



# The Power of Words

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Having alcohol and other drug conversations:  
**Application Guide**

**The Power of Words (Having alcohol and other drug conversations: a practical guide) has been developed to support the health and wellbeing of people impacted by alcohol and other drugs (AOD) by promoting the use of inclusive language. The Power of Words is based on evidence, including consultations with people who have used AOD.**

For people who use AOD, stigma is a real and significant problem. The actions and language of others can make people feel unwelcome and unsafe. This can stop them from seeking the services they need, negatively impacting their health, wellbeing, employment and social outcomes.

There's power in language.

Many commonly used terms relating to drug use have negative associations that can be used as a derogatory label. In the worst cases, demeaning language and stigmatising actions can lead to harmful discrimination. By focusing on people, rather than their use of alcohol and other drugs, and by choosing words that are welcoming and inclusive, professionals in the health, community services, education and justice sectors, and others who interact with people who use drugs, can dramatically reduce the impact of stigma.

Applying the Power of Words is a good opportunity for individuals and organisations to examine their behaviour and attitudes. By starting with language, we can rethink how we interact with people, how we build policies in our organisations and how we deliver services with empathy.

## Who should use The Power of Words?

The Power of Words can be used by many people across society and in different sectors. This can include family and friends of people who use drugs, people working in health and human services, including peer workers and people with lived experience who work in alcohol and other drug services, education and justice sectors, politicians, the media, and advocacy organisations.

It's particularly important that appropriate language is used when speaking to people who use alcohol and other drugs. This applies when you are speaking directly to a client who uses alcohol and other drugs. It also applies to indirect communication where you might be sending messages to a broad audience – for example, if you are working in management, people and culture, marketing, the media or social media.

It's also important to adopt inclusive language in organisational policies and procedures, and in academic and educational writing. By formalising the use of inclusive language, you can help foster its use by new workers and students alike.

You can find The Power of Words at [adf.org.au/powerofwords](http://adf.org.au/powerofwords).

## Using inclusive language in your organisation

All organisations have a role to play in addressing stigma, particularly those working directly with people who use drugs

where the language used can have a big impact on health and wellbeing.

The Power of Words is designed to be easily adapted into organisational policies and recognises that addressing stigma is an ongoing process rather than a discrete shift in practice. As language changes, these policies may need to be updated. We encourage all organisations to be responsive to cultural change.

Organisations can also use the Power of Words as part of their preferred terminology or incorporate them into existing style guides.

## Marketing and communications teams

If you work in marketing or communications, you can help significantly reduce alcohol and other drugs-related stigma through your work by using inclusive language in:

- presentations and events
- copywriting for print and digital media
- media and public relations, and
- social and work situations.

By modelling good practice, you can encourage your audiences to also use inclusive language.

## People and culture teams

Providing everyone in your organisation with the opportunity to learn about inclusive language promotes best practice and can improve health outcomes. Inclusive language is preferable when inducting new staff and students to an organisation, both verbally and in written induction and procedural documents.

Inclusive language can be used in all situations, and clinicians should be aware of scientifically justified and culturally inclusive language.

Be aware that peer workers and people with a lived experience of alcohol and other drug treatment and services may be part of the staff team – it may even be you! These workers may also be affected by stigmatising language.

Language should always be accessible, with your audience taken into account. People's knowledge and level of understanding about alcohol and other drugs may vary. This may be due to a range of reasons, including varying cultural backgrounds. You may wish to translate these resources into other languages.

## Championing inclusive language

Everyone has the opportunity to positively impact health outcomes by helping people feel included.

You can share the Power of Words with your colleagues, organisations and communities using the link [adf.org.au/powerofwords](http://adf.org.au/powerofwords).

The Power of Words digital pack of support resources can be downloaded from [adf.org.au/powerofwords](http://adf.org.au/powerofwords).

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