



**PERSON-FIRST AND  
IDENTITY-FIRST  
LANGUAGE GLOSSARY**



# PERSON-FIRST AND IDENTITY-FIRST LANGUAGE GLOSSARY

*A valuable tool for all who champion equity, diversity, and inclusion in the spaces where they live, work, and play.*

## **About This Resource**

The Person-First and Identity-First Language Glossary is a valuable resource for culturally responsive communication. Its recommendations are designed to help New York State employees engage with the more than 19 million New Yorkers we serve in a way that reflects the respect and dignity we all deserve.

We also encourage anyone interested in using more inclusive language to consult this glossary as a reference and use it as a tool to foster mindful communication. The language we feature emphasizes people over their disabilities, identities, or characteristics while also respecting how people may choose to describe themselves. Our goal is simple: to center the voices, perspectives, and experiences of people often stereotyped, underrepresented, or excluded.

This glossary explains the origins of outdated and sometimes disrespectful language and offers thoughtful alternatives. Some terms may be distressing due to their derogatory nature and the history of discrimination they evoke. However, by including them in this document, we acknowledge the harm they have caused to individuals and communities while demonstrating the importance of adopting more affirming and inclusive language.

This resource was written and produced in collaboration between the [Governor's Office of the Chief Disability Officer](#), the [Governor's Office of Diversity and Inclusion](#), the Governor's Deputy Secretary for First Nations, the [New York State Office of Faith and Nonprofit Development Services](#), the [New York State Office of Language Access](#), and the [New York State Digital and Media Services Center](#). It draws from the American Psychological Association's "Inclusive Language Guide" and other inclusive language resources, all of which are linked in the Resources section at the end of this document. It also incorporates feedback from [New York State Agency Language Access Coordinators](#).

Eriksen Translations and Avantpage Translations worked to translate and culturally adapt this glossary into the languages most spoken by New Yorkers. Please note that cultural and linguistic nuances differ between countries and communities. Therefore, there may be variations between the English source document and its multilingual adaptations, which were created specifically for United States-based speakers of those languages.

This glossary will continue to evolve as new terminology emerges. We recognize that culture and language are alive and always evolving. Preferred terms may change faster than documents and institutions can adapt. Additionally, while this glossary includes advice from experts across New York State government, the recommendations provided may not fit or be appropriate in every situation, setting, or institution. Please consider the context in each circumstance and give the community you're referencing the opportunity to express their preferences when possible.

For the latest glossary or any questions, contact the New York State Office of Language Access at [LanguageAccess@ogs.ny.gov](mailto:LanguageAccess@ogs.ny.gov).





## Person-First Versus Identity-First Language

**Person-first language emphasizes the person** before any aspect of their identity, such as their disability, chronic condition, or other characteristics like sexual orientation, gender expression, age, and more.<sup>1</sup> The goal is to focus on the person as a whole, not just a single aspect of their identity.

**Identity-first language focuses on the disability, chronic condition, or other identity facet**, allowing the individual to claim and embrace their own identity. This approach empowers people to take ownership of how they are identified rather than permitting others to define them. Identity-first language is often used to express cultural pride and to reclaim identities that were previously viewed negatively or considered “less than.”

Initially, the discussion of person-first versus identity-first language pertained only to people with disabilities. Over time, it has grown to include other identity groups.<sup>1</sup>

Examples include:

Person-First Language	Identity-First Language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• adults 65 and over</li><li>• person who is blind</li><li>• person who is hard of hearing</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• older adults</li><li>• blind person</li><li>• hard of hearing person</li></ul>

When discussing identity, **we encourage you to use either person-first or identity-first language, or a mix of both, until an individual or identity group clearly defines their preference.** Once the person establishes a preference, you should respect it and apply it moving forward.

However, it’s important to recognize that terms and phrases considered acceptable in some languages and cultures may be deemed derogatory in others. Societal norms around language and preferred terminology can vary based on factors such as the language spoken, the cultural context, the speaker, and more.

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<sup>1</sup>American Psychological Association (APA); [Inclusive Language Guide](#), 2023.



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## Age

Ageism is stereotyping and discriminating against individuals or groups based on their age. It can take many forms, including prejudicial attitudes, discriminatory practices, or institutional policies and practices that perpetuate stereotypical beliefs about different age groups.<sup>2</sup>

Suggested Terms	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• older adults</li><li>• older people</li><li>• adults 65 years and older</li><li>• people 65 years and older</li><li>• the aging community</li><li>• the older population</li><li>• today’s youth</li><li>• young adults</li><li>• young people</li></ul>	<p>Unless the person or group you’re speaking with specifies otherwise, avoid using the following terms and similar “othering” language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• aging dependents</li><li>• elderly/the elderly</li><li>• kids (unless referring to children)</li><li>• old people</li><li>• seniors</li><li>• the aged</li></ul> <p>Additionally, avoid the following terms, as they can perpetuate negative stereotypes and undermine an individual’s contributions and experiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• generational terms like “Baby Boomers,” “Gen X,” “Millennials,” or “Gen Z” (when used negatively)</li><li>• old-fashioned</li><li>• outdated</li><li>• snowflake</li></ul>

## Disability Status

Ableism involves stereotyping, holding prejudiced attitudes, engaging in discriminatory behavior, and socially oppressing people with disabilities, which inhibits their rights and well-being.<sup>2</sup> While some disabilities are visible, others are not. In fact, more than 1 in 4 people in the United States have a disability.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>American Psychological Association (APA): [Inclusive Language Guide](#), 2023.

<sup>3</sup>U.S. Census Bureau: [Disability Characteristics, 2023 American Community Survey 1-year Estimates](#), 2023.





