

TALKING ABOUT RECOVERY

Messaging from Faces & Voices of Recovery

Faces & Voices of Recovery is very excited to share with you language that you can use to talk with the public and policymakers about recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs. This messaging is a result of in-depth public opinion research with the recovery community and the general public. We encourage you to use this “messaging” or language in all of your recovery advocacy if you are speaking out as a person in recovery or a family member or friend.

"This recovery messaging is excellent. Thanks to Faces & Voices of Recovery for its leadership in developing messages to all Americans that clearly and passionately convey the living reality of long-term recovery from addiction" - Bill White, senior research consultant at Chestnut Health Systems/Lighthouse Institute and past board chair of Recovery Communities United.

Why we want to speak about recovery with one voice

Faces & Voices of Recovery has been working to find a way to describe and talk about recovery so that people who are not part of the recovery community can understand what we mean when we use the word “recovery.” One of the important findings, from our groundbreaking 2004 survey of the general public, was that people believe that the word “recovery” means that someone is trying to stop using alcohol or other drugs. We realized that we needed to find a way to talk about recovery that would allow us to be clear and believable when describing it in a way that will move our advocacy agenda forward.

There are some important things that we’ve learned from our research about how to talk with people about recovery:

1. Making it personal, so that we have credibility
2. Keeping it simple and in the present tense, so that it’s real and understandable
3. Helping people understand that recovery means that you or the person that you care about is no longer using alcohol or other drugs. We do this by moving away from saying “in recovery” to saying “in long-term recovery.” Also, it is important to talk about stability and mention the length of time that the person is in recovery
4. Talking about your recovery, not your addiction
5. Helping people understand that there is more to recovery than not using alcohol or other drugs and that part of recovery is creating a better life

MESSAGING OR LANGUAGE FOR A PERSON IN RECOVERY

I’m [Your name] and I am in long-term recovery, which means that I have not used [Insert alcohol or drugs or the name of the drugs that you used] for more than [Insert the number of years that you are in recovery] years. I am committed to recovery because it has given me and my family new purpose and hope for the future, while helping me gain stability in my life. I am now speaking out because long-term recovery has helped me change my life for the better, and I want to make it possible for others to do the same.

MESSAGING OR LANGUAGE FOR A FAMILY MEMBER OR FRIEND OF A PERSON IN RECOVERY

I'm [Your name]. My [Insert son, daughter, mom, dad, friend] is in long-term recovery, which means that [Insert he/she] has not used [Insert alcohol or drugs or the name of the drugs that he or she used] for more than [Insert the number of years] years. I am committed to recovery because it has given me and my family new purpose and hope for the future. I am now speaking out because long-term recovery helped us change our lives for the better and I want to make it possible for others to do the same.

What's not in the message and why

"I'm a recovering addict [alcoholic]." When people hear the words addict or alcoholic, it reinforces the idea of a revolving door. It says that either you or the person in your family is still struggling with active addiction.

Information about particular pathways to recovery. The message does not mention a particular pathway to recovery, which addresses concerns that people in 12-step programs, such as AA, NA, Al-Anon or other programs, may have about their anonymity.

A definition of recovery. This message describes recovery, so that the person you are speaking with or the audience you are addressing, understands what recovery means; you or your family member is in long-term recovery and that others should have the opportunity to recover as well. You are not speaking out as a physician who is diagnosing a person who needs treatment referral or as an insurance company deciding whether or not someone's care should be covered.

"Addiction is a disease." "Addiction is a health problem." In our research, and as we're sure you know from your own experience, we found that many people believe that addiction is a moral issue, not a health problem. Even when someone says that they believe it's a health problem, when we scratched below the surface, we found that because of their personal experiences and/or prejudices, it's difficult for many Americans to truly believe that addiction is a disease or a health problem.

We have side-stepped engaging in a discussion about whether or not addiction is a health issue and have gone straight to our message: Real people, their sons and daughters, friends, neighbors, and co-workers are in long-term recovery from addiction and their lives, and the lives of their families are better because of it. That's why we need to make it possible for even more people to get the help they need, and once they are in recovery, remove barriers that keep them from long-term recovery.

Where to use this message

We hope that you will use this message, day in and day out, in all of your advocacy work. "Staying on message" means using the same message over and over again, until it becomes part of our common understanding. You may get sick of saying it, but a unified message, from the entire recovery community is what we need. This basic message will help us maintain our focus and continuity as it gets integrated into everything that we do. In the future, when there is greater public understanding of recovery, we will be able to change our basic message.

Opportunities to use this message include:

- With the media on all levels
- In coalition meetings
- With supporters
- In meetings with legislators
- In materials you develop to help you drive your overall strategies
- In short, any time you write or speak about recovery, publicly or privately, remember to use these messages.

Putting long-term recovery messaging in a public policy context: There is a reason that people all over our country are organizing to support recovery – to change local, state, and national policies that restrict access to recovery and remove barriers to sustained recovery. This messaging is a key part of recovery advocacy issue campaigns.

Examples of how to use this messaging

An example:

Congress has been considering legislation to end insurance discrimination facing people with mental illness and addiction. Many Americans have no idea about this barrier facing people seeking recovery.

To use this messaging to talk about ending insurance discrimination, a recovery advocate would say:

- “I’m **[Your name]** and I am in long-term recovery, which means that I have not used **[Insert alcohol or drugs or the name of the drugs that you used]** for more than **[Insert the number of years that you are in recovery]** years.”
- “I am committed to recovery because it has given me and my family new purpose and hope for the future, while helping me gain stability in my life.”
- “I am now speaking out because long-term recovery has helped me change my life for the better, and I want to make it possible for others to do the same.”
- “Insurance discrimination denies people with addiction the same insurance protection as people with other health issues. As a result of this discrimination, many are unable to get the treatment and recovery support services necessary to achieve long-term recovery.”
- “We must ensure that appropriate recovery support services and treatments are available to those who need them.”
- “I am living proof that people can recover from addiction and make a better life for themselves and their families, but I would not have been able to do it without help and support.”
- “Unfortunately, many people are not so lucky. Many are denied access to services because their insurance companies will not pay for it or are not required to cover it.”
- “Insurance discrimination for those who need help to recover from addiction needs to end and that is what we are fighting to do.”

Another example:

Nationally, more than four million Americans are denied the right to vote as a result of laws that prohibit voting by felons or ex-felons: in 48 states, (with the exception of Maine and Vermont) and the District of Columbia prisoners cannot vote. In 36 states felons on probation or parole are disenfranchised, and in 11 states a felony conviction can result in a lifetime ban long after the completion of a sentence.

- “I’m **[Your name]** and I am in long-term recovery, which means that I have not used **[Insert alcohol or drugs or the name of the drugs that you used]** for more than **[Insert the number of years that you are in recovery]** years.”
- “I am committed to recovery because it has given me and my family new purpose and hope for the future, while helping me gain stability in my life.”
- “I am now speaking out because long-term recovery has helped me change my life for the better, and I want to make it possible for others to do the same.”
- “I am one of more than four million Americans who have been denied the right to vote because of a criminal conviction while I was using drugs. People in recovery cannot fully participate in our communities without our right to vote.”

Faces & Voices of Recovery is using this messaging in all of the work that we do. We encourage you to do the same!

RESOURCES

- Faces & Voices of Recovery's 2004 Hart/Teeter survey of the general public and 2001 survey of the recovery community can be found at:
http://www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org/resources/public_opinion.php
- Faces & Voices of Recovery
www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org