

TACKLING DRUG STIGMA IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

A tool for talking about drugs and tackling stigma

Greater Glasgow & Clyde
Drug **Stigma** Action Group

Drug stigma conversation cards

These cards are designed to help you talk openly about drug stigma, challenge assumptions and reflect in a safe and respectful way.

Prior to using this resource, you are encouraged to review the 'Tackling Drug Stigma Is Everyone's Business' framing document.

Each conversation card links to the framing document, where you can explore more information to help inform your discussions.

The toolkit also includes five short films that share individual experiences of drug stigma and its impact. These films can be shown alongside the use of the conversation cards to encourage further discussion.

The framing document, films and wider toolkit can be accessed here:

Tackling Drug Stigma is Everyone's Business - NHSGGC

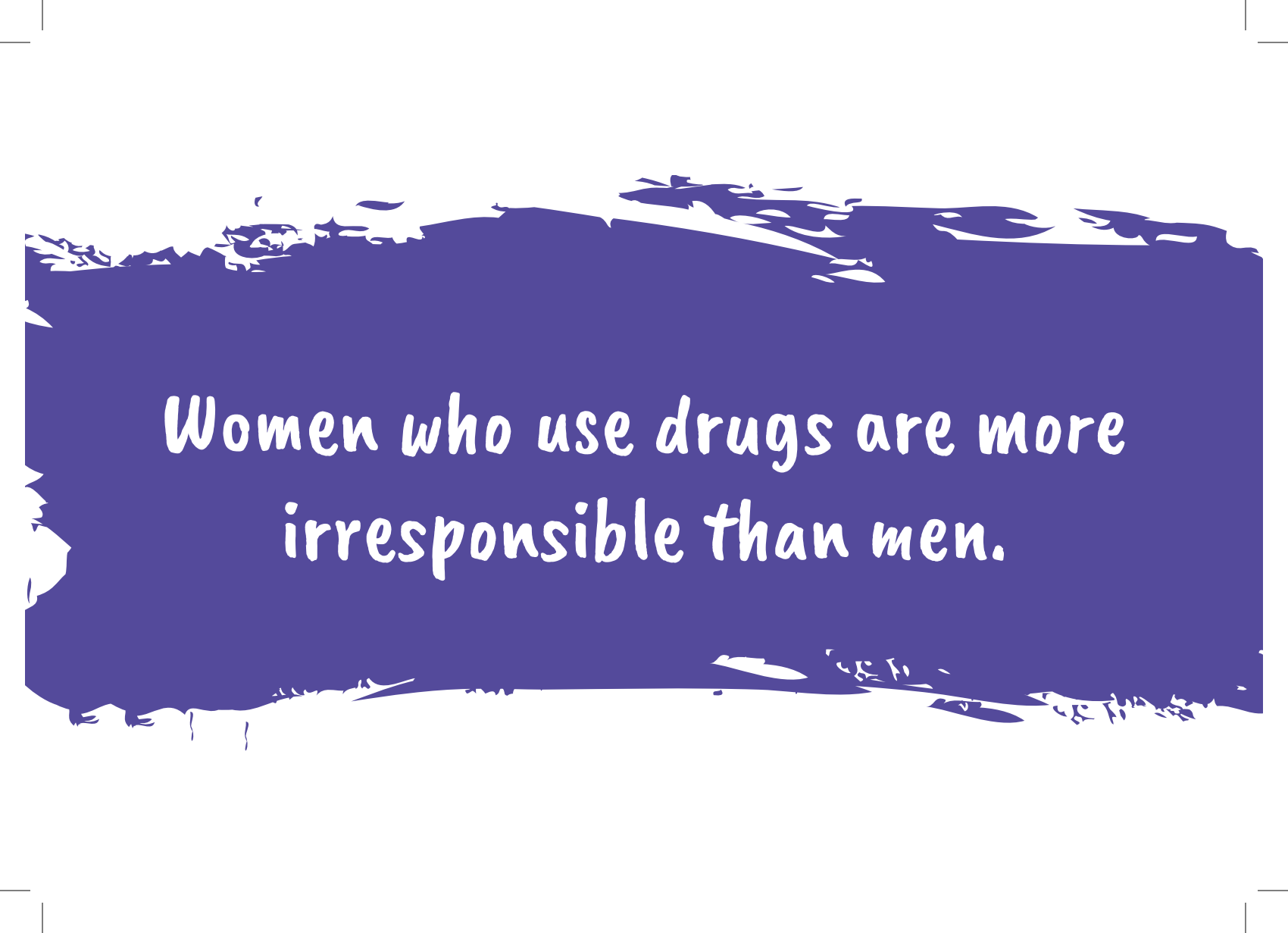


How to use:

Choose one card and read the statement, share thoughts, reactions and impact of the statement.

Turn the card over and read the key information and reflect what action could be taken to tackle stigma in relation to each of the statements.

Remember: Be respectful and focus on learning, not blame.

A torn piece of yellow paper with a black border. The paper has a rough, deckled edge and a slightly textured appearance. The text is written in a white, cursive-style font.

Women who use drugs are more
irresponsible than men.

Blame is not constructive

Rather than being less responsible, many women are managing complex circumstances with very limited support.

Stigma like this can stop women getting the help they need and increase harm rather than reduce it.

Women face gendered stigma, often judged more harshly because of expectations about motherhood and caregiving.