## Disability Status (Continued)

Suggested Terms	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• person with/who has a disability</li> <li>• person with/who has a birth disability</li> <li>• person with/who has a congenital disability</li> <li>• person with/who has a physical disability</li> <li>• person with/who has an intellectual disability</li> <li>• people with disabilities</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid terms that are condescending or patronizing, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• able-bodied</li> <li>• disabled people</li> <li>• handi-capable</li> <li>• mentally challenged</li> <li>• physically challenged</li> <li>• special needs</li> </ul> <p>Avoid using offensive terms like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lame</li> <li>• invalid</li> </ul> <p>The inclusive term “people with disabilities” is not meant to replace clinical diagnostic language or terms (for example, terms pertaining to medical or mental health diagnoses).</p> <p>When referencing terms related to disabilities, use “accessible” rather than “handicapped” (for example, accessible parking or accessible bathrooms).</p> <p>Some people use the term “special needs” when referring to children’s disability programming. The term should not be used for adults with disabilities. It is generally preferable to avoid using that term in conversations about disability, as there is a growing emphasis on placing disability within an integrated concept of community and life, rather than separating it as something “special” or apart from the norm.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• person with a brain injury</li> <li>• person with a traumatic brain injury (TBI)</li> </ul>	<p>Use person-first language and avoid using “brain-damaged,” as it can be interpreted as derogatory.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• blind person</li> <li>• person who is blind</li> <li>• person with low vision</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid language that implies restriction or impairment, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sight-challenged</li> <li>• visually challenged</li> <li>• visually impaired</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deaf person</li> <li>• DeafBlind person</li> <li>• hard of hearing person</li> <li>• person who is hard of hearing</li> </ul>	<p>Many Deaf or DeafBlind individuals culturally prefer to be called Deaf or DeafBlind rather than terms like “people with hearing loss.” This preference reflects their identity and cultural pride within their respective communities.</p>



## Disability Status (Continued)

Suggested Terms	Comments
	<p>Both are proper nouns and should be capitalized as shown when referring to people who identify with Deaf or DeafBlind culture.<sup>4</sup></p> <p>Use lowercase “deaf” or “deafblind” when referring to the condition, or if a person prefers the lowercase.<sup>5</sup> It’s always best practice to ask the person you’re communicating with about their preference.</p> <p>Be mindful that a DeafBlind person has a unique disability and not simply a combination of two disabilities.<sup>6</sup></p> <p>Avoid language that implies restriction or impairment, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• hearing-impaired</li> <li>• hearing loss</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• person in a wheelchair</li> <li>• person who uses a wheelchair</li> <li>• wheelchair user</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid language that conveys negative imagery (such as “wheelchair-bound”), terms that imply restriction, and slurs that insult or disparage specific groups.</p> <p>Avoid using offensive terms like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cripple</li> <li>• crippled</li> </ul> <p>As with other diverse groups, insiders in disability communities may use these terms with one another, but it is not appropriate for an outsider (someone who doesn’t have a disability) to use them.</p>

## Faith

Faith practices are specific to each person and their individual beliefs. Avoid making assumptions about an individual’s faith based on their race, ethnicity, or country of origin. Examples might include assuming all Arabs are Muslims, all Italians are Catholic, or all Israelis are Jewish. Refrain from making sweeping generalizations about a particular faith tradition or ideology to avoid perpetuating stereotypes and intolerance.

Also, avoid biased language or assumptions about religious practices or traditions. For example, not all Muslim women wear a head covering (hijab), and not all Jewish people observe the Sabbath.

<sup>4</sup>Arizona Commission for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing: [FAQ](#), 2025.

<sup>5</sup>American Chemical Society [Inclusivity Style Guide: Disabilities, disorders and other health conditions](#), 2025.

<sup>6</sup>World Federation of the Deafblind: [What is deafblindness?](#), 2025.





## Faith (Continued)

Suggested Terms	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• belief(s)</li> <li>• faith tradition(s)</li> <li>• spiritual practice(s)</li> <li>• spirituality</li> <li>• worldview(s)</li> </ul>	<p>Be mindful and inclusive of all beliefs and faith traditions (including agnosticism and atheism). We recommend using the suggested terms instead of “religion.”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• happy holidays</li> <li>• holiday break</li> <li>• winter break</li> <li>• winter holidays</li> </ul>	<p>Do not assume that Christianity is the most common faith tradition. Not everyone celebrates Christian holidays and may observe other faith traditions.</p> <p>Be specific and avoid using a particular religious holiday to indicate a time of year or season, such as “Christmas break.” This includes wishing someone a “Merry Christmas” (unless you know they celebrate it). Not everyone observes or celebrates this holiday.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• person who practices <i>[insert applicable faith tradition]</i></li> </ul>	<p>Use person-first language to avoid reducing people to their faith tradition.</p> <p>For instance, Islam is a religion, and Muslims are adherents of Islam. Referring to a person as “Islamic” is incorrect.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• given name</li> <li>• name</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using “Christian name,” unless a person prefers it.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Christian-majority country</li> <li>• country with a Muslim majority</li> <li>• Muslim-majority country</li> </ul>	<p>Countries are not monolithic; various faith traditions exist within each country. We recommend using the suggested phrases rather than “Muslim country” or “Christian country.”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• expert/mentor</li> <li>• role model/inspiration/symbol</li> </ul>	<p>Use neutral language instead of borrowing words from faith traditions and using them in a casual or metaphorical way outside of their original context.</p> <p>For example, “guru” is an appropriation from Hindu and Buddhist faith traditions. It refers to a spiritual leader who is highly respected. Using it as a synonym for “expert” or “mentor” diminishes its importance and origins.</p> <p>Similarly, using “spirit animal” to refer to something that resonates with you personally trivializes its sacred role in Indigenous cultures.</p>



## Faith (Continued)

Suggested Terms	Comments
	<p>Instead, we recommend using terms like “role model,” “inspiration,” or “symbol” to convey similar meaning without appropriating sacred concepts.</p> <p>If you’re unsure about a particular term, learning its origins can guide you toward respectful usage.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• event</li> <li>• gathering</li> <li>• meeting/discussion/brainstorming</li> </ul>	<p>Using a term like “powwow” to refer to a casual gathering or a business meeting trivializes a concept with significant meaning for Indigenous communities.</p> <p>We recommend using alternatives such as “event,” “gathering” or “meeting” instead.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>[use term for place of worship that is specific to the faith tradition you are referring to]</i></li> <li>• place of worship</li> </ul>	<p>Be mindful that the terms used for places of worship are specific to each faith tradition and not interchangeable. See some examples below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• temple (Buddhism)</li> <li>• church (Christianity)</li> <li>• mosque (Islam)</li> <li>• synagogue (Judaism)</li> <li>• gurdwara (Sikhism)</li> </ul> <p>Various branches or sects within a given faith tradition may prefer terms that differ from those listed above. As always, use the term preferred by the group or individual you’re communicating with.</p> <p>Use the neutral “place of worship” if you are unsure which term to use.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be well/stay well</li> <li>• Gesundheit!</li> <li>• ¡Salud!</li> <li>• take care</li> <li>• to your health</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using phrases that carry religious undertones, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God bless you</li> <li>• bless you</li> <li>• bless your heart</li> <li>• have a blessed day</li> </ul> <p>Consider using commonly used expressions in other languages, such as “¡Salud!” or “Gesundheit!,” to wish good health or luck in ways unrelated to faith traditions.</p>



## Immigration Status, Nationality and Language

Inclusive language around immigration status can help you avoid terms that dehumanize and vilify immigrants and people without citizenship. It affirms the legitimacy of all human beings while celebrating diversity.

