END THE SYNDEMIC

TENNESSEE

LANGUAGE GUIDANCE

"ALL BIG CHANGES OF THE WORLD COME FROM WORDS."
- Marjane Satrapi

THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE

Language can be both a powerful tool of connection and a strong source of division. This guide contains small language shifts that have a big impact in building a culture of compassion rather than one of stigma, shame, and stereotypes. We recognize that language is ever-evolving, and that which is accepted today may become unfavorable tomorrow. As Maya Angelou said, "when you know better, you do better". This guide is intended to be a living document.

If you have feedback for improvement, please email endthesyndemic.tn@tn.gov

THREE GUIDING PRINCIPLES
of language that builds compassion and shrinks stigma, shame, and stereotypes

PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE

Person-first language means centering the person before a particular health condition or experience. This sets the tone that you see someone as a complex and complete person before any singular component of their life. When referencing an individual or group of people use the following language:

Person with _____   **People with** _____

Person who _____   **People who** _____

THE PLATINUM RULE

The Platinum Rule takes the Golden Rule one step further to say, "treat others as **they** wish to be treated." While this guide is based on the favored preferences of people with lived experience, it is important to note language preferences vary among individuals. Always respect and mirror the language an individual uses to describe their identity or experience. When speaking to other individuals or more generally, use the favored preferences of people with lived experience reflected in this language guidance document.

CULTURAL HUMILITY

Cultural humility differs from cultural competence in that it recognizes the ongoing work of creating an environment where all cultures are respected equally. Cultures, like language, change throughout time. Cultural humility is the commitment to sustained learning, self-reflecting, and growing. It is continually seeking to know better so you can do better. Cultural competence is a destination, and cultural humility is the lifelong pursuit.

Language Guide Table
quick reference of easy language fixes with big impact

	TRY THIS	INSTEAD OF THIS	LEARN WHY
GENERAL GUIDANCE	transmit *or* acquired	infect became infected	The word "infection" carries stigma and often invokes blame. Acquisition and transmission are simple and accurate substitutions.
	people living with _____ person living with _____ people with _____ person with _____	_____ infected people _____ positive(s) _____ carrier(s) people infected with _____ _____ case(s)	Person-first language centers the person first rather than the health condition. This simple shift says, "I see you first, before your health condition". For health conditions that have a cure, such as hepatitis C, it is also acceptable to say, "people/person with _____."
	people without _____ person without _____	_____ uninfected people _____ negatives _____ unaffected	The word "infected" carries stigma. The meaning of the word "negative" is unclear. "Unaffected" is inaccurate as we are all directly or indirectly impacted by transmissible health conditions.
	new _____ diagnoses people newly diagnosed with_____ person newly diagnosed with _____	new _____ case(s)	"Cases" takes away the humanity of the people impacted by a particular health condition and implies their care/diagnosis is work.

	TRY THIS	INSTEAD OF THIS	LEARN WHY
HIV LANGUAGE	HIV	HIV/AIDS	The term HIV is inclusive of HIV and AIDS. AIDS should only be used when describing this specific medical condition as it often reminds people of the suffering and death of the AIDS crisis.
	HIV HIV virus	HIV infection	"Infection" carries stigma and characterizes people living with HIV as a threat.
	HIV transmission HIV acquisition new HIV diagnoses	HIV infections	When referring to the virus itself, one can say "HIV" or "HIV virus". Transmission and acquisition are non-stigmatizing ways to communicate the potential of HIV to be communicable without invoking sentiments of blame and fear.
	prevents HIV prevents transmission of HIV prevents acquisition of HIV	prevents HIV infection	
	died from complications related to HIV died of an AIDS-related illness	died of AIDS died of HIV	The preferred phrases clarify HIV is not uniformly fatal and opportunistic infections are the acute cause of death.
	HIV response End HIV transmission	HIV elimination HIV eradication	HIV response efforts must include long-term survivors of HIV and acknowledge that HIV will not be eliminated until there is a cure.
	mixed HIV status relationship	sero-discordant	"sero-discordant" is not easily understood and implies a couple is not well suited for each other. "Mixed HIV status" is more neutral.
	stage 3 HIV	full-blown AIDS	"Full-blown AIDS" is not a medical diagnosis. Use Stage 3 HIV or Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

