



Substance  
Misuse  
Limestone  
Coast

Global Problems, Local Solutions



Limestone Coast  
Local Government  
Association

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## Rethink your language around AOD use: SMLC

“Think about language, not labels” is the message from Substance Misuse Limestone Coast (SMLC) after a recent social media post garnered stigmatising comments around drug and alcohol use.

A survey shared on social media by the Limestone Coast Drug Action Team about a “memory tree” for local people to have a place for reflection and remembrance was meant to gather community feedback, but instead brought out some harmful and negative labels, said SMLC Project Officer Sophie Bouchier.

“Events like International Overdose Awareness Day are designed to start a conversation in the community around overdose prevention but for some, it kickstarted the wrong conversation,” Ms Bouchier said.

“It’s disappointing, but not surprising that this happened. Labelling terms such as “junkie” and “addict” are still used in some media outlets and of course, people are going to copy and use those terms thinking that’s okay. It’s not okay.”

“Labels are for food packaging. People should not be defined by their substance use. Labelling someone by their AOD use is demoralising and stigmatising and means people may be less likely to ask for help or seek out treatment options.

“The right words have the power to reduce stigma and improve health outcomes.”

Instead of using labelling language, Ms Bouchier suggested using “someone who uses drugs” or “person with lived experience of drug dependence”.

The World Health Organisation ranks drug dependence as the most stigmatised health condition globally, with alcohol dependence ranked number four.

Ms Bouchier said there were plenty of good resources out there for people who wished to inform themselves about the correct language.

“The Power of Words” by the ADF is a great resource and easily available online,” she said. “It contains evidence-based advice on using non-stigmatising language and alternative words and phrases to use in everyday conversations.

“There’s a real power in language and by focusing on people, rather than their use of alcohol and other drugs, and choosing words that are inclusive, everyone can help reduce the impact of stigma.”

The [Power of Words](#) is available on the ADF website.

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