In general, use terms with a global perspective that acknowledge diversity and promote inclusive practices. This approach helps to foster respect and understanding for people from all backgrounds.

Suggested Terms	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• asylee</li> <li>• asylum seeker</li> <li>• displaced person/people</li> <li>• immigrant</li> <li>• migrant</li> <li>• new American</li> <li>• parolee</li> <li>• refugee</li> <li>• undocumented immigrant</li> <li>• undocumented individual</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using terms that dehumanize people and reduce their identity to a legal status, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• alien</li> <li>• illegal</li> </ul> <p>The term “noncitizen” is used in policy documents and guides, but we recommend not using it to refer to individual people.</p> <p>Note that “asylee,” “asylum seeker,” and “refugee” are terms that describe different legal processes through which migrants arrive to the United States.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• displaced person</li> <li>• permanent resident</li> <li>• person from <i>[insert applicable nation/country of origin]</i></li> <li>• undocumented individual</li> <li>• undocumented person</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using “citizen” or “resident” as umbrella terms for people who live in the United States unless you are providing information related to U.S. citizenship.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• inclusion</li> <li>• integration</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using “assimilation,” which for many carries negative connotations, including the pressure to abandon one’s cultural practices to fit in.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• naturalized U.S. citizen</li> <li>• U.S.-born citizen</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using “anchor baby,” which is offensive due to its dehumanizing and politically charged connotations.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• family-based immigration</li> <li>• family-based migration</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using “chain migration,” which is often perceived to be politically charged, misleading, and dehumanizing.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• person/individual from <i>[insert applicable nation/country of origin]</i></li> </ul>	<p>Be as specific as possible when speaking about people and their heritage.</p> <p>Avoid using terms like “ethnic,” “exotic,” or “foreign” to describe individuals or their characteristics. Instead, when relevant and appropriate, refer to their country of origin or heritage.</p>



## Immigration Status, Nationality and Language (Continued)

Suggested Terms	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>country of destination</li> <li>country of residence</li> <li>destination country</li> <li>new home</li> <li>receiving country</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using “host country,” which can reinforce notions of exclusivity or a power imbalance.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>birthplace</li> <li>country of origin</li> <li>former country of residence</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using “home country,” which assumes a fixed identity. “Home” can also be subjective, since immigrants may consider the United States their home.</p> <p>Avoid using “sending country,” which can suggest a lack of agency and overlook the often-complex reasons for migration.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>United States of America</li> <li>United States</li> <li>U.S.</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using just “America,” which implies a superiority of the United States over other North, Central, and South American countries.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>person who speaks <i>[insert applicable language]</i></li> </ul>	<p>Be as specific as possible when speaking about languages other than English.</p> <p>Foreignness is relative. Avoid using the term “foreign language,” which implies that English is the default or superior language. Instead, specify the language you’re referring to (like Spanish or Urdu, for example).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>person who prefers <i>[insert applicable language]</i></li> <li>person who prefers a non-English language</li> <li>person with a non-English language preference (NELP)</li> </ul>	<p>English has the most speakers around the world, but only 1 in 4 are native speakers. Learners of English as a second language have varying levels of proficiency and thus may not feel as comfortable navigating certain topics when communicating in English.</p> <p>Moreover, people often cannot learn English at an advanced level, or at all, due to different factors, including lack of time and resources. When the dominant language around a person is different to their preferred, they are likely to face barriers in access, including to government services.</p>



## Immigration Status, Nationality and Language (Continued)

Suggested Terms	Comments
	<p>The U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS)<sup>7</sup> uses the term “limited English proficient speaker” (or “LEP speaker”) to refer to persons who consider they understand, speak, read or write English less than “very well.” For instances where this or related ACS data sets are being discussed, it’s preferred to use the person-first language alternative: “person who has/with limited English proficiency,” or the plain language alternative “person who doesn’t speak, read, write or understand English very well.”</p> <p>While the concept of “limited English proficiency” has become established via numerous social and public policy decisions, it’s considered too vague and deficit-oriented to sufficiently capture the complex reality of bilingualism and language preference. This is why we recommend using “non-English language preference (NELP)” to refer to individuals who prefer a language other than English when communicating.</p> <p>To learn more, reference <a href="#">Rethinking the Term “Limited English Proficiency” to Improve Language-Appropriate Healthcare for All</a>.<sup>8</sup></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• preferred language</li></ul>	<p>Avoid using “primary language.” For many bilingual or multilingual individuals, choosing a “primary” language can be complex, because different languages may play distinct roles in their lives (at home, at work, in school, and elsewhere).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• developing country</li></ul>	<p>Avoid using “third-world country.” It is outdated and implies a false hierarchy in the global landscape.</p>

<sup>7</sup>U.S. Census Bureau: [Language Spoken at Home, 2022 American Community Survey 1-year Estimates](#), 2022.

<sup>8</sup>Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health: [Rethinking the Term “Limited English Proficiency” to Improve Language-Appropriate Healthcare for All](#), 2022.





## Mental Health

Suggested Terms	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• attempted suicide</li><li>• death by suicide</li><li>• died by suicide</li><li>• survived a suicide attempt</li></ul>	<p>When speaking about suicide, avoid language that implies judgment or success/failure, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• committed suicide</li><li>• completed suicide</li><li>• failed suicide attempt</li><li>• successful suicide attempt</li><li>• unsuccessful suicide attempt</li></ul> <p>Such language lacks the necessary focus on the person’s health and need for support.</p> <p>For more information about unsafe language around suicide and self-harm, reference <a href="#">The Messaging Don’ts</a>.<sup>9</sup></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• person with a mental health condition</li><li>• person with a mental health disability</li></ul>	<p>Avoid using the following offensive phrases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• crazy</li><li>• cuckoo</li><li>• defective</li><li>• insane</li><li>• mentally ill</li><li>• nuts</li><li>• psycho</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• person with bipolar disorder</li><li>• person with borderline personality disorder</li><li>• person with a psychotic disorder</li></ul>	<p>Use person-first language and avoid using diagnostic psychiatric terms such as “bipolar,” “borderline,” or “psychotic” to describe a person.</p>

<sup>9</sup>Action Alliance: [The Messaging “Don’ts,”](#) 2021.