Fear of judgement or child removal leads many women to avoid healthcare and substance use services, including maternity care.

What action could you take to tackle stigma in relation to this statement?



*If someone relapses,
their recovery has failed.*

Stigma is a barrier to good health and quality of life

Recovery is not a straight line. Relapse does not mean recovery has failed, it is a process rather than a single event and setbacks can be part of long-term change.

When relapse is treated as failure, or met with punishing responses, it increases self-stigma, shame and disengagement from services, which in turn raises the risk of harm and overdose.

A compassionate response that focuses on safety, learning and support is much more likely to help someone continue their recovery journey.

What action could you take to tackle stigma in relation to this statement?

A horizontal strip of paper with a blue background and white text, appearing to be torn from a larger sheet. The edges are irregular and ragged, with some white paper visible underneath. The text is written in a white, cursive-style font.

Everyone in prison uses drugs.

Everyone Knows someone

It's important to recognise that not everyone in prison uses drugs. Many people in prison have experienced trauma, poverty, or limited access to support, which can influence drug use.

Engagement improves when services are non-judgemental and coordinated.

Drug related death risk is extremely high immediately post release.

What action could you take to tackle stigma in relation to this statement?

A graphic of a torn piece of paper with a blue background and white text. The paper has a rough, torn edge and is set against a white background.

Tackling drug stigma
is everyone's business.

