



# HEALTH EQUITY WEEK 2019

March 27, 2019

## Welcome to Penn Medicine Health Equity Week!

All week long we are connecting staff on the front lines of healthcare delivery and our community of trainees and learners with resources and tools to increase knowledge and skills to achieve health equity.

Penn Medicine is committed to providing the best patient and family centered care to all patients regardless of their personal characteristics. During this week, we hope to advance our understanding of health and health care disparities and inspire solutions for achieving equitable care.

Continue reading to learn more about what you can do help us achieve this mission.

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## Stigma

### What is it?

**Stigma** can be defined as *the co-occurrence of labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination in a context in which power is exercised.*

Stigma can be *internal* or *external*.

- **Internal stigma** involves feelings of shame and expecting to be judged by others.
- **External stigma** involves unfair treatment or discrimination by other people.

## Why is it important?

**Stigma may prevent people from seeking help and using the healthcare system for fear of judgment or discrimination.** Patients who experience stigma receive decreased quality of care, which can negatively impact the patient's physical and mental health.

Fast facts:

- Drug addiction is the most stigmatized social/health problem in 14 countries, including the U.S.
- Other commonly stigmatized populations include persons with mental illness, obesity, HIV/AIDS, physical disabilities, LGBTQ+ persons, and minority race/ethnicities.
- Health care providers who show stigma towards certain populations are less involved in those patients' care – they are less engaged and show less empathy to the patient.

Individuals who belong to stigmatized populations face negative attitudes from health care providers and the general public **that are created and reinforced by language choices.**

## What you can do

**Our words matter!** No matter what role you play in a patient's care, the language and labels that you choose to use can reduce stigma and discrimination that a patient feels. Consider these approaches:

- **Use "person first" language.** Person first language suggests that a person has a problem that can be addressed. By contrast, using language that defines the person with the problem they are experiencing (for example, calling someone a "drug abuser") implies the person is the problem, and that problem is an unchangeable part of their identity.
- **Use clear, technical language with a single, clear meaning.** Language used around people from stigmatized populations should clearly communicate medical facts, and avoid value-laden labels or words with inconsistent definitions.

Being aware of the relationship between language and stigma is key to breaking the cycle of stigma in the medical environment. Consider these approaches:

- **Meet patients, without judgment, where they are.** Even without intending to, we may make value judgments with our words-- labeling things "good" or "bad", "clean" or "dirty" depending on their behaviors. Being aware of

unintentional bias is an important first step to destigmatizing your interactions with patients.

- **Reflect on your own experiences.** Think of the people in your life who may fall into commonly stigmatized populations. Reflecting on these relationships can help you connect with and express compassion for people who might otherwise be easily stigmatized.

***Together we can ensure our culture  
and climate are inclusive for everyone.***

To learn more:

- [Words Matter: How Language Choice Can Reduce Stigma](#)
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)
  - [Take the Stigma Quiz. Take the Pledge.](#)
  - [9 Ways to Fight Mental Health Stigma](#)
- [Research Recovery Institute: The Addictionary](#)

### **Celebrate Health Equity All Week Long!**

Unable to make one of the in-person events? [Click here](#) to view the events that will be live streamed. Also, connect with your colleagues from across Penn Medicine by following [PennCHEA](#) on Twitter and posting using [#HEW2019](#)!

**[Click Here to Learn More and See the Full Schedule of Events](#)**