	TRY THIS	INSTEAD OF THIS	LEARN WHY
SEXUAL HEALTH LANGUAGE	condomless sex **or** sex without the use of prevention tools or barriers sex with the use of condoms, barriers, or prevention tools	unprotected sex unsafe sex risky sex protected sex safe sex	The preferred phrases are specific and do not issue a value judgement . Condoms are one of many effective prevention tools to reduce the transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. PrEP, U=U, behavioral actions, and use of condoms/barriers are all ways a client may be practicing safer sex.
	has multiple sex partners person with partner(s) of an unknown HIV/STI status	promiscuous	"Promiscuous" issues a value judgement and should always be avoided. "Non-monogamous" may also be used. "Anonymous" is unspecific.
	internal condom	female condom	Internal condoms can be used vaginally and anally by people of all genders.
	condom external condom	male condom	External condoms can be used on toys or on genitals by people of all genders.
	sexually transmitted infection (STI)	sexually transmitted disease (STD)	Not all sexually transmitted infections develop into disease. Although the word "infection" is not preferred when talking about HIV, it is acceptable and preferred when speaking about other sexually acquired infections.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

When talking about sex and sexuality do so from a sex-positive lens. This means using language that conveys a positive attitude towards consensual sex, and respects people's diverse practices. Avoid assuming someone's practices based on their gender, sexual orientation, or relationship status . And avoid using words or a tone of voice that convey a value judgement. Instead use accurate and affirming language when talking about sexual practices and prevention methods.

	TRY THIS	INSTEAD OF THIS	LEARN WHY
SUBSTANCE USE LANGUAGE	substance use disorder alcohol use disorder	drug addiction drug dependence drug habit drug abuse alcoholism alcohol abuse alcohol dependence	Substance use disorder/alcohol use disorder are health conditions, not a moral failing. "Abuse" has an implied value judgement. "Addiction" is not diagnostic term, but may be used to describe moderate to severe substance use disorder. "Dependence" indicates the potential for withdrawal symptoms and is not synonymous with substance use disorder.
	person who uses drugs person who injects drugs person with substance use disorder person with alcohol use disorder	addict /drug addict drug user/ drug abuser injection drug user (IDU) intravenous drug user junkie alcoholic	Person-first language emphasizes humanity by centering the whole person before their substance use. Not all people who use drugs have a substance use disorder and therefore the preferred terms are not synonymous with each other and one should select the most applicable term.
	new syringes unused syringes sterile syringes used syringes	clean syringes dirty syringes contaminated syringes	"Clean" and "dirty/contaminated" imply a value judgement and should be replaced with more accurate terms. "Needles" is an acceptable and preferred to "syringe" in some communities. Reflect the word a given community uses and understands.
	not currently using substances currently using substances	clean dirty	Labeling persons who use drugs as "clean" or "dirty" issues a value judgement. These terms are also nonspecific. Some people may also use "person with a history of substance use".
	treatment center	rehab detox center	"Rehab" and "detox center" carry cultural misconceptions and perpetuate stigma.

	TRY THIS	INSTEAD OF THIS	LEARN WHY
SUBSTANCE USE LANGUAGE	person in recovery	former addict/alcoholic recovered addict/alcoholic reformed addict/alcoholic	Recovery is a ongoing and variable process for many people with substance use disorder and others addressing substance use in their lives.
	medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD) *preferred for opioid use disorder* medication-assisted treatment (MAT) *for alcohol use disorder*	opioid replacement methadone maintenance drug substitution	"MAT" is an umbrella term for medications used to treat opioid and alcohol use disorders. However, "MOUD" is the preferred term when talking about medications for opioid use disorder. MOUD and MAT are not "replacements" or "substitutes" for opioids or alcohol, they are evidence-based treatments.
	toxicology screen positive for _____ toxicology screen negative for _____	dirty clean	When referencing toxicology screening it is more specific to say a client is positive or negative for various substance(s). "Clean" and "dirty" issue an unwarranted value judgement and are non-specific.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is important to keep in mind that not all people that use drugs have a substance use disorder and "substance misuse" is not synonymous with "substance use disorder". People can misuse a substance without meeting the criteria for a substance use disorder. Likewise, "addiction" and "dependence" are not synonymous. Addiction, while not a diagnostic term, is defined as a pattern of compulsive substance use marked by behavior change caused by biochemical changes in the brain. Dependence is characterized by the physical potential for withdrawal symptoms. If these terms are used they should be defined and applied appropriately.

People may refer to their own experience with drugs/alcohol using the term "addiction" and identify with the word "addict". It is fine for folks with lived experience to use the language that feels best in characterizing their own experience; however, when referring to other people it is best to avoid the term "addict" and use person-first language to describe drug/alcohol use.

PREGNANCY AND PERINATAL LANGUAGE	TRY THIS	INSTEAD OF THIS	LEARN WHY
	people of childbearing potential	women of childbearing potential	People of all genders may have childbearing potential.
	people with reproductive potential	men with reproductive potential	People of all genders may have reproductive potential.
	pregnant persons	pregnant women	People of all genders may experience pregnancy.
	perinatal transmission vertical transmission	mother-to-child transmission	People of all genders may become pregnant. The preferred terms assign blame towards the birthing person.
	infant exposed to _____	_____ exposed infant	Center the person first then the health condition (i.e. HIV, hepatitis C, etc).
	born in withdrawal born dependent on _____	born addicted	Infants are not capable of compulsive substance use that defines addiction.
	infant with neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS)	addicted infant	Neonatal abstinence syndrome is the clinically correct term. Infants are not capable of the compulsive substance use that defines addiction.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

People of all genders may experience pregnancy. Avoid terms that characterize pregnancy as only applicable to women and replace them with gender neutral language. When talking about health conditions with the potential for perinatal transmission avoid language that places blame on the birthing person.

	TRY THIS	INSTEAD OF THIS	LEARN WHY
PUBLIC HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE REALTED LANGUAGE	client program participant	patient	"Client" is considered more empowering than "patient" and more broadly applicable to the provision of non-medical services.
	priority population	target population	Communities should not be targeted. Instead, they should be prioritized.
	hardly reached **or** unsuccessfully engaged population/individuals	hard to reach population/individuals	The preferred language shifts the onus on the health care system rather than individuals. "Medically underserved" may also be used where applicable.
	disproportionately affected or impacted by _____**or** groups that have been placed at higher risk of _____ **or** groups that have been marginalized	marginalized groups vulnerable groups high-risk groups high-burden groups	People/communities do not have inherent risk, but rather are disproportionately impacted by health conditions due to structural and societal challenges. Using language that highlights the role that systems play in unequitable health outcomes reduces stigma and stereotypes.
	person behaviorally vulnerable to _____ **or** person who engages in_____	at-risk person high-risk person person with risky behaviors	People do not have inherent risk. And not all people that engage in the same behaviors experience the same chance of acquiring a health condition due to unequitable disease distribution and resource allocation.
	likelihood chance	risk	The preferred terms are less stigmatizing and easier to understand.
	adherence not adherent	compliance non-compliant	"Compliance" implies a more passive role while "adherence" acknowledges a person's active engagement in care.