## Public Health

Suggested Terms	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>abuse or violence in the home</li> <li>domestic violence</li> <li>gender-based violence</li> <li>intimate partner violence</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using “spousal abuse,” which excludes non-marital relationships. Abuse in domestic settings isn’t limited to romantic relationships.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>victims/survivors</li> <li>victims and survivors</li> <li>victims or survivors</li> <li>person who has been impacted/affected by <i>[insert applicable hardship]</i></li> <li>person who has experienced <i>[insert applicable hardship]</i></li> </ul>	<p>People who have experienced crime, violence, or difficult events may not see themselves as one or the other: “victims” or “survivors.” These two words are not interchangeable, so we recommend using both terms, when possible, to speak to this audience respectfully.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>individual living with <i>[insert applicable illness or condition]</i></li> <li>person being treated for <i>[insert applicable illness or condition]</i></li> <li>person with <i>[insert applicable illness or condition]</i></li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using terms like “sufferer” or “suffering from,” which can reduce a person’s identity to their illness or condition and frames their existence through pain and suffering.</p>
<p>For health-related test results (such as sexually transmitted infections, or STIs, for example):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>negative test results</li> <li>positive test results</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid loaded terms, such as “clean” or “dirty.” Use neutral language instead.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>person living with HIV (human immunodeficiency virus)</li> <li>person with AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome)</li> <li>survivor of HIV/AIDS</li> <li>to acquire HIV</li> <li>to be diagnosed with HIV</li> </ul>	<p>Use person-first language to emphasize humanity over diagnosis.</p> <p>We recommend avoiding the following terms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AIDS victim</li> <li>HIV or AIDS patient</li> <li>HIV-infected person</li> <li>person infected with HIV</li> <li>to catch AIDS or HIV</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>person with diabetes</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using “diabetic.” Use person-first language to emphasize the person rather than their condition instead.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>person with albinism</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using “albino.” Use person-first language to emphasize the person rather than their condition instead.</p>



## Public Health (Continued)

Suggested Terms	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>person with dwarfism</li> <li>individual(s) of short stature</li> </ul>	Avoid terms like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>dwarf</li> <li>midget</li> <li>little person</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>health inequalities</li> <li>health inequities</li> </ul>	The suggested terms shift the focus toward the systemic factors that create differences in health outcomes, which is more productive for addressing root causes. Avoid using “health disparities,” which can sound neutral or passive, and focuses on the difference in health outcomes while overlooking the historical and ongoing structural inequalities that contributed to them.

## Race and Ethnicity

Race and ethnicity are social constructs that are not universal. Race classifies humans into groups based on shared physical and social characteristics. Ethnicity recognizes differences between people, typically based on a shared language and culture. Whenever possible, use the racial and/or ethnic terms that individuals use to refer to themselves.

Racial and ethnic groups are proper nouns and should be capitalized (Black, for example), with the exception of “white,” which should remain lowercase, because “white people generally do not share the same history and culture, or the experience of being discriminated against because of skin color.”<sup>10</sup> Aside from Black and white, avoid using colors to refer to other human groups, which is offensive. Do not hyphenate dual-heritage terms (such as Asian American).

As with all discussions on race and ethnicity, it is preferable, when possible, to be specific about regional or national origin and to avoid generalizing. It is best practice to ask an individual or the community addressed regarding how they would like to be described or referred to.

Suggested Terms	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asian</li> <li>Asian American</li> <li>Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI)</li> <li>Pacific Islander</li> <li>Middle Eastern North African (MENA)</li> </ul>	Use “Asian” for people from Asia and “Asian American” for people of Asian descent in North America or specify a nation and/or region of origin.  “Oriental” is a slur and should not be used.  “MENA” refers to individuals from the geographic region that includes the Middle East and North Africa.

<sup>10</sup>The Associated Press (AP): [Why we will lowercase white](#), 2020.



Suggested Terms	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black people</li> <li>• BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of color)</li> <li>• Indigenous people</li> <li>• <i>[use term(s) that specifically name the person or community being referenced]</i></li> <li>• people of color (POC)</li> <li>• communities of color</li> </ul>	<p>The term “BIPOC” first appeared in 2013 and builds upon “POC” (people/persons of color), which has been in use for centuries. The two letters, “B” and “I,” were added to highlight the systemic injustices that continue to profoundly affect the lives of Black and Indigenous people in ways that other communities may have not experienced.</p> <p>However, “BIPOC” is not universally embraced. Some argue that it blurs the differences between the groups it’s supposed to center, or that it generalizes by lumping together the experiences of all communities of color. Be as specific as possible with the terms you use (Black or Indigenous, for example) when referring to particular groups and <b>only use umbrella terms like BIPOC when that is what you really mean.</b></p> <p>Avoid using “people of color” when referring to one specific racial group. Use a term specific to that group instead.</p> <p>Avoid “non-white” and any terms that treat whiteness as a default or “normal” identity.</p> <p>Avoid “colored people” and “colored.” These terms are outdated and offensive.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• biracial</li> <li>• multicultural</li> <li>• multiracial</li> </ul>	<p>It is best to follow a person’s lead when it comes to how they choose to identify themselves.</p> <p>Avoid using “mulatto,” which is offensive.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• African</li> <li>• African American</li> <li>• Black</li> </ul>	<p>Some American people of African ancestry prefer “Black,” and others prefer “African American.” Both terms are acceptable, and it is best practice to ask the person or consult with the community being named. Be mindful that there are white African Americans as well.</p> <p>“African American” should not be used to refer to people of African ancestry worldwide because it does not account for other ethnicities or national origins (Kenyan or Haitian, for example). In these cases, use “Black.”</p> <p>Avoid using “Afro-American,” which is archaic. Its usage is inappropriate unless referring to the names of organizations or historical references.</p>



