

# **WHY MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS MORE INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION**

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Mental health is a state of emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. Awareness about mental health and its impact on communities is increasing. Conversations are highlighting communication gaps, stigma, and misunderstandings surrounding mental health. Various campaigns are recognising the importance of inclusive communication. This kind of communication improves mental health outcomes, reduces stigma, and empowers communities

## **The Problem with Traditional Mental Health Communication**

Many mental health messages are out of date. They rely on stigmatising language, technical jargon, and complexity, which build barriers between healthcare providers, patients, caregivers, and communities.

- Medical jargon: Specific language and expressions used by healthcare professionals. These terms are familiar to providers but can be confusing for patients and caregivers. For example, terms like "affective disorder" are accurate but can be unclear.
- Stigmatising language: Stigma involves negative perceptions or labels related to mental health conditions. Phrases such as "suffering from" or "mentally ill" reinforce negative stereotypes and portray individuals as helpless or broken.
- Cultural insensitivity: Despite diverse cultural experiences with mental health, communication often overlooks these differences, leading to mistrust or misinterpretation.
- Neglecting neurodiversity and disability perspectives: We exclude people with autism, ADHD, or cognitive disabilities from mental health discussions.

## **What is Inclusive Communication?**

Inclusive communication is not only about being respectful and transparent but also about empowering others. It prioritises the person over the condition and adapts to diverse needs and experiences.

- Person-first language is a powerful tool in inclusive communication. It focuses on the individual, not the condition. Instead of "a depressed person," you say "a person living with depression." This approach affirms the person's identity beyond their diagnosis. It demonstrates respect and understanding. Person-first language humanises individuals and prevents defining them solely by their condition. It helps them feel valued and appreciated.

- Plain language is vital for inclusive communication. It uses everyday words to explain complex ideas, making information more accessible. Instead of using the term "comorbidities," you can say "other health conditions." Instead of technical terms like "psychosis," you can say "losing touch with reality." This approach ensures everyone understands the information, helping them feel included and considered.
- Culturally responsive messaging involves recognising different cultural beliefs, languages, and values. For example, some communities prefer terms like "emotional well-being" over "mental illness."
- A trauma-informed tone aims to avoid triggering language and to respect emotional safety. It uses gentle phrases like "you're not alone" or "many people feel this way." By adopting this tone, you create a more supportive and understanding environment. This environment is vital for mental health.
- Visual formats such as infographics and videos make information more accessible for people with low literacy or language barriers.

## **Real-World Impact of Inclusive Communication**

Inclusive communication is not only idealistic; it is evidence. A 2023 study published in Psychiatric Services found that person-first, respectful language improves therapeutic relationships and encourages help-seeking behaviour [PubMed ID: 37023230]. Patients who feel respected are more likely to engage in treatment, share their concerns, and follow care plans.

Inclusive messaging also reduces stigma within communities, especially among groups like Indigenous populations. When individuals see themselves reflected in health communication, they are more likely to trust it.

## **Practical Tips for Health Communicators**

Here are ways to make your communication more inclusive:

- Review your language by checking materials for bias, jargon, or exclusion.
- Work with diverse voices, including patients, advocates, and cultural advisors. Their views are valuable in developing inclusive communication.
- Use readability tools to ensure your writing remains clear and accessible.
- Set up feedback mechanisms by asking for input and making changes based on real-world experiences.

## **Conclusion**

Mental health communication should empower rather than divide. Use inclusive language to reduce stigma, foster trust, and build a more caring society. Whether you're creating a patient handout or having a chat, your words matter.

Let's make sure they have an impact.

## References

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