

# Pathways to Care for People Facing Substance Use Stigma



## Equipping health care to tackle discrimination and inequity

The main goal of the Pathways project is to improve care by reducing the substance use stigma and discrimination that people face in health care settings. We provide:



### Guidance:

To health providers and organizations for how best to serve the diversity of people who may experience substance use discrimination.



### Resources and E-Learning:

A curriculum to support health care providers to better understand and reduce discrimination regarding substance use and related issues, such as trauma and violence.



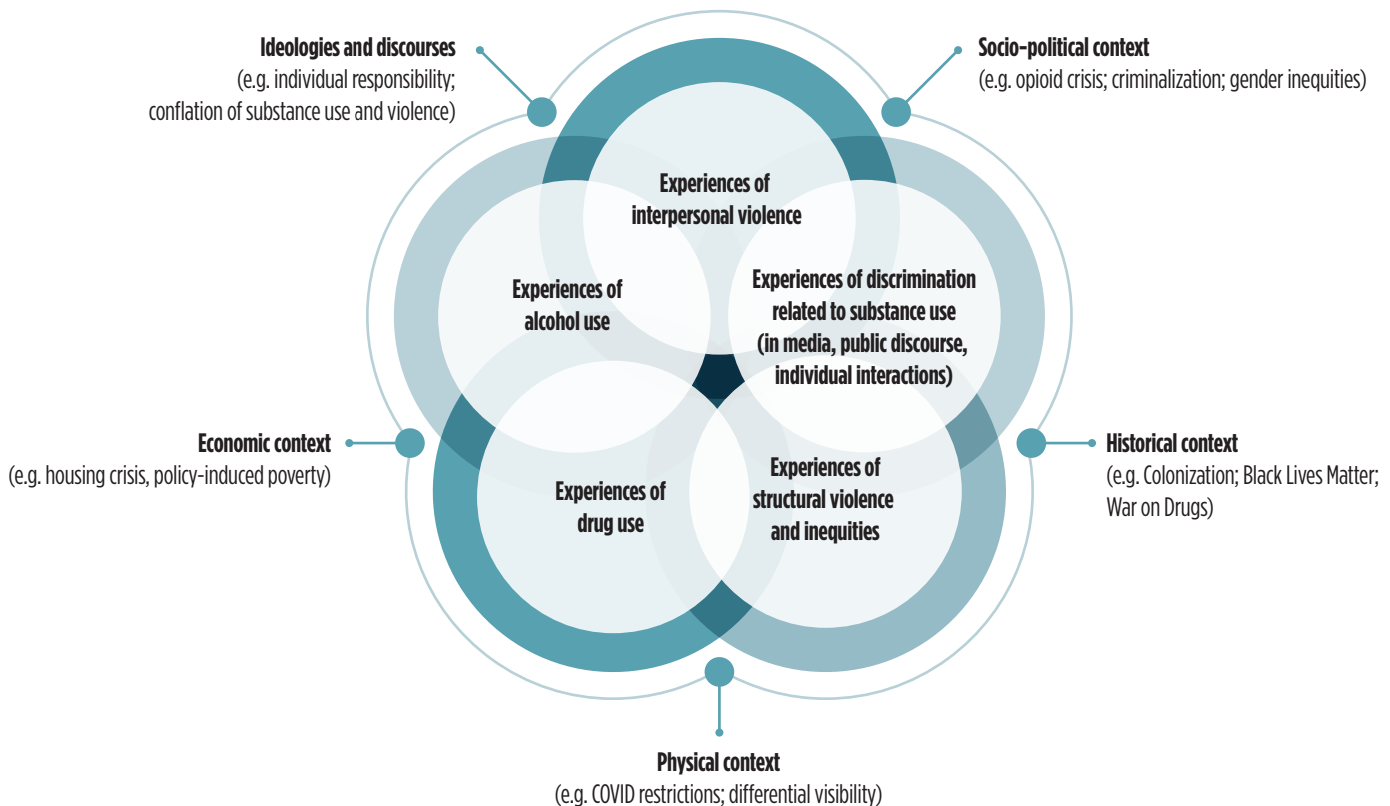
### Strategies:

To help providers and organizations put resources into action, including a start-up kit and supportive webinars and activities.

**Substance use is complex, with most people in society using some form of substance or another.**

People use different substances, in different ways, and for different reasons, and are stigmatized differently depending on their circumstances, social status and position. For example, people who use substances and experience poverty or homelessness are subject to more stigma, surveillance and mistreatment within health care, policing and legal sectors than people whose substance use is either less visible or viewed as socially acceptable. People who have experienced violence and trauma, and the physical and emotional pain related to these experiences, are often more stigmatized than others. Because trauma, violence and chronic pain are often intertwined with substance use and mental health, substance use discrimination is closely related to mental health stigma, adding another potential layer of discrimination. People are judged and treated differently, even among those using the same substance – and some people are negatively judged and stigmatized even when they don't use substances.