Suggested Terms	Comments
	<p>Specify a person’s region or nation of origin whenever possible to avoid the impression that all people of African descent have the same cultural background, family history, or family experiences.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• European</li> <li>• European American</li> <li>• white</li> </ul>	<p>Use “white” (with a lowercase “w”) or “European American” for people of European descent living in North America or provide the nation of origin.</p> <p>Do not capitalize “white” in racial, ethnic, or cultural contexts, unless it starts a sentence. (See the beginning of this section for more information.)</p> <p>Avoid using “Caucasian,” which is outdated and can be offensive due to its problematic origins and promotion of a Eurocentric racial ideology.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>[use specific group name(s)]</i></li> <li>• Indigenous</li> <li>• Native American</li> <li>• Native Peoples</li> </ul>	<p>When appropriate, identify groups indigenous to North and South America by their specific group or nation (for example, Inuit, Yupik, Chukchi, and others) to show respect for their distinct identities.</p> <p>When the broader designation is appropriate, note that “Native American” is preferred to “American Indian.”</p> <p>Remember that the term “Indian” refers to people from India. The exception is when it is part of a proper noun, such as Oneida Indian Nation, Tonawanda Band of Seneca Indians, and others.</p> <p>When talking about Native groups or people(s), use the terminology the members of the community use to describe themselves collectively.</p> <p>In general, refer to a group as a “people(s)” or “nation” rather than as a “tribe.”</p> <p>Avoid “Eskimo,” which has colonial roots and is offensive and outdated.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hispanic</li> <li>• Latine</li> <li>• Latino/Latina</li> <li>• Latinx</li> </ul>	<p>“Hispanic” refers to people from Spanish-speaking countries, including Spain and Latin American countries.</p> <p>“Latino,” “Latina,” “Latinx” or “Latine” is a person of Latin American descent who can be of any background or language (such as Portuguese speakers from Brazil).</p>

## Race and Ethnicity (Continued)



Suggested Terms	Comments
	<p>If a person does not identify as Latino or Latina (which are gendered terms), the gender-neutral terms “Latinx” or “Latine” are alternative options. It is best practice to ask an individual, or the community addressed, how they would like to be described or referred to.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a Hispanic person</li> <li>• Black people</li> <li>• white people</li> </ul>	<p>Use adjectives instead of nouns (for example, use “a Hispanic person” instead of “a Hispanic”) when referring to someone’s race or ethnicity.</p> <p>The word “white” should not be capitalized. (See the beginning of this section for more information.)</p>

## Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity

Suggested Terms	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• asexual</li> <li>• bisexual</li> <li>• gay</li> <li>• intersex</li> <li>• lesbian</li> <li>• LGBTQ+</li> <li>• LGBTQIA+</li> <li>• transgender</li> <li>• queer</li> </ul> <p>(“+” stands for other communities not encompassed in the acronym, such as pansexual, two-spirit, and more)</p>	<p>Be mindful of confusing terms that refer to gender identity with ones that refer to sexual orientation.</p> <p>“LGBTQ+” is an umbrella term that includes all sexual orientations outside of heterosexuality and all gender identities outside of cisgender (someone whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth).</p> <p>“Queer” is an umbrella term used colloquially to describe the LGBTQ+ community, but it can be a slur when used by people outside of the community or in a negative context. Only use “queer” if mirroring an individual’s self-identifying language. It can be used in terms of gender identity or sexual orientation.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• gender identity</li> <li>• sexual orientation</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using words like “lifestyle” and “preference.” They are inaccurate and derogatory. Both imply that being LGBTQ+ is voluntary or a choice.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assigned female at birth (AFAB)</li> <li>• assigned male at birth (AMAB)</li> <li>• assigned sex</li> <li>• sex assigned at birth</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid the following terms, which assume a male/female binary and conflate the sex an individual is assigned at birth with gender identity. This disregards that someone’s lived gender may not align with what was assigned at birth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• birth sex</li> <li>• born a boy/male/man</li> <li>• born a girl/female/woman</li> <li>• natal sex</li> </ul>





Suggested Terms	Comments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>used to be a boy/male/man</li> <li>used to be a girl/female/woman</li> </ul> <p>Please note that many in the trans community do not like the terms “assigned female at birth” and “assigned male at birth,” but understand their use in the medical field.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>cis</li> <li>cisgender man</li> <li>cisgender woman</li> </ul>	<p>“Cisgender” describes an individual whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth.</p> <p>Avoid using terms like “biological man” and “biological woman,” which suggest that “man” or “woman” is determined solely by biology and ignore the distinctions between biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>intersex</li> </ul>	<p>“Intersex” is the preferred term for sex that falls outside of the male/female binary.</p> <p>Avoid using “hermaphrodite,” which is outdated, inaccurate, and offensive when referring to human beings.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>trans</li> <li>transgender</li> </ul>	<p>“Transgender” is the preferred term for an individual whose gender identity is different from their sex assigned at birth.</p> <p>Avoid using the words “transvestite” and “transsexual,” which are outdated, stigmatizing, and offensive, as well as “tranny,” which is a slur.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a trans man</li> <li>a trans person</li> <li>a trans woman</li> <li>a transgender individual</li> </ul>	<p>Transgender is an adjective and should not be used as a noun (“a transgender,” “the transgenders”).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>gender-affirming care</li> <li>gender-affirming surgery</li> <li>transition care</li> </ul>	<p>The suggested terms are preferred because gender-affirming care and surgeries do not confirm or reassign sex or gender. In New York State, surgery is not required to change an individual’s legal gender marker. Also, not all trans people want or have access to surgery</p> <p>Avoid using the following terms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>gender confirmation surgery</li> <li>gender reassignment surgery (GRS)</li> <li>non-operative, pre-operative, or post-operative (non-op, pre-op, or post-op)</li> <li>sex change</li> <li>sex reassignment surgery (SRS)</li> </ul>



