitudes toward treatment facilities
- Vote for policies that prioritize health over punishment

## Your Daily Action Plan: Being a Recovery Ally

### In Conversations

- **Listen without judgment** when someone shares their struggles. Ask “How can I help?” instead of giving unsolicited advice. Share resources rather than trying to fix the problem yourself, and always respect privacy - never share someone's recovery status without permission.

### In Your Neighborhood

- **Welcome recovery housing** rather than opposing it. Support local treatment centers through volunteering or donations. Host educational events in your home or community space, and model inclusive behavior for children and other family members.

### Online and on Social Media

- **Share positive recovery stories** (with permission). Correct misinformation about addiction when you see it. Use respectful language in all posts about addiction, and amplify voices of people in recovery.

## Recognizing When Someone Needs Help

**Watch for these behavioral changes:**

- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Declining work or school performance
- Changes in appearance or hygiene
- Financial problems or frequent borrowing
- Health problems or frequent illnesses

**How to help:**

- Express concern without judgment
- Provide specific resources and phone numbers
- Offer to help make appointments or provide transportation
- Continue to show love and support regardless of their response

Do you or someone you know need help finding treatment for a substance use disorder?  
[Fill out this form.](#)

## Essential Resources

### National Educational Resources

- [National Institute on Drug Abuse](#)
- [SAMHSA National Helpline](#): 1-800-662-4357
- [Shatterproof](#)
- [Partnership to End Addiction](#)

### Connecticut-Specific Resources

- [CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services](#)
- [Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery](#)
- [CT 211 \(Information and Referral\)](#): Dial 2-1-1
- [New Haven Health Department](#)

### Training Opportunities

- [Overdose Prevention & Response Training and Suicide Prevention Training](#) is available at the [New Haven Health Department](#)
- [Mental Health First Aid](#)

## Remember: Recovery is a Community Effort

It takes a village to raise a child - and it takes a community to support recovery. Every conversation, every act of compassion, every moment of understanding moves us closer to a stigma-free community where everyone can heal. **Your actions today can save a life tomorrow.**

## Sources

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