There are things we can do to tackle Stigma

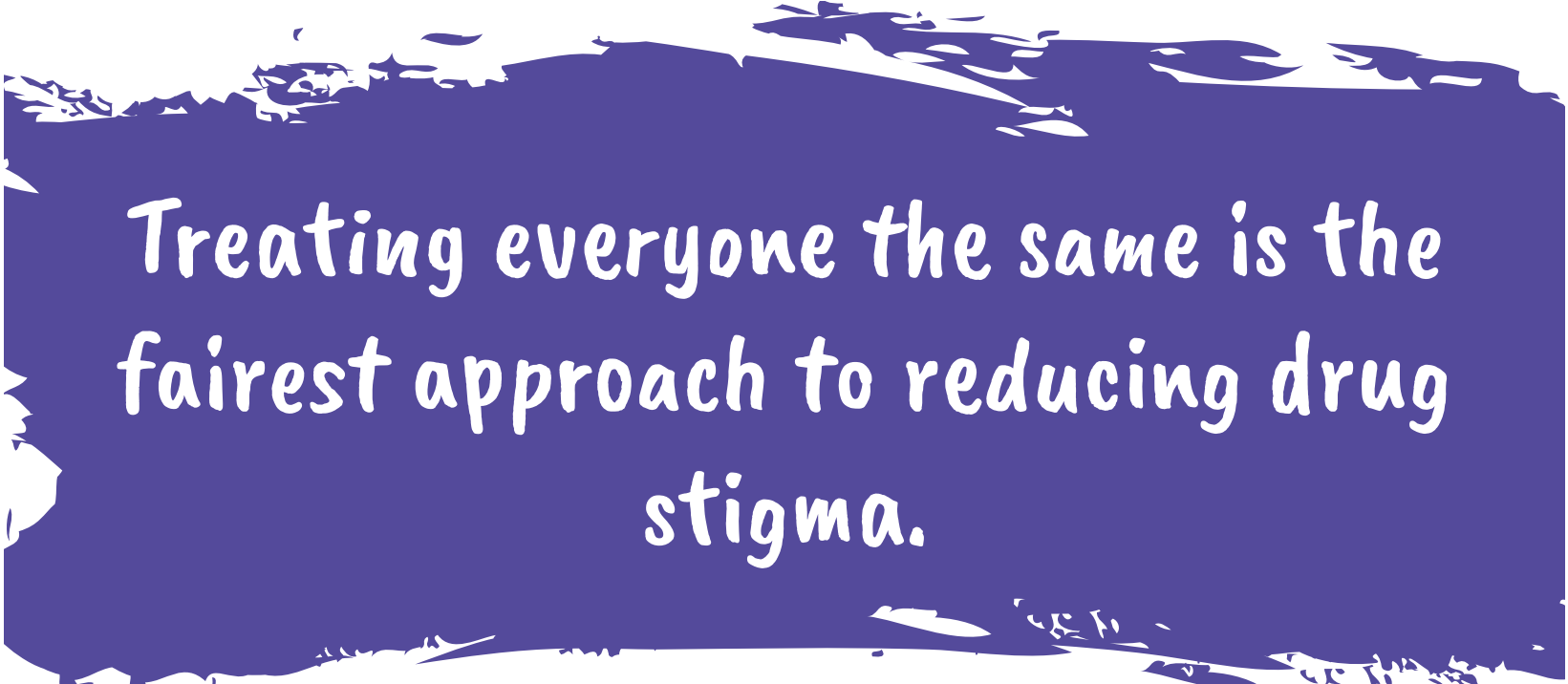
People with lived and living experience report that stigma can happen anywhere, such in the community, within social and healthcare settings and on the street.

If we all wait for 'someone else' to address it, nothing changes.

The way each of us speaks and behaves can either reinforce harm or help reduce it.

That is why tackling drug stigma is everyone's business.

What action could you take to tackle stigma in relation to this statement?

A dark blue banner with a torn, ragged edge effect, set against a white background. The banner contains white text in a casual, handwritten-style font.

Treating everyone the same is the
fairest approach to reducing drug
stigma.