Suggested Terms	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• drag artist</li> <li>• drag king</li> <li>• drag performer</li> <li>• drag queen</li> </ul>	<p>“Drag queen” and “drag king” are generally appropriate when used in a respectful context. They refer to performers who dress in exaggerated attire and adopt characteristics associated with femininity or masculinity for entertainment, self-expression, or art. Use them only when referring to performers in drag culture, acknowledging it as an art form or entertainment style.</p> <p>Some people may confuse being a drag queen with being transgender, but they are distinct identities. In some cases, the term “drag queen” has been used in a derogatory way to mock or belittle someone’s gender expression. Not everyone who performs in drag identifies as a “drag queen.” Some might prefer “drag artist” or “drag performer,” which are gender-neutral terms. Remember that people of any gender can participate in drag.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pregnant and parenting person(s)</li> <li>• pregnant and parenting woman (if you know that this is how an individual refers to themselves)</li> </ul>	<p>If an individual uses a gendered term for themselves, it is appropriate to use that term for them. However, if you do not know the term that an individual or group of people uses, it is best to use language that is inclusive of people of all genders.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• personal pronouns</li> <li>• pronouns</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using “preferred pronouns” because it communicates that pronouns are a preference and that other pronouns, or another person’s preferences, are acceptable.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ours</li> <li>• themselves</li> <li>• themselves</li> <li>• they</li> <li>• us</li> <li>• we</li> </ul>	<p>Because you should not assume someone’s pronouns, it is best practice to use the individual’s name or gender-neutral pronouns (for example, they/them/theirs) until that individual tells you otherwise, at which point you may proceed with using gendered pronouns (he/she).</p> <p>You should also use gender-neutral language, including but not limited to “they,” “them” and “theirs,” if you are composing something that will generally apply to everyone.</p> <p>Instead of using a gender-specific pronoun, you may want to substitute a noun or to rewrite the sentence to eliminate the need for a pronoun. For example, “The agency has 30 days to respond once the individual submits an application.”</p>



Suggested Terms	Comments
	<p>The pronouns “we”, “us,” and “ours” honor and identify collective social identities. These pronouns show solidarity with an individual’s community and further highlight the cultural history of a people.</p> <p>In 2023, Governor Hochul signed S155<sup>11</sup> /A1142<sup>12</sup> (Chapter 139, Laws of 2023<sup>13</sup>), which requires that “hereafter, in any law, rule, regulation, ordinance or resolution, gendered terms shall not be used and gender-neutral terms, including but not limited to ‘they,’ ‘them,’ and ‘theirs,’ shall be used in substitution therefor and with the same force and effect...”</p> <p>However, “if such law, rule, regulation, ordinance or resolution is in reference to a specific person, the language referring to such person shall be gendered in accordance with the gender identity of such person.”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mx.</li> </ul>	<p>If an individual has indicated that they use a particular gendered prefix (such as Mr./Ms./Mrs./Miss/sir/ma’am), it is appropriate to use that prefix for them.</p> <p>However, if you do not know the prefix an individual uses or the way they want to be addressed, it’s best not to assume. Instead, use the person’s name or a greeting that omits a gendered description.</p> <p>If asking about a prefix (for example, on a form), we recommend including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a gender-neutral prefix option (like “Mx.”)</li> <li>• an option to indicate no prefix</li> <li>• an option to write in a prefix that is not listed</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• adult</li> <li>• child</li> <li>• family member</li> <li>• nibling<sup>14</sup></li> <li>• parents and caregivers</li> <li>• person responsible for <i>[insert applicable action]</i></li> </ul>	<p>If an individual has indicated that they use a gendered term for themselves or their family member, it is appropriate to use the same language that they use (husband/wife, sister/brother, for example).</p> <p>However, if you do not know the term that an individual uses, it is best to use gender-neutral language.</p>

<sup>11</sup>New York State Senate: [Senate Bill S155](#), 2024.

<sup>12</sup>New York State Assembly: [Assembly Bill A1142](#), 2024.

<sup>13</sup>New York State Council on Developmental Disabilities: [New York State 2023 Budget Provisions and New Laws Related to Developmental Disabilities](#), 2023.

<sup>14</sup>Merriam-Webster Dictionary: [Words We’re Watching: ‘Nibling’](#), 2020.





Suggested Terms	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sibling</li> <li>• spouse/partner</li> </ul>	<p>Remember that families come in all shapes, sizes, and structures. When addressing groups, use “parents and caregivers” to be more inclusive. Many children are cared for by someone other than their biological parents or parental figures.</p> <p>Use “family” instead of “extended family,” which is subjective; perhaps the child you’re referencing is cared for by a cousin or family friend who they would not consider “extended.”</p> <p>Use “household” only when referencing a physical structure, not when you mean “families,” since many parents, caregivers, and decision-makers do not live under one roof.</p> <p>Finally, avoid assigning family or household duties to particular family members—for example, a phrase like “quick dinners for busy moms” is outdated and possibly inaccurate, and reinforces gender stereotypes.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• good afternoon/good morning <i>[insert applicable gender neutral term, like folks, everyone, everybody, all]</i></li> <li>• greetings to you all</li> <li>• hello and welcome</li> </ul>	<p>When beginning a conversation with a group of people, use greetings that are not gendered. For example, “ladies and gentlemen” or “guys” can exclude or misrepresent people. Instead, use the suggested alternatives to create an inclusive, welcoming introduction.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• congressperson</li> <li>• firefighter</li> <li>• flight attendant</li> <li>• police officer</li> </ul>	<p>If an individual has indicated that they use a gendered term for themselves, it is appropriate to use the same language that they use. However, if you do not know the term that an individual uses, it is best to use gender-neutral language to avoid making assumptions and be more inclusive.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act (GENDA)<sup>15</sup></li> <li>• gender identity nondiscrimination law</li> <li>• legislation impacting transgender rights</li> <li>• nondiscrimination law</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using “bathroom bill,” which oversimplifies, trivializes, and stigmatizes legislation—often about the rights of transgender and nonbinary individuals—to the narrow issue of restroom access.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• human beings</li> <li>• humanity</li> <li>• humankind</li> <li>• humans</li> <li>• people</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using “mankind,” which centers men as the default. While the term was historically used to refer to all humans, modern usage recognizes the need for more inclusive language to better reflect the diversity of humanity.</p>

<sup>15</sup>New York State Division of Human Rights: [Human Rights Law Protections for Gender Identity and Expression](#), 2025.