## DIFFERENTIAL EXPERIENCES OF HARM

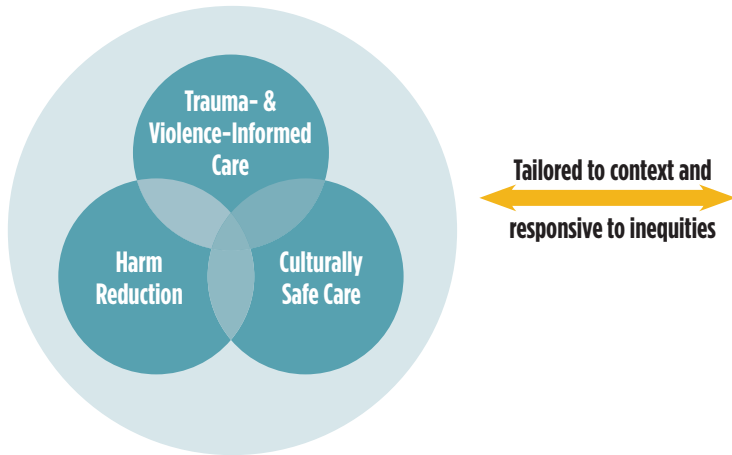


**Stigma and discrimination associated with substance use, known as substance use stigma (SUS) contributes directly to significant harms and barriers to care. Because of the pervasiveness of negative attitudes towards people with substance use issues, many people are negatively judged and treated in dismissive, disrespectful or discriminatory ways in health care settings.**

These kinds of responses to substance use contribute to inequities in health and health care – inequities that are more likely to affect people living in poverty, those who are criminalized for their substance use, and those who experience racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. Lack of service provider knowledge about how best to respond when working with people who are actively using, myths about who is drug seeking, limited services (ranging from safe use services to drug checking and treatment), and harmful policies can deepen inequities and cause people harm.

The Pathways project is founded on EQUIP Health Care, an evidence-based approach to enhancing equity-oriented health care (EOHC). EQUIP uses three key dimensions of EOHC operationalized in 10 strategies. The EQUIP Tool Kit and Equipping for Equity Modules are freely available to support implementation efforts, and through this project will be adapted to be optimally relevant for counteracting substance use discrimination.

### Key Dimensions of Equity-Oriented Care

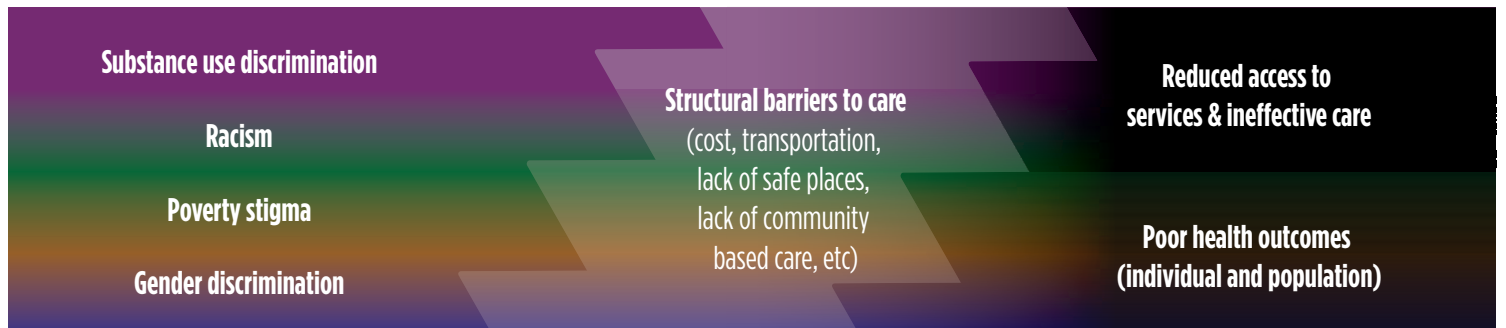


### 10 Strategies for Equity-Oriented Health Care

1. Explicitly commit to equity
2. Develop supportive organizational structures, policies, and processes
3. Re-vision the use of time
4. Attend to power differentials
5. Tailor care, programs and services to local contexts
6. Actively counter racism and discrimination
7. Promote meaningful community and patient engagement
8. Tailor care to address inter-related forms of violence
9. Enhance access to the social determinants of health
10. Optimize use of place and space

This project will enhance the existing EQUIP materials to deepen attention to SUS and strategies to reduce harms. A key focus is to promote trauma- and violence- informed care, and cultural safety in tandem with reducing SUS, especially the fundamental relationship between trauma, violence, chronic pain and substance use. The project will help providers and organizations shift thinking from “what’s wrong with this person?” to “what’s happened, and is still happening, to this person, and how can I help?”; and “what can my organization do better to convey respect to people who use substances, to ensure people are treated with dignity, and to counteract or eliminate the SUS that people often experience?”.

### Substance use discrimination intersects with other forms of discrimination and structural barriers to shape health and quality of life



### Responding to this problem through an equity lens, we plan the following project deliverables:



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We are working to co-develop resources with people with lived experience of substance use stigma and diverse health care partners, including:

