



Quick reference guide for public communication about alcohol and other drugs

This quick reference guide has been developed to support safe and sensitive public communication of alcohol and other drugs (AOD). The way in which AOD is portrayed in our communication can shape community perceptions, as well as have an impact on an individual's recovery.

Inaccurate or alarmist portrayals of AOD in the media can lead to the stigmatisation and marginalisation of people impacted by AOD, and their families. People who experience stigma are less likely to seek appropriate help in a timely manner.

By adopting the advice in this guide, we can contribute to a more informed and compassionate public communication surrounding AOD use, reducing barriers to help seeking and ultimately contributing to the reduction of harmful use.

For more detail and context, access the full suite of Mindframe guidelines, and other supporting resources specifically for communication about data and statistics [here](#).



Always consider the impact of language and images on the people that you are communicating about, as well as the impact it may have on audiences:

Key guidance:

- Frame AOD use as a public health issue, treating it like any other health condition that affects all populations in our society.
- When communicating about someone who has broken the law in a drug related crime, ensure information is factual, avoiding sensationalist content.
- Recognise the impact of public portrayals on individuals and their families, and consider if your message fosters understanding, empathy and encourages help-seeking behaviours.
- Where possible, remind the audience that AOD dependence is a treatable condition and people can and do make a full recovery.
- Providing details of relevant support services including the National Alcohol and Other Drugs Hotline 1800 250 015. Further information on how to encourage help-seeking is available [here](#).
- Language and image choice is a key part of ensuring your communication is safe, sensitive and reduces stigma.
- When communicating about AOD, we need to consider the contexts in which words are used and the ways in which they may affect identity, understanding, attitudes or behaviours.
- Consider the images you use as they can be helpful or harmful depending on the context.
- Using images that model recovery or support help can reduce stigma, offer hope and increase protective factors.
- Further guidance on word and image choice is provided in the following tables.
- Access *Mindframe* guidelines for safe communication about AOD [here](#).

Language guidance

Choosing language that reflects and empowers individual experiences, is not sensationalised, is understandable and is adapted to individual preferences or audience is recommended.

Preferred

- ✔ Person who uses drugs; he has an addiction to alcohol; a person who uses cannabis'
- ✔ Person with a dependence on drugs; substance use
- ✔ Person who no longer uses drugs
- ✔ Respond to or address drug use in the community'
- ✔ Increased rates of crystal methamphetamine use; concerning rates of substance use
- ✔ Intoxicated

Problematic

- ✘ Addict; junkie; crackhead; a drunk; alcoholic; pot-smoker
- ✘ Drug habit
- ✘ Clean; ex-addict
- ✘ Fight or combat drugs; war on drugs
- ✘ Ice epidemic
- ✘ Life of the party

Image guidance

Using diverse images, seeking permission before using images of a person with lived experience, and using images that are hopeful and encourage help-seeking is recommended.

Preferred

- ✔ Images that show a diverse range of people living their lives in usual settings
- ✔ Images that show a diverse range of people, cultures, ethnicities and settings
- ✔ Images that relate to health and wellbeing, and hope of recovery (e.g. people accessing AOD support)
- ✔ Use images that are relevant to the story and promote harm reduction

Problematic

- ✘ Image use that only reflects stereotypical or extreme experiences of AOD use (e.g. homelessness) can contribute to stigma and marginalisation
- ✘ Images portraying people using AOD as violent or aggressive can contribute to stigma and marginalisation
- ✘ Images that convey lack of hope or recovery can contribute to stigma and be a barrier to help-seeking
- ✘ Using images of needles and syringes when talking about other drugs such as cannabis