## Size

Sizeism is stereotyping and discriminating against individuals or groups based on their body size.<sup>16</sup>

Suggested Terms	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• average weight range (in medical contexts)</li> <li>• body diversity</li> <li>• body inclusivity</li> <li>• higher BMI (in medical contexts)</li> <li>• higher weight</li> <li>• person living in a larger body</li> <li>• person with a larger body</li> <li>• within recommended weight range (in medical contexts)</li> </ul>	<p>In general, it’s best to avoid commenting on or emphasizing body size. Compliments that reinforce narrow beauty standards like “You look so thin!” or “You’ve lost weight!” can reinforce sizeist ideas.</p> <p>Don’t assume that someone’s body size reflects their health, habits, or abilities. Phrases like “healthy weight” or “ideal body” can reinforce harmful stereotypes and oversimplify health as merely a factor of size.</p> <p>Avoid judgmental or value-laden terms like “overweight” or “heavy.” If you must address body size or shape, use the language a person prefers to describe themselves. Some may identify as “fat” in a neutral or positive way, while others may prefer “larger-bodied” or other terms. When in doubt, ask.</p> <p>When referencing clothing size, use the size directly or a phrase like “inclusive sizing.”</p>

## Socioeconomic Status, Racial Equity, and the Criminal Legal System

Suggested Terms	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• person experiencing poverty</li> <li>• person with low income</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using terms like “low-class” and “the poor,” which can be demeaning. Instead, use person-first language and define income brackets and levels if possible.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• person experiencing homelessness</li> <li>• person who is unhoused</li> <li>• person without housing</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using the “homeless,” which can define a person solely by their housing status, reducing their identity to a single characteristic.</p>

<sup>16</sup>College for Creative Studies (CCS): [Celebrating Belonging Blog – The Pervasiveness of Sizeism](#), 2023.



Suggested Terms	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>incarcerated individual</li> <li>person living in a correctional facility</li> <li>person who is/has been incarcerated</li> <li>person with a prior conviction</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid the following terms, which reduce people to their legal status and ignore their humanity, individuality, and potential for change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>convict</li> <li>inmate<sup>17</sup></li> <li>prisoner</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>human trafficking victim/survivor (can cover sex workers and individuals who have been forced into other forms of work in exchange for something or through some type of coercion)</li> <li>person who engages in sex work</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using “prostitute” or “hooker,” which reduces individuals to a single aspect of their work or circumstances, often depriving them of dignity and personhood.</p> <p>These terms have historically been used negatively and are associated with judgment and moral condemnation.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>child who has been [sexually] assaulted/raped</li> <li>child who has been trafficked</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using “child prostitute,” which implies that a child is voluntarily engaged in sex work. It also obscures the fact that children involved in sex work are often victims of exploitation, trafficking, or coercion.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>rape</li> <li>sexual assault</li> <li>sexual violence</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using terms like “date rape” and “acquaintance rape,” which minimize the severity of the crime and draw focus to relationship dynamics rather than the crime itself.</p> <p>When possible or appropriate, phrase the act around the perpetrator who committed a crime or behaved a certain way instead of unfairly focusing on the behavior of a victim/survivor (“victim blaming”). For example, “The man is accused of committing sexual assault,” instead of, “The woman was sexually assaulted.” This uses the active voice and centers the conversation on what the perpetrator did, calling for responsibility and accountability. Sexual assault doesn’t just happen to a person: It happens because someone committed the act.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>person who is/was enslaved</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using “slave” because it carries deeply dehumanizing and historical connotations that reduce individuals to their condition of involuntary enslavement, stripping them of their humanity, identity, and agency.</p>

<sup>17</sup>New York State Senate: [Senate Bill S8216](#), 2022.



Suggested Terms	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• disinvested</li> <li>• low opportunity</li> <li>• low socioeconomic area</li> <li>• neighborhoods with access to fewer opportunities/resources</li> <li>• neighborhoods with high poverty rates</li> <li>• under-resourced</li> <li>• under-resourced area</li> <li>• underserved</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid the following terms because they carry negative, stereotypical connotations that are often used to marginalize and stigmatize certain neighborhoods and their residents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• disadvantaged neighborhoods</li> <li>• distressed neighborhoods</li> <li>• ghetto</li> <li>• inner-city</li> <li>• the ghetto</li> </ul> <p>It’s important to use terms like “low opportunity,” “underserved,” or “disinvested” thoughtfully, because they can unintentionally suggest a hierarchy of value, where some places—and by extension, their residents—are seen as less valuable than others. These descriptions should be accompanied by context explaining the limited or inequitable access to services that has affected many communities. The shortage of resources in areas such as education, housing, transportation, and employment is not an intrinsic trait of any location.<sup>18</sup></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• food insecurity</li> <li>• food poverty</li> <li>• hunger</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using “food desert,” which frames the problem as merely a lack of supermarkets in certain areas, suggesting that building more stores would solve the issue. This approach misses the underlying policy decisions that have contributed to the shortage of grocery options in some communities.</p> <p>“Food desert” fails to account for deeper systemic issues such as structural racism, historical context, and racial inequities, which explain why food deserts disproportionately impact communities of color. Furthermore, by focusing on distance as the main obstacle to food access, the term neglects other important factors, including affordability, cultural relevance, store hours, accessibility, and product availability.<sup>19</sup></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• client</li> <li>• individual accessing services</li> <li>• part of/participant in <i>[insert applicable program]</i></li> <li>• person receiving assistance</li> <li>• person receiving support</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using “recipients,” particularly in discussions about individuals who receive aid, benefits, or services. It can be dehumanizing and reduce people to passive recipients of help.</p>

<sup>18</sup>Urban Institute: [Place and Opportunity](#), 2018.

<sup>19</sup>Healthy Food Policy Project: [Moving Beyond Food Deserts in Healthy Food Policy](#) (via Wayback Machine), 2023.





Suggested Terms	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>historically underserved students</li> <li>historically underserved youth</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using “at-risk students” or “at-risk youth” because they are overly vague and deficit-based, and frame young people as passive without acknowledging their agency. It also implies that someone who is underserved is on an inevitable path toward “risky” or dangerous behaviors, circumstances, and futures.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>[use applicable job-specific terms like “teacher,” “nurse,” “mechanic,” “software engineer,” “construction worker,” and so on]</i></li> <li>salaried professional</li> <li>skilled laborer</li> <li>skilled trades worker</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using “blue-collar worker” and “white-collar worker,” which can perpetuate class divisions, reinforce stereotypes, and oversimplify the diverse nature of work. Instead, describe the person’s job or occupation directly whenever possible.</p>