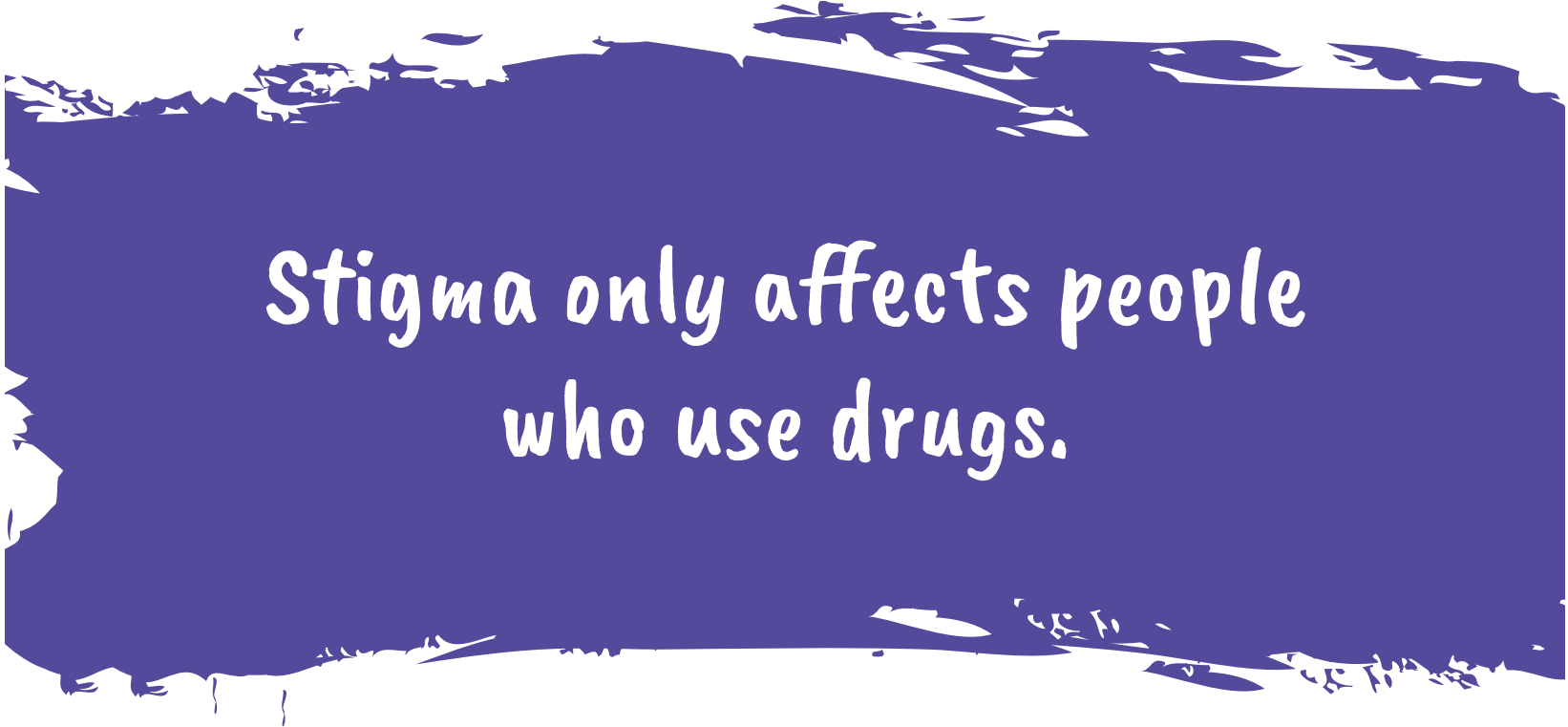
Tackling drug stigma is a human rights issue and reduces harm

Treating everyone the same might seem fair, but recognising the impact of drug stigma allows people to be treated with dignity and understanding.

People start from different places and face different barriers, so fairness often means responding to individual needs.

Person-centred care improves outcomes, reduces drug stigma and reduces harm.

What action could you take to tackle stigma in relation to this statement?



Stigma only affects people
who use drugs.