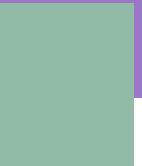| PRIORITY POPULATION LANGUAGE	TRY THIS	INSTEAD OF THIS	LEARN WHY
	sex worker sex work sex for trade transactional sex	prostitute prostitution commercial sex work	"Prostitute" and "prostitution" carry cultural stigma and do not reflect the ownership and agency that many sex workers claim. There is no need to add the word "commercial" before sex work as it is redundant.
	sex trafficking human trafficking sex trafficking of minors	sexual slavery forced prostitution child prostitution	Language related to forced/coerced transactional sex should emphasize the role of the exploiters, not the person exploited.
	survivor of sexual assault *or* person who has experienced sexual assault	rape victim	"Survivor" is more empowering than "victim" and is generally the favored term. However, reflecting back the language a person uses to describe this experience is best approach.
	intimate partner violence	domestic violence	Violence between intimate partners can occur inside or outside a home. This is not reflected by "domestic".
	person who has experienced violence/abuse *or* survivor of violence/abuse	abuse victim	"Survivor" is more empowering than "victim" and generally preferred, but always reflect back the language a person uses to describe their experience.
	person who is incarcerated person in jail/prison formerly incarcerated person system-impacted person system-impacted	felon criminal offender convict inmate prisoner ex-convict	Center the individual rather than a specific instance in their life. "Person or individual with carceral system involvement" may also be used. The phrase "criminal justice" is debated by many as the system is not just for all. "System impacted" can be use to indicate the ripple effect mass incarceration has on families/communities.

	TRY THIS	INSTEAD OF THIS	LEARN WHY
PRIORITY POPULATION LANGUAGE	person with _____	mentally ill person crazy person insane person	Person-first language centers the individual rather than their mental health need and helps to dispel the belief that mental health diagnoses are untreatable.
	people who are undocumented **or** undocumented immigrants	illegals/ illegal immigrant alien	"Illegal" and "alien" are stigmatizing and nonspecific terms that should always be avoided.
	people experiencing homelessness/housing insecurity/unstable housing **or** person who is unhoused	homeless people the homeless bums street people	Using person-first language emphasizes the whole person before their housing situation.
	people with lower incomes people/households with incomes below the federal poverty level	the poor poor people poverty-stricken	Using person-first language centers the person before their income.
	older adults people over age _____	the elderly the aged seniors/senior citizens	"Adults" affirms the agency of the person. It is always best to use a specific age when possible.
	people who live in rural areas rural communities	rural people frontier people	Person-first language centers on the individual rather than where they reside.
	person(s) of color people of color	non-white minorities racial minorities	Avoid using person(s) of color when referencing a specific racial/ethnic group. Instead use the appropriate term for that group. Person(s) of color are not a minority.

	TRY THIS	INSTEAD OF THIS	LEARN WHY
GENDER AND SEXUALITY LANGUAGE	sex assigned at birth assigned male at birth assigned female at birth	birth sex biological sex natal/natural sex sex at birth	Terms as "birth sex", "natal sex", and "biological sex" should be avoided as it perpetuates the idea sex is a natural category rather than a constructed category.
	transgender man trans man transgender woman trans women nonbinary person	female-to-male (FTM) used to be a woman born a woman male-to-female (MTF) used to be a man born a man	Using words like "used to be_____" or "born a _____ " does not affirm the person's gender identity. "FTM" and "MTF" are outdated terms, imply a person was formerly another gender, and imply all trans people want or have access to medical interventions.
	transgender trans transgender people transgender person	transgendered transsexual transgenders transsexuals a transgender	Transgender is an adjective to describe a person whose current gender does not align with the gender assigned to them at birth. It is not a verb, so adding "ed" is improper grammar and stigmatizing. Likewise, adding an "a" before or a "s" after the word transgender suggests it is a noun. This is also incorrect grammar and stigmatizing.
	gender affirmation gender confirmation transition transitioning	transgendering sex reassignment surgery sex change pre-operative post-operative	Not all transgender people want or have access to medical interventions to affirm their gender. People's gender affirmation process can include social components in addition to medical intervention and the preferred terms reflect this.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For comprehensive list of LGBTQIA+ definitions , terms, and outdated/stigmatizing phrases to avoid please visit the Fenway Institute's *LGBTQIA+ Glossary of Terms for Health Care Teams* linked in the additional resources section of this language guidance document.

