

Revising IP #1 Who, What, How, and Why

Following this introduction is a draft of a gender-neutral version of IP #1. As you will read below, the World Service Conference (WSC) made a decision to release this draft for Fellowship review so that members can respond to a concrete example of what gender-neutral language in NA literature looks like. WSC 2026 was made up of 261 delegates, alternates, and World Board members from 48 countries, speaking 31 languages.

Background:

In our most recent *Membership Survey*, 83 percent of members listed “identification” as a major reason they kept coming back to Narcotics Anonymous. The *Who, What, Why, and How* readings that open so many NA meetings often form a newcomer’s first impression of NA and can make or break that sense of identification. For years, NA groups have been asking for more gender-inclusive versions of these readings, defining an addict not as “a man or a woman” but more broadly as “a person.” It is clear that the gender-specific language in our older literature alienates some members and potential members.

A motion addressing this topic appeared in the 2020 *CAR* but was not taken up at WSC 2020 due to limitations imposed by the pandemic. In 2023, the WSC passed Motion 14: “*To direct the World Board to create a project plan for consideration at the next WSC to investigate changes and/or additional wording to NA literature from gender specific language to gender neutral and inclusive language.*” Since the passage of that motion, the Fellowship has discussed this issue from seemingly every angle: as a component of the NAWS Collaborative Plan, as an Issue Discussion Topic (IDT), and as a discussion question and *CAR* Survey option in the 2026 *CAR*.

This cycle was the first in which all conference participants worked together to create the [Collaborative Plan](#). Over many web meetings, they identified key goals for the coming cycle, along with potential solutions. One of these goals (Goal 7) is to “*Raise the level of consciousness regarding inclusiveness in our diverse Fellowship, and develop tools to support groups in ensuring that all members and potential members feel safe, welcome, and included at in-person and virtual meetings.*” As one potential solution, conference participants suggested “*Investigate changes and/or additional wording to NA literature from gender-specific language to gender-neutral and inclusive language.*”

While conference participants were hashing out the collaborative plan, the Fellowship was engaging with the cycle’s IDTs, including “Gender Neutral Language in NA Literature.” Over 5,500 NA members took the opportunity to share their perspectives through the survey posted on na.org. Although more than half of the Fellowship felt that changing the literature to be more inclusive would have a positive effect, many others had concerns about diluting the NA message, and there was considerable confusion about what kind of changes were being considered.

Gender-neutral language is a big umbrella. On the one hand, there are the gendered words we use to describe our members and potential members (e.g., “a society of men and women”). On the other hand, there are the gendered words we use to describe God in our Steps and Traditions and elsewhere. Based on the IDT survey input, the World Board decided that, for WSC 2026, we would focus *only on the language used to describe our members and potential members*. The *CAR* posed a new survey question:

Given that we all want to provide a safe, welcoming, inclusive Fellowship where everyone can recover (regardless of . . .), are we willing to explore these types of changes in our literature in order to carry the message more effectively? If not, why not? Of over 4,000 responses, mostly from members, 78 percent were willing to explore gender-neutral revisions to how our literature describes human beings.

Did you know that any Fellowship-approved literature can be read at an NA meeting? Instead of the conventional reading cards, some groups have shared other (unaltered) excerpts from NA texts that happen to be gender neutral. We have collected these ideas for other groups that wish to make their group readings more inclusive. Find them at na.org/gender or email yours to wb@na.org.

At WSC 2026, conference participants discussed this issue at length in small breakout groups. The small groups were asked: *Are we ready to move forward creating review drafts of literature (to be moved through the normal literature review process)? If you do not believe we are ready, what do you think are the next steps in this discussion (how should we focus discussion on this topic this cycle or what more information would we need)? If yes, how we can support you in your role as delegate in moving this issue forward?*

Discussions at the conference were productive. Although not all the small groups were able to come to a consensus, the majority of participants were willing to move forward with some kind of review draft. Something we heard repeated in different rooms is that people still weren't completely clear on what this type of inclusive language might look like—the parameters of this stage of these proposed revisions. Some said that they and/or their regions needed to see a draft in order to make an informed decision.

The conference's decision to start with IP #1 was a natural outgrowth of this conversation. IP #1 is always the first piece of literature that gets translated into a new language. It also contains the common group readings *Who Is An Addict*, *What is the NA Program*, and *Why Are We Here*, which are so formative to addicts' sense of belonging in NA. The four suggested revisions are shown in the table below in bold:

Who is an addict?	"an addict is a man or a woman"	"an addict is a person "
What is the Narcotics Anonymous program?	"fellowship or society of men and women"	"fellowship or society of people "
What...	"regardless of age, race, sexual identity, creed, religion, or lack of religion"	"regardless of age, race, gender , sexual identity, creed, religion, or lack of religion"
Why are we here?	"ahead of our families, our wives, husbands and our children."	"ahead of our families and loved ones. "

We believe these four simple changes will help make our program more attractive and welcoming to the addict who still suffers without taking anything away from the NA message that has kept so many of us clean for decades. Updating our recovery literature is something we undertake each World Service Conference, and we want to make sure everyone is able to see themselves in our literature.

