

# Language Matters webinar with Dr Robert Stirling, Mary Harrod, Kate Johnson and Dr Hester Wilson

Dr Robert Stirling, CEO of NADA and Mary Harrod, CE of NUAA gave us the background to this resource and the need for the update.

Kate Johnson, Peer Leader at Lives Lived Well and Dr Hester Wilson, Chief Addiction Medicine Specialist at Ministry of Health, Centre for Alcohol and Other Drugs gave us their perspectives.

## Key messages:

- Language Matters was originally developed through a collaboration between NADA and NUAA to adapt the NZ version for the Australian and NSW context.
- The process involved engaging and consulting with people who use alcohol and other drugs (AOD), people with lived and living experience (LLE), AOD workers, and organisations to adapt it to local context.
- This document was created for people without LLE to provide tools and guidance when working with those who have LLE.
- The resource was recently revised, and the changes to create version 2 was based on feedback from NADA members.
- The recent updates resulted from extensive consultation, focus groups, reviews, and input from LLE.
- The Language Matters guidelines are important for people accessing services, as they can influence how services are perceived and received.
- Clinicians need to be aware of the impact of their words when working with clients; the language used can affect interactions, the therapeutic relationship, and how people feel.
- Internalised stigma can prevent people from feeling deserving of good care.
- The language a person uses for themselves does not give clinicians permission to use that same language.
- Language affects people with LLE both personally and professionally.
- Language Matters is intended for everyone, including broader health and social services.
- The document can be shared in various ways, such as during onboarding, training, and organisational induction.
- Reclaiming language helps shift power back to people with LLE. 12-step groups are built on mutual aid rather than medical terminology and emphasise ownership of the impact language can have.
- Shame is not an environment conducive to learning; language is always evolving, and the focus should be on education and raising awareness. Adopting a person-first, respectful approach can improve outcomes.