**Substance Use and Addiction**

Suggested Terms	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>misuse of substances</li> <li>substance use</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using “substance abuse” because it can imply moral failure or intentional harm, which can create shame and discourage individuals from seeking help.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>person who injects drugs (PWID)</li> <li>person who uses drugs (PWUD)</li> <li>person with <i>[insert specific substance]</i> use disorder (if clinically accurate)</li> <li>person with active use</li> <li>substance use disorder (SUD) (clinical term)</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using outdated terms like “chemical dependence” and “chemical dependency” because they do not fully capture the complexity of substance use and addiction. Use person-first language instead of the following terms, which are dehumanizing and perpetuate negative stereotypes about people with substance use disorders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>addict</li> <li>crackhead</li> <li>dope fiend</li> <li>junkie</li> <li>substance abuser</li> </ul> <p>When describing a diagnosis, use the name of a specific substance followed by “use disorder,” such as “cannabis use disorder.”</p>



## Substance Use and Addiction (Continued)

Suggested Terms	Comments
<p>For toxicology test results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• negative test results</li> <li>• positive test results</li> </ul> <p>For non-toxicology purposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• currently or actively using substances</li> <li>• in recovery or remission</li> <li>• not currently or actively using substances</li> <li>• not using substances</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using terms like “clean” or “dirty” to discuss toxicology test results and non-toxicology. They are imprecise and imply moral judgment. Use clear and neutral language instead.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• items that may create an unsafe environment</li> <li>• items that may create unsafe conditions</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using “contraband,” which is often associated with illegal goods or smuggling, and can frame the conversation in a way that criminalizes individuals rather than addressing underlying issues like addiction, poverty, or systemic inequities.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• recurrence</li> <li>• recurrent substance use</li> <li>• recurrent use</li> <li>• resumed use</li> <li>• return to use</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid the following terms, which imply failure or carry moral judgment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lapse</li> <li>• relapse</li> <li>• slip/slip-up</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• person who uses alcohol</li> <li>• alcohol use disorder (AUD) (clinical term)</li> <li>• person with alcohol use disorder (AUD) (if clinically accurate)</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid using the following terms, which can reduce a person’s identity to their condition and evoke a strong stigma:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• alcoholic</li> <li>• alcoholism</li> </ul>

## Veteran Status

Suggested Terms	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• combat veteran</li> <li>• military personnel</li> <li>• service member</li> <li>• veteran</li> </ul>	<p>A veteran is someone with military experience. A combat veteran is someone who served in combat.</p> <p>Anyone who has served in the military and has been released from active duty is a veteran. Anyone still serving is a service member.</p> <p>Instead of “serviceman,” use “service member” to acknowledge folks of all genders who serve.<sup>20</sup></p>

<sup>20</sup>Washington State University (WSU): [WSU Editorial Style Guide](#), 2025.



## Veteran Status (Continued)



Suggested Terms	Comments
	Avoid “accident” when referring to war-related or combat-related violence.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• armed forces</li><li>• military, or specify the branch (for example, “the U.S. Army” or “the U.S. Air Force”)</li></ul>	Avoid “army” as a generic term for the military. Specify the branch if possible.



## Resources

**Please note:** We began collaborating on this document in 2024, prior to the deactivation of websites related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) principles in 2025. Where noted, such websites are linked here via the [Wayback Machine Internet Archive](#) on the date closest to when we accessed them.

Action Alliance: [The Messaging “Don’ts,”](#) 2021.

American Chemical Society Inclusivity Style Guide: [Disabilities, disorders and other health conditions,](#) 2025.

American Psychological Association (APA): [Inclusive Language Guide,](#) 2023.

Arizona Commission for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing: [FAQ,](#) 2025.

The Associated Press (AP): [Why we will lowercase white,](#) 2020.

The Chicago School: [Inclusive Language Guide,](#) 2024.

Coalition for Diversity and Inclusion in Scholarly Communications: [Immigration,](#) 2022.

College for Creative Studies (CCS): [Celebrating Belonging Blog – The Pervasiveness of Sizeism,](#) 2023.

Father Joe’s Villages: [Why We Don’t Use the Terms “the Homeless” or “Homeless People,”](#) 2021.

Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD): [GLAAD Media Reference Guide—11th Edition,](#) 2022.

Healthy Food Policy Project: [Moving Beyond Food Deserts in Healthy Food Policy](#) (via Wayback Machine), 2023.

Indigenous Journalists Association (IJA): [Reporting Guides,](#) 2020.

Journal of General Internal Medicine: [Rethinking the Use of “Caucasian” in Clinical Language and Curricula: A Trainee’s Call to Action,](#) 2022.

Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health: [Rethinking the Term “Limited English Proficiency” to Improve Language-Appropriate Healthcare for All,](#) 2022.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary: [Words We’re Watching: ‘Nibbling’,](#) 2020.

New York Times: [Where Did BIPOC Come From?,](#) 2020.

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA): [Guidance on Inclusive Language,](#) 2022.

National Institutes of Health (NIH): [Advisory Committee to the Director Working Group on Diversity Subgroup on Individuals with Disabilities Report](#) (via Wayback Machine), 2022.

New York State Council on Developmental Disabilities: [New York State 2023 Budget Provisions and New Laws Related to Developmental Disabilities,](#) 2023.





New York State Assembly: [Assembly Bill A1142](#), 2024.

New York State Division of Human Rights: [Human Rights Law Protections for Gender Identity and Expression](#), 2025.

New York State Senate: [Senate Bill S155](#), 2024.

New York State Senate: [Senate Bill S8216](#), 2022.

Northwestern University: [Inclusive Language Guide](#), 2019.

Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU): [Inclusive Language Guide](#), 2020.

Pratt Institute Libraries: [Inclusive Language: Religion](#), 2024.

Religion Newswriters Foundation: [Religion Stylebook](#), 2011.

University of Bristol: [Inclusive writing guide](#), 2024.

Urban Institute: [Place and Opportunity](#), 2018.

U.S. Census Bureau: [Disability Characteristics, 2023 American Community Survey 1-year Estimates](#), 2023.

U.S. Census Bureau: [Language Spoken at Home, 2022 American Community Survey 1-year Estimates](#), 2022.

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): [Health Equity Guiding Principles for Inclusive Communication](#) (via Wayback Machine), 2023.

U.S. General Services Administration (GSA): [Inclusive Language](#) (via Wayback Machine), 2017.

U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA): [Inclusive Language](#) (via Wayback Machine), 2024.

Washington State University (WSU): [WSU Editorial Style Guide](#), 2025.

Women Against Abuse: [The Language We Use](#), 2015.

World Federation of the Deafblind: [What is deafblindness?](#), 2025.

YWCA Seattle: [Why we use BIPOC](#), 2024.