Stigma is a barrier to good health and quality of life

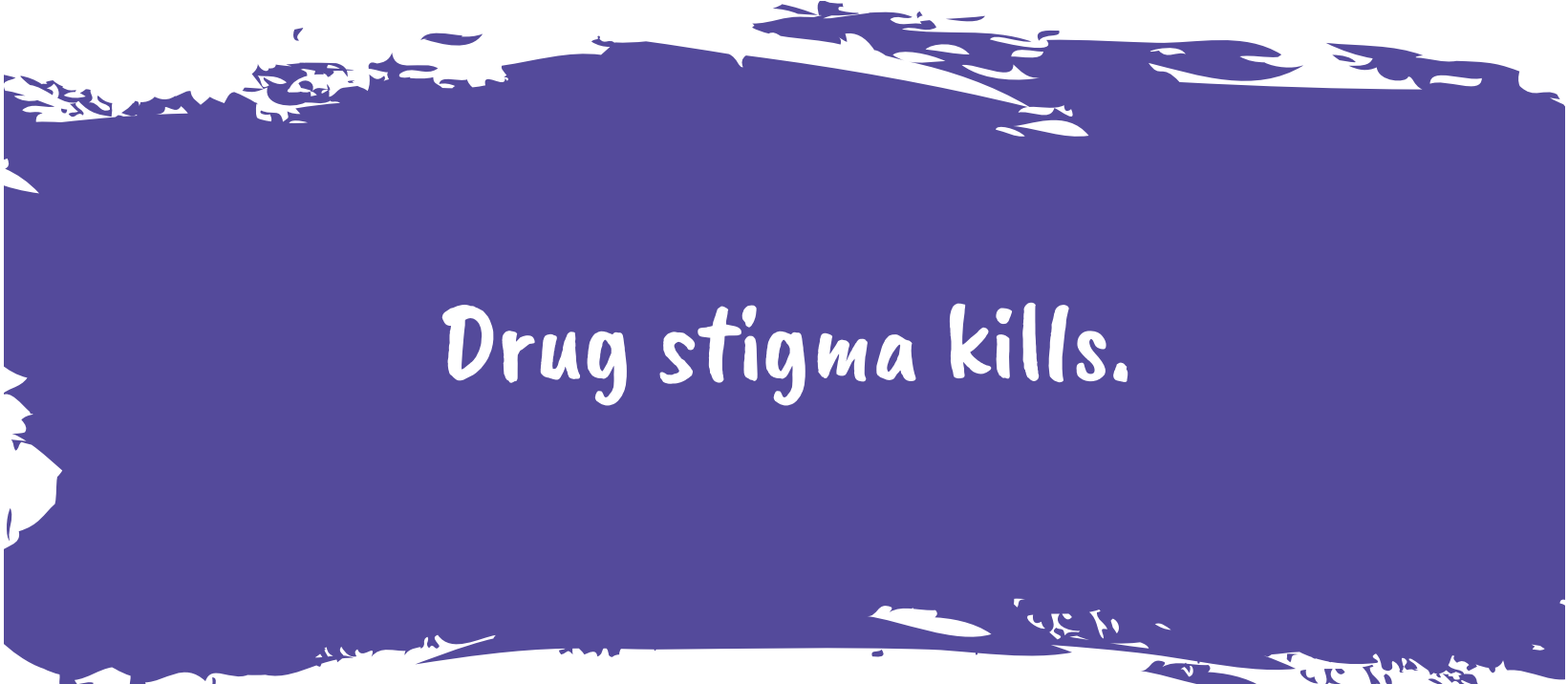
Stigma affects many people, including families, people in recovery, people with mental health issues, and those who have been in prison.

Drug stigma often extends beyond the person who uses drugs.

Families, children, workers, and communities experience stigma.

Stigma by association increases isolation and reduces support seeking.

What action could you take to tackle stigma in relation to this statement?



Drug stigma kills.