We know many members also feel strongly about gender-neutral language when referring to a Higher Power. Because this includes the language of our Steps and Traditions, it would be a more complicated undertaking. We are first tackling the language describing people because the process to make these changes is simpler and discussions so far seem to indicate that building consensus around these changes may be easier.

Next Steps:

This draft will go through the standard process for literature development: Fellowship feedback collected during this review and input period will guide the next steps. Depending on how the draft of IP #1 is received, we might be able to look at making similar revisions in other pieces of literature. Decisions about next steps will be made by the World Board in consultation with conference participants. Final decisions about approval or revisions of NA literature are always made by the Fellowship through decision items in the *CAR*.

Please use the online form posted at na.org/survey to provide input. This draft is posted for review until the end of October 2026.

Questions to Consider:

1. Do you object to any of these four changes? Y/N
2. Why or why not?
3. Is there anything you believe should be worded differently? / Did we miss anything?
Y/N
4. If yes, explain:

Who, What, How, and Why

Who is an addict?

Most of us do not have to think twice about this question. *We know!* Our whole life and thinking was centered in drugs in one form or another—the getting and using and finding ways and means to get more. We lived to use and used to live. Very simply, an addict is a ~~man or a woman~~ person whose life is controlled by drugs. We are people in the grip of a continuing and progressive illness whose ends are always the same: jails, institutions, and death.

What is the Narcotics Anonymous program?

NA is a nonprofit fellowship or society of ~~men and women~~ people for whom drugs had become a major problem. We are recovering addicts who meet regularly to help each other stay clean.

This is a program of complete abstinence from all drugs. There is only one requirement for membership, the desire to stop using. We suggest that you keep an open mind and give yourself a break. Our program is a set of principles written so simply that we can follow them in our daily lives. The most important thing about them is that they work.

There are no strings attached to NA. We are not affiliated with any other organizations. We have no initiation fees or dues, no pledges to sign, no promises to make to anyone. We are not connected with any political, religious, or law enforcement groups, and are under no surveillance at any time. Anyone may join us, regardless of age, race, ~~gender~~, sexual identity, creed, religion, or lack of religion.

We are not interested in what or how much you used or who your connections were, what you have done in the past, how much or how little you have, but only in what you want to do about your problem and how we can help. The newcomer is the most important person at any meeting, because we can only keep what we have by giving it away. We have learned from our group experience that those who keep coming to our meetings regularly stay clean.

Why are we here?

Before coming to the Fellowship of NA, we could not manage our own lives. We could not live and enjoy life as other people do. We had to have something different and we thought we had found it in drugs. We placed their use ahead of the welfare of our families ~~and loved ones, our wives, husbands, and our children~~. We had to have drugs at all costs. We did many people great harm, but most of all we harmed ourselves. Through our inability to

accept personal responsibilities we were actually creating our own problems. We seemed to be incapable of facing life on its own terms.

Most of us realized that in our addiction we were slowly committing suicide, but addiction is such a cunning enemy of life that we had lost the power to do anything about it. Many of us ended up in jail, or sought help through medicine, religion, and psychiatry. None of these methods was sufficient for us. Our disease always resurfaced or continued to progress until, in desperation, we sought help from each other in Narcotics Anonymous.

After coming to NA we realized we were sick people. We suffered from a disease from which there is no known cure. It can, however, be arrested at some point, and recovery is then possible.

How it works

If you want what we have to offer, and are willing to make the effort to get it, then you are ready to take certain steps. These are the principles that made our recovery possible.

1. We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

11. We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

This sounds like a big order, and we can't do it all at once. We didn't become addicted in one day, so remember—*easy does it*.

There is one thing more than anything else that will defeat us in our recovery; this is an attitude of indifference or intolerance toward spiritual principles. Three of these that are indispensable are honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness. With these we are well on our way.

We feel that our approach to the disease of addiction is completely realistic, for the therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel. We feel that our way is practical, for one addict can best understand and help another addict. We believe that the sooner we face our problems within our society, in everyday living, just that much faster do we become acceptable, responsible, and productive members of that society.

The only way to keep from returning to active addiction is not to take that first drug. If you are like us you know that one is too many and a thousand never enough. We put great emphasis on this, for we know that when we use drugs in any form, or substitute one for another, we release our addiction all over again.

Thinking of alcohol as different from other drugs has caused a great many addicts to relapse. Before we came to NA, many of us viewed alcohol separately, but we cannot afford to be confused about this. Alcohol is a drug. We are people with the disease of addiction who must abstain from all drugs in order to recover.

The Twelve Traditions of NA

We keep what we have only with vigilance, and just as freedom for the individual comes from the Twelve Steps, so freedom for the group springs from our traditions.

As long as the ties that bind us together are stronger than those that would tear us apart, all will be well.

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on NA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

3. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or NA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry the message to the addict who still suffers.
6. An NA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the NA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, or prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every NA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Narcotics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. NA, as such, ought never be organized, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Narcotics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the NA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.