



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**New National Survey Finds Americans Increasingly View Addiction as a Health Issue and Recovery as Real—But Discrimination and System Gaps Persist**

**Washington, DC** — A new nationwide survey released today by **Faces & Voices of Recovery (FVR)** finds that public attitudes toward addiction and recovery have shifted dramatically over the past two decades, moving away from moral judgment and toward a public health understanding—while revealing persistent gaps in access, equity, and recovery support systems.

**Public Perceptions of Addiction and Recovery: A 20-Year Follow-Up to the Hart Benchmark (2004–2026)**, conducted in February 2026, revisits and updates a landmark 2004 national poll on addiction and recovery. The results show that Americans increasingly recognize addiction as a health issue, view recovery as real and achievable, and support recovery-oriented policy solutions—but also acknowledge ongoing stigma and systemic discrimination against people in recovery.

“America’s attitudes have changed in powerful ways,” said **Patty McCarthy, CEO of Faces & Voices of Recovery**. “People now understand that addiction is not a moral failing and that recovery is possible and sustainable. The challenge now is that our policies, systems, and institutions have not fully caught up with what the public already believes.”

**Key Findings Show a Major Cultural Shift**

The survey reveals that **behavioral health now dominates public concern**, with mental illness cited by a majority of respondents as a top national health issue and addiction rising to the center of public health priorities. Compared to 2004, concern about gaps in addiction treatment and mental health services has increased sharply, signaling growing recognition of systemic shortcomings rather than individual blame.

Public perceptions of recovery have also evolved significantly. Nearly half of respondents now believe that most people who seek treatment achieve lifelong recovery—up substantially from two decades ago. Definitions of recovery have shifted as well, with many more Americans describing recovery as a stable outcome rather than an ongoing struggle.

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Workplace attitudes reflect similar progress. Negative bias against hiring people in long-term recovery has been cut by more than half since 2004, while positive hiring perceptions have more than doubled. Past drug use is also far less disqualifying than it once was, suggesting meaningful reductions in stigma within employment settings.

### **Discrimination and Access Barriers Remain**

Despite these gains, the survey highlights ongoing challenges. A large majority of Americans say stigma toward people in recovery still exists, and nearly half recognize discrimination against people in recovery as a serious problem—particularly in employment and insurance coverage.

Access to care remains a central concern. The public increasingly identifies **lack of affordable, available treatment** as a major barrier to getting help, alongside fear of shame and social consequences. While support for recovery is growing, many respondents remain uncertain that communities have sufficient resources or that people know where to go for help.

### **Strong Support for Recovery-Oriented Policy Solutions**

The findings also show broad public support for policies that expand access to treatment and recovery supports. Large majorities favor requiring private insurance and Medicaid to cover addiction treatment and recovery services, investing in recovery support programs, and strengthening employment and job-training opportunities for people in recovery.

At the same time, respondents overwhelmingly oppose policies that would punish or exclude people in recovery, including laws that would deny government assistance based on recovery status.

“The public is sending a clear message,” McCarthy said. “People want solutions that support recovery, strengthen communities, and treat addiction like the health issue it is. This data gives policymakers, employers, and community leaders a mandate to act.”

### **Methodology**

**Public Perceptions of Addiction and Recovery: A 20-Year Follow-Up to the Hart Benchmark (2004–2026)** was conducted February 13–17, 2026 by Recovery Insights Lab in a mixed-mode survey of 846 likely voters nationwide (margin of error  $\pm 3.4$  percentage points). The study replicates and expands upon a 2004 national survey, allowing for a direct comparison of public attitudes toward addiction and recovery over a 22-year period.

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### **About Faces & Voices of Recovery**

Faces & Voices of Recovery is the leading national advocacy organization mobilizing the over 23 million Americans living in recovery from substance use disorder, as well as their families, friends, and allies. Faces & Voices works to advance recovery-ready policies, reduce stigma and discrimination, and elevate the voices of people with lived experience to build a nation where recovery is possible for everyone.

### **About Recovery Insights Lab**

Recovery Insights Lab partners with organizations to reach people that awareness, messaging, and standard research have missed. Working at the intersection of mental health and addiction, RIL delivers full-service research and strategic advisory — public opinion and market research, qualitative fieldwork, behavioral analysis, and messaging strategy — peer-led at every level by researchers, analysts, and consultants who have navigated treatment, mental health care, and recovery themselves, and alongside clients, friends, and family.

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### **Media Contact:**

Tim Sullivan / T3 Shamrock Media / [t3shamrock@gmail.com](mailto:t3shamrock@gmail.com) / 732-816-0239

### **Faces & Voices of Recovery Contact**

Patty McCarthy, Chief Executive Officer  
[pmccarthy@facesandvoicesofrecovery.org](mailto:pmccarthy@facesandvoicesofrecovery.org), 202-737-0692

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50 F St NW Ste 350 Washington, DC 20001 | [www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org](http://www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org)  
[info@facesandvoicesofrecovery.org](mailto:info@facesandvoicesofrecovery.org) | 202.737.0690