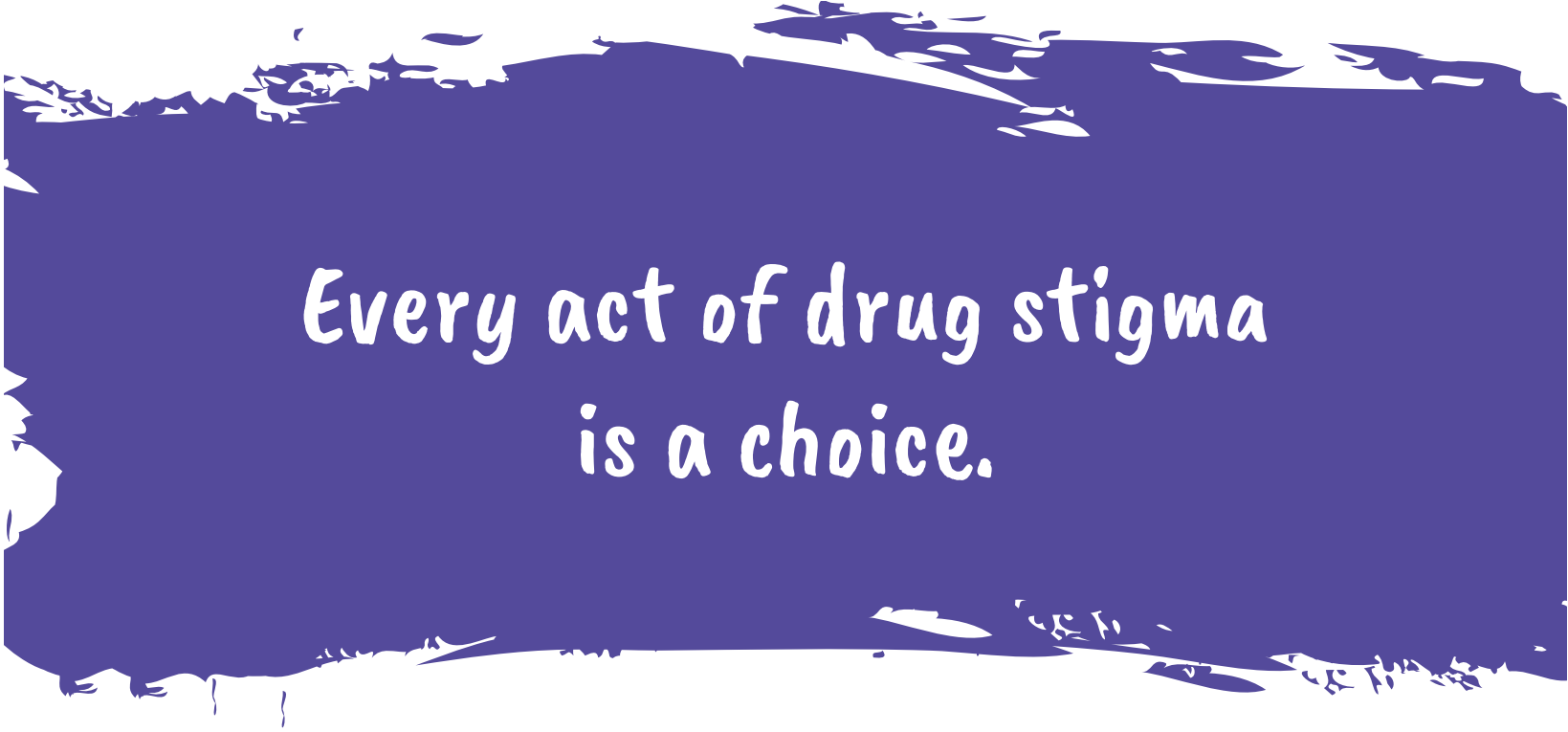
It's everyone's business to tackle drug stigma

Stigma is not inevitable, it is created through attitudes, language and systems, which means it can also be challenged.

Stigma may be common but accepting it as unavoidable allows harm to continue. History shows that stigma can and does change.

We might not eliminate stigma overnight, but we can reduce it through respectful language, inclusive services and fair policies.

What action could you take to tackle stigma in relation to this statement?



Every act of drug stigma
is a choice.

