Just about all of us know someone struggling with addiction, whether we realize it or not. Opioid and other substance use disorders can affect anyone, but addiction doesn’t define who someone is. All too often, our family members, friends and neighbors in Berks County suffer in silence. Fear of being judged and outcast prevents them from seeking treatment.

Your support makes a difference. Words of encouragement, hope and support break through the negative perceptions that prevent people from seeking help.

SOSBerks.com/Addiction

“Eleven years ago, I hit rock-bottom. After 20 years of actively using drugs and experiencing all of the judgement that comes with it – low self-esteem, feelings of being ‘less-than’ – my family led me to seek treatment. I cannot express in words how my life has changed for the better since being in recovery. I have a life today.”

– Kristin S.

“Someone told me very early in recovery to write down everything you want in life and, if you get five years clean, you will have short-changed yourself. Nine years later, I am employed, married, living in my own home and providing for myself and others. Don’t give up, don’t ever give up. This is what recovery does.”

–Daniel M.

Paid for with Pennsylvania Taxpayer Dollars.
**What is stigma?**
Stigma is defined as a set of negative beliefs that a group or society holds about a topic or group of people. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), stigma is a major cause of discrimination and exclusion and it contributes to the abuse of human rights. When a person experiences stigma they are seen as less than because of their real or perceived health status. Stigma is rarely based on facts but rather on assumptions, preconceptions, and generalizations; therefore, its negative impact can be prevented or lessened through education.

**How does stigma affect addiction treatment?**
According to the WHO, stigma results in prejudice, avoidance, rejection, and discrimination against people who have a socially undesirable trait or engage in culturally marginalized behaviors, such as drug use. Stigma not only impacts an individual's self-esteem and mental health, it can also reduce their willingness to attend treatment facilities or seek care for their substance use, abuse and addiction.

**What can you do to help reduce stigma?**
In order to encourage people to reach out for help and get on the path to recovery, it is important to reduce the stigma surrounding their situation. Educational programs and modeling of non-stigmatizing behavior can help people provide nonjudgmental, empathic support. Learning more about the science behind addiction can help people gain greater understanding about the disease of addiction and stamp out these offensive labels that are demeaning and derogatory.

**Addiction is a disease (ama.org)**
Some people think addiction cannot be a disease because it is caused by the individual's choice to use drugs or alcohol. While the first use (or early stage use) may be a choice, once the brain has been changed by addiction, experts have found that a person loses control of their behavior. When this change happens, substance use is no longer an option, but becomes a physiological need such as eating and sleeping. Addiction is defined as a disease by medical associations, including the American Medical Association and the American Society of Addiction Medicine.

**Words to Avoid/Words to Use**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Addict/Alcoholic</th>
<th>Person with an addiction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drug Abuser/ Junkie</td>
<td>Person with unhealthy or harmful substance use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dirty/Clean Drug Screening</td>
<td>Positive or Negative drug screening</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By using person-first language like this, we can make great progress toward reducing the deadly stigma associated with addiction.

**Positive Responses to Negative Statements**

- **“Well, it’s their choice to use.”**
  Addiction is not a choice, addiction is a disease.

- **“A person should only be revived from Narcan® a few times, and then be left to die.”**
  We don’t neglect care for those with other diseases that need repeated medication attention. Why is addiction any different?

- **“Narcan just enables people to keep using.”**
  Narcan enables people to continue living and gives them the opportunity to enter treatment and recovery.

- **“Using MAT isn’t real recovery.”**
  Everyone’s treatment for their addiction and their pathway to recovery is different. The combination of medication and behavioral modification therapy are shown to be superior to therapy alone.

- **“She has already been to treatment four times. Don’t you think it’s not working?”**
  Because someone has entered treatment multiple times, does not speak to the fact that the treatment does not work. This speaks to the aggressive and severe forms that addiction can take. Just like someone who has to enter cancer treatments many times, and sometimes still relapses, often an individual with an addiction must do the same.