GENDER AND SEXUALITY TERMS

All the definitions come from the Fenway Institute's, "LGBTQIA+ Glossary of Terms for Health Care Teams"

TERM	DEFINITION	CONSIDERATIONS
sex assigned at birth	The sex (male or female) assigned to an infant, most often based on the infant's anatomical and other biological characteristics.	Terms such as "birth sex", "natal sex", and "biological sex" should be avoided as they perpetuates the idea that sex is a natural category rather than a constructed category.
cisgender	A person whose gender identity is consistent with their sex assigned at birth.	The gender binary is the idea that there are only two genders (girl/woman and boy/man). This fallacy has led to the untrue assumption that all people assigned male at birth are men, and all people assigned female at birth are women. In reality, there are an infinite number of genders. Gender is self-determined, and is not tied to anatomy or expression. "Cisgender" and "transgender" adjectives not nouns.
transgender	A person whose gender identity and sex assigned at birth do not correspond based on traditional expectations.	
sexual orientation sexuality	How a person characterizes their emotional and sexual attraction to others.	Avoid saying "sexual preference" or "lifestyle" as that gives the impression that sexuality is a choice rather than a natural expression.
gender pronouns	Words people should use when they are referring to you but not using your name. ***e.g. she/her/hers*** ***he/him/his*** ***they/them/theirs***	Avoid saying "preferred pronouns". All people have pronouns and "preferred" gives the impression using the correct pronouns optional. It is not. The best way know someone's pronouns is to offer your own when introducing yourself and then ask for the theirs. This should be done with all people, not just people you think may be transgender. Avoid assuming someone's pronouns based on their gender expression and simply ask. If you make a mistake with pronouns, quickly apologize, correct yourself, and move foward.

	GROUP	DEFINITION	CONSIDERATIONS
RACE AND ETHNICITY TERMS All the definitions reflect what is used by the Census Bureau in accordance with the Office of Management and Budget standards.	White Non-Hispanic White	A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North America.	"Non-Hispanic White" is used to clarify that this group of people does not include white Hispanic people. Avoid framing White as a default or raceless identity.
	Black African American	A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.	"Black" should always be capitalized when referring to group or individual and should never be made plural. "African American" excludes folks of the African diaspora that don't reside in or identify as American.
	American Indian Alaskan Native	A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America and maintains tribal affiliation or community attachement.	The best approach is to always use the specific tribal identity when possible. Some folks may also use the term "Native American" or "indigenous" to describe their personal identity. When referring to a diverse group people with indigenous people use "American Indian" or "Alaskan Native".
	Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander	A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.	Some folks may identify as aboriginal Hawaiian to draw the distinction that they descendants of the Polynesian people that were the first to migrate to and live in Hawaii.
	Asian	Having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent.	Where appropriate, some folks may use East Asian, South Asian, and Southeast Asian to further differentiate region of origin.
	Latino/Latina Latinx Hispanic	A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.	Hispanic refers to individuals whose origins are from Spanish speaking nations. Latino, Latina, and Latinx refers more specifically persons with origins from Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico, South and Central America.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

This language guide was developed through many conversations and in consultation with existing resources, mainly the *NIAD HIV Language Guide.* That guide as well as many other useful resources are linked below for further education.

- The NIAD HIV Language Guide

- The Fenway Institute's LGBTQIA+ Glossary of Terms for Health Care Teams

- GLAAD's An Ally's Guide to Terminology: Talking About LGBT People and Equality

- Underground Scholars' Language Guide for Communicating About Those Involved In The Carceral System

- HIVE's HIV #LanguageMatters: Addressing Stigma by Using Preferred Language

- The National Alliance of Advocates for Buprenorphine Treatment's The Words We Use Matter- Reducing Stigma Through Language