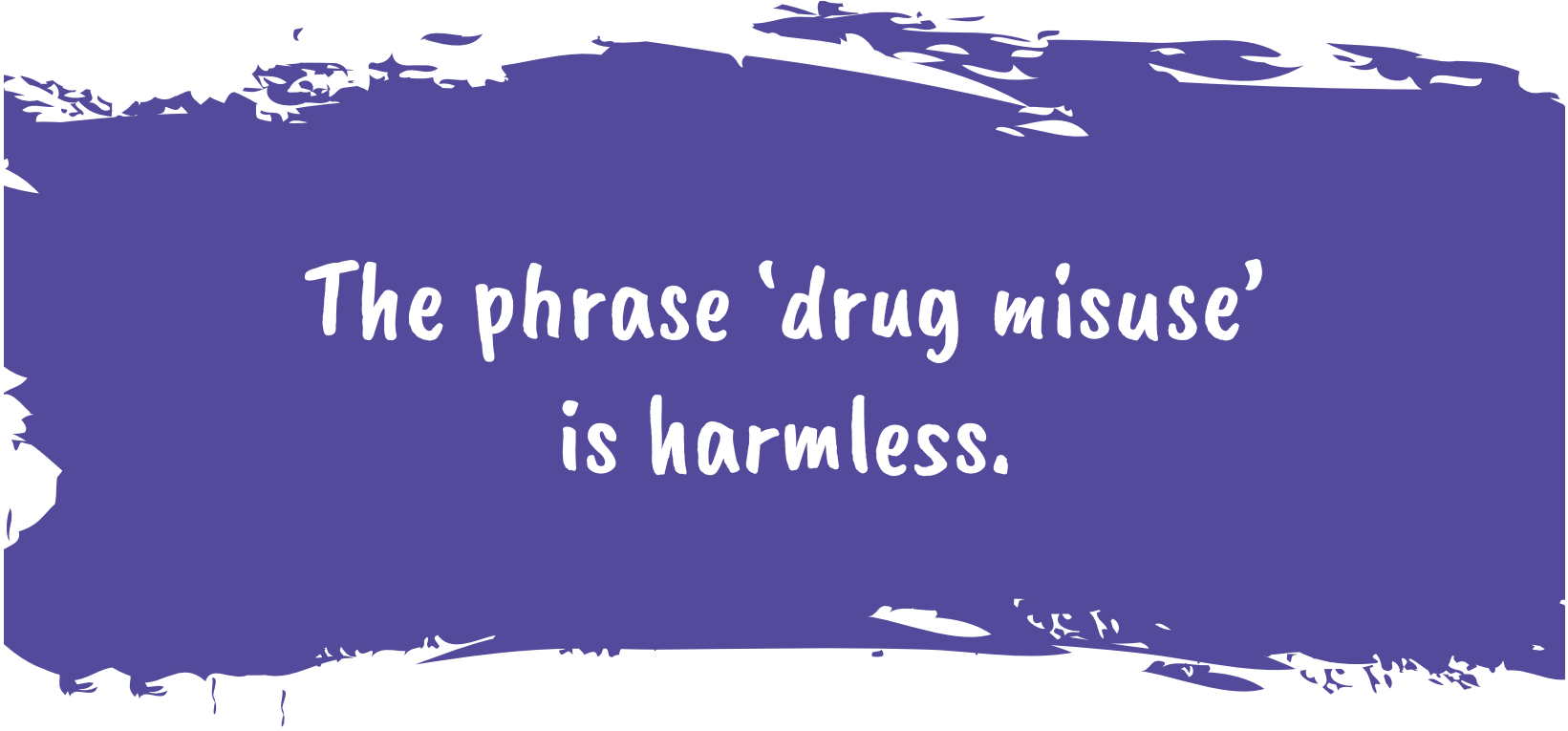
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What action could you take to tackle stigma in relation to this statement?

A torn piece of yellow paper with a black border, featuring the text "The phrase 'drug misuse' is harmless." in a black, handwritten-style font. The paper has a distressed, torn edge effect.

The phrase 'drug misuse'
is harmless.

