

MEDIA RELEASE

New language guide helps us find the right words, because words matter in mental health support

8 July 2022: As more people access mental health services due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and compounding exposure to natural disasters, it is increasingly important that inclusive, safe and positive language around mental health is used in health and support settings.

The wrong words can contribute to stigma and alienate people further, hampering their recovery and willingness to seek support.

To encourage the use of respectful and accepting language, Mental Health Coordinating Council has launched a new [Recovery Oriented Language Guide](#) for use in health services and support settings.

MHCC CEO Carmel Tebbutt says language matters in the context of mental health, especially given historical discrimination and stigma associated with mental health conditions.

“The choices we make about language have an impact on the way people living with mental health conditions feel, how well they recover and how they are perceived in society,” Ms Tebbutt says.

“In the context of health and support services we want everyone, from doctors to front desk receptionist, supporters and family, to use words that convey hope, optimism and support. We hope this Guide will promote a culture of recovery and wellbeing.”

The Recovery Oriented Language Guide is [free to download](#) and includes helpful lists of destigmatising language and useful Do’s and Don’ts to help reframe language positively.

Tips include saying someone ‘has been diagnosed with...’ rather than ‘is mentally ill’, not arguing with a person’s perception of events or feelings, but rather asking if they feel they have been listened to, turning statements like ‘they refused help’ around to ‘they prefer not to...’ and swapping out ‘they are anti-social’ for ‘they are working on finding motivation’.

The Guide includes sections on talking about suicide, diversity inclusive language, talking to young people and guides for interactions between clinicians.

This is the third, and most extensively updated edition of the Guide, first published in 2013.

The Guide is developed by Mental Health Coordinating Council, the peak body for community-based mental health organisation and is available for free at mhcc.org.au

Interviews can be arranged with Mental Health Coordinating Council CEO Carmel Tebbutt and Darren Wagner, a suicide prevention and postvention worker with lived experience of complex post-traumatic stress disorder. Darren can talk about his experience of language in his recovery. For interviews contact Lara Cole on lara.c@mhcc.org.au or 0421 202 643.

For a free copy of the Recovery Oriented Language Guide go to mhcc.org.au.