



Health District of Northern Larimer County
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How we talk about addiction matters

Leading the community conversation about the public health crisis of addiction starts with the words we use. The stigma of the disease keeps many of our neighbors from seeking the treatment they need. Addict, user, junkie and other negative terms for those living with addiction are not only inaccurate, they're harmful and a barrier to treatment.

Person-first language emphasizes the individual, not the disease. It conveys respect to people who are living with addiction, as well as their families, friends, colleagues, support networks and caregivers. Clinical terminology describes the disease, treatment and recovery accurately and without judgement.

Addiction isn't a choice. But we can all choose how we talk about the disease — changing minds, opening innovative pathways to care and saving lives.

USE person-first, clinical language	AVOID negative labels
Person living with addiction, person with an addiction	Abuser, addict, drunk, user, junkie
Patient, client, consumer	Problem, offender
Substance use or misuse, risky use	Abuse, substance/alcohol/drug abuse
Active addiction, substance use disorder	Drug habit
Medication-assisted treatment	Replacement/substitution therapy
Evidence-based treatment	Rehab, drunk tank
Recurrence of use, recovery setback	Repeat offender, non-compliant, relapse
Person living in recovery, addiction-free	Clean, sober, ex-addict