It's everyone's business to tackle drug stigma

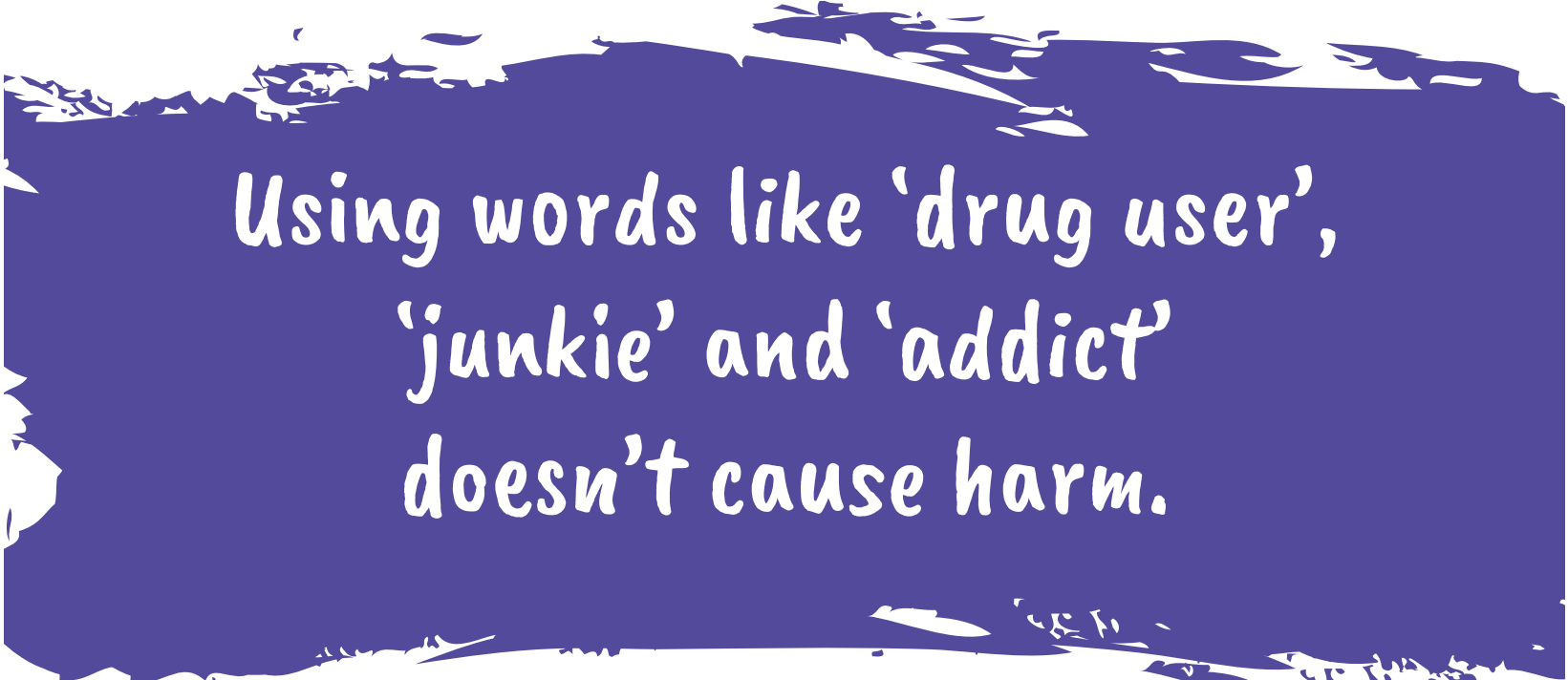
The term “misuse” carries an implicit judgement that drug use is morally wrong or irresponsible, rather than recognising the social, medical and structural factors that influence why people use drugs.

Many people use drugs including prescribed medication, in ways linked to pain, trauma, poverty or mental health challenges.

In healthcare, “drug misuse” has traditionally been used as a clinical term to describe: The use of a medication (prescribed or not) in a way that differs from medical guidance and may cause harm.

When services move away from judgement terms, engagement improves and people are more likely to speak openly about their needs.

What action could you take to tackle stigma in relation to this statement?

A dark blue, torn-edge rectangular piece of paper is centered on a white background. The paper has a rough, deckled border. On the paper, the text "Using words like 'drug user', 'junkie' and 'addict' doesn't cause harm." is written in a white, casual, handwritten-style font. The text is arranged in four lines, centered horizontally.

Using words like 'drug user',
'junkie' and 'addict'
doesn't cause harm.

It's everyone's business to tackle drug stigma

Language matters.

Some people find terms like these dehumanising, while others may experience it as empowering. At the same time, these labels can reduce a person to a single behaviour and reinforce shame, blame and negative stereotypes, sometimes implying that change or growth is not possible.

Sometimes people with lived and living experience may use language to describe themselves that others wouldn't. It's not our job to correct them. It's important we meet people where they are comfortable to communicate with us and we do so with dignity and respect.

Stigmatising language can discourage people from seeking help, increase isolation, and negatively affect how services respond to individuals.

What action could you take to tackle stigma in relation to this statement?