

# Addiction & Mental Health (AMH) Stigma in Healthcare

Stigma in healthcare affects people at their most vulnerable and leads to:

- Negative patient-provider interactions
- Poorer treatment outcomes
- Reduced empathy and quality care
- Treatment avoidance and/or disruption
- Policies and practices that exclude, stereotype, or discriminate against people with addiction and mental health concerns

**25%**

of Canadians report experiencing stigma and discrimination when accessing mental health services.

**50%**

of Canadians in recovery for substance use report experiencing stigma and discrimination.

Learn more about [AMH stigma in Canada](#).

## How do patients experience stigma?

### Stigma can impact anyone and at all stages of healthcare access

People who experience addiction and mental health issues commonly report feeling

**devalued,  
dismissed &  
dehumanized**

by healthcare professionals and/or the health system.

#### AMH clients may be:



**excluded** from decision-making processes.



given **insufficient** information.



treated in a **paternalistic** or **demeaning** way.



**dismissed** or **not taken seriously**.

### Stigma can impact healthcare staff

Stigma within healthcare can have a negative impact on healthcare staff, causing:

- barriers to disclose and/or seek help for AMH concerns.
- an over-reliance on self-treatment.
- poor morale and peer support among staff.
- increased risks of suicide.

## Healthcare approaches that reduce stigma

### Recovery-oriented care

This approach recognizes that **recovery is not a linear process and looks different to different people.**

#### Supports clients on their recovery journey

- Offers clients a sense of control over themselves
- Collaboratively sets goals
- Draws on personal strengths

### Trauma-informed care

This approach considers how **trauma relates to AMH concerns** and impacts trust and willingness to seek help.

#### Emphasizes the person over the problem

- Uses person-first, strengths-based language
- Asks "What happened to this person and how do I understand them?" instead of "What's wrong with this person?"

### Partner with AMH clients with respect, collaboration, and compassion



Look for ways to enhance your relationship with AMH clients and include them in decision-making processes.



Consider engaging persons with lived experience and [AHS Patient Advisory Councils](#) when developing AMH-related programs, services, and information.

## Resources to reduce stigma in healthcare

### Educate yourself and others:

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) hosts a free, online [Understanding Stigma course](#) that explains stigma as it relates to the AMH field.

The Mental Health Commission of Canada offers [Mental Health First Aid](#) training to reduce stigma, support those with AMH issues, and strengthen resilience.

### Choose your words carefully:

AHS developed an [Our Words Matter](#) infographic describing non-stigmatizing AMH language.

CAMH offers an [AMH language guideline](#).

The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction and Community Addictions Peer Support Association coproduced an [overcoming stigma through language primer resource](#).

The Government of Canada has a [resource](#) on substance use and language.

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