



Faces & Voices of Recovery Modifications to SAMHSA's Working Definition of Recovery from Mental Disorders and Substance Use Disorders

Faces & Voices of Recovery urges the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to continue developing its working definition of recovery from mental and substance use disorders. The definition and guiding principles released on December 22, 2011 fail to recognize the importance of not using alcohol and other illicit or non-prescribed drugs as part of recovery from a substance use disorder.

The only reference to not using alcohol and other drugs is buried in the third of ten Guiding Principles and it is unclear and perhaps misleading. The Principle includes the following statement, "Abstinence is the safest approach for those with substance use disorders." Faces & Voices suggest that a new first Principle be, "Recovery from substance use disorders requires abstinence from alcohol and other illicit or non-prescribed drugs."

In 2005, SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, in consultation with the recovery community and others, developed a definition of recovery, "Recovery from alcohol and drug problems is a process of change through which an individual achieves abstinence and improved health, wellness, and quality of life."

One of the important findings from Faces & Voices 2004 research conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. and Robert M. Teeter's Coldwater Corporation, was that the general public believes that the word recovery means that someone is trying to stop using alcohol or other drugs. Because of these findings, we urge SAMHSA to make sure that the public, researchers, policy makers and people seeking recovery understand that recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs means that an individual is no longer using alcohol or other drugs.

In addition, the agency should consider a Faces & Voices recommendation made during the comment period to use the words "and/or" between the two health conditions that are being described.

We would be pleased to discuss these recommendations in greater detail. Until our concerns are addressed by SAMHSA, we will be unable to adopt and disseminate this definition broadly.

January 12, 2012

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