Share Your Voice Through Op-Eds and Online Articles

"I am a living testimony that you can make it through if you have faith and, in my case, family."

Jaquese Armstrong Edison, NJ

Empowerment

Courage

Education

Confidence

to wellness

join the voices for recovery

COE

On pathways



SHARE YOUR VOICE THROUGH OP-EDS AND ONLINE ARTICLES

People's opinions are often shaped by what they read in the media, whether in newspapers or online. The media is a powerful mechanism for spreading information, and placing an op-ed or bylined piece in a print or online media outlet can help raise awareness about **National Recovery Month (Recovery Month).** An op-ed, short for "opposite the editorial pages" of a newspaper, is a way to express opinions and perspectives on a certain subject or initiative. Writing about **Recovery Month** in any publication can promote understanding of mental and substance use disorders in your community, town, city, territory, or state.

This document includes helpful tips on how to write an op-ed or online article and how to submit it for publication.

Get Started...

The 2013 **Recovery Month** theme, "Join the Voices for Recovery: Together on Pathways to Wellness," represents the many ways people can prevent behavioral health issues, seek treatment, and sustain recovery as part of a commitment to living a mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually healthy life. The theme also highlights that people are not alone in this journey to seek total health every day. Family, friends, and community members can support individuals throughout the entire recovery process.

Think about this theme when you brainstorm ideas for your op-ed or online article. Also consider the purpose of **Recovery Month** – to spread the message that behavioral health is essential to overall health, prevention works, treatment is effective, and people recover.

To help you gain more attention, note that the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (http://www.samhsa.gov), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) (http://www.hhs.gov), sponsors the *Recovery Month* observance annually across the country.

Plan appropriately and start writing early to place your op-ed or opinion piece – either in print or online – during **Recovery Month** in September. Refer to the checklist below to stay on track:

- **Determine a clear and concise message:** A strong op-ed or online article makes a single point or argument persuasively in the beginning of the piece. Explain topics through simple messaging, so readers can stay focused and walk away with the main point.
- **Think current:** Make the subject of an op-ed or article timely and relevant to the general public. Consider tying your piece to a recent event or news story.
- **Personalize it:** Include a personal story to help readers easily connect with the message. Be sure to ask for permission before sharing someone's personal story.
- Locate statistics and facts: Validate all statements or opinions with hard facts. For example, if you want to note that mental and/or substance use disorders are common and more prevalent than one might think, include statistics on the prevalence to prove that statement. Resources provided later in this document offer a starting point for finding those statistics.



- **Think local:** Give the article a local angle to increase chances that a print or online outlet will publish the piece. Feature local residents in your op-ed or article, address recent local events, and include statistics that are specific to your city or state.
- **Keep it brief:** Op-ed or online articles should be between 400 and 750 words. Check with publications to determine specific limitations on word count or other requirements, such as deadlines and how they prefer to receive submissions.
- Identify the appropriate publication(s): Assess which publication is the best fit for a particular op-ed. A local newspaper might be ideal if the article focuses on community issues. If the article focuses on a broader, national issue, try a newspaper with a higher circulation. Remember that most publications will not publish op-eds that were already published in another outlet. For this reason, prioritize each outlet and select your top choices, followed by back-up options. Read examples of past op-eds to get a sense of what formats and topics appear to capture the publication's interest.
- **Create a relationship:** The best way to have your thoughts published or posted is to develop a relationship with the editor in advance. Always plan out what you want to say before contacting the publication. Provide background information about yourself, your organization, and **Recovery Month**, in addition to any local and state recovery issues.
- **Refer to the template:** Consult the sample op-ed at the end of this document to help initiate the writing process.

To gain additional attention for your op-ed, contact well-known organizations in the community and offer to co-write an op-ed or online article with them. An established partner might catch the eye of an editor and increase the chances that your op-ed is published. Refer to the "Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Resources" document in this toolkit to see organizations that you could collaborate with in your area.

Write...

Select a topic and statistics with a local angle to support your information about **Recovery Month** and its mission, along with this year's theme. Avoid controversial statements or imposing beliefs on others, but do take a clear position on the issue. Also, consider the publication's readers when writing an op-ed or online article, and think about what would catch their attention and create interest in **Recovery Month**.

Refer to the below tips when writing an op-ed or online article:

- Include an eye-catching title that emphasizes central messaging;
- Make it personal and include true stories to connect with readers;
- Clearly restate your main points at the end of the op-ed and issue a call to action;
- Avoid technical jargon and acronyms most newspapers are written at a fifth grade level; and
- Include your name, contact information, and a description of who you are and your qualifications at the end of the piece.



Personalize:

Refer to the resources below for facts to make an op-ed or online article more compelling:

- Single-State Agency (SSA) Directory
- SAMHSA's National Survey on Drug Use and Health (http://www.samhsa.gov/data/NSDUH.aspx)
- SAMHSA's Recovery Statement (http://blog.samhsa.gov/2012/03/23/defintion-of-recovery-updated/)
- SAMHSA's National Survey of Substance Abuse Treatment Services (N-SSATS) (http://www.dasis.samhsa.gov/dasis2/nssats.htm)
- SAMHSA's Drug Abuse Warning Network (http://www.samhsa.gov/data/DAWN.aspx)
- SAMHSA's Treatment Episode Data Set (http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/DASIS.htm#teds2)
- SAMHSA's Store (http://store.samhsa.gov/home)

Publish...

When submitting an op-ed or online article, include a brief cover letter to establish why you are qualified to write the piece and why it is timely, along with a simple explanation of why recovery from mental and/or substance use disorders is important to readers. When trying to place your piece in a publication or online, be sure to:

- Place a follow-up call: Follow up with the editor one week after submitting the op-ed or article. If he or she has not had time to look at it yet, follow up again one week later. Remember to be polite and state that publishing your piece will help others who may not know where to turn.
- **Set a time limit:** Since most publications will not send notification if an op-ed is rejected, set a deadline for your piece to be published. If the deadline passes, move on to the next outlet and gauge their interest in publishing the piece. Don't give up!

If your op-ed is rejected from your desired publications, consider alternatives to the traditional printed op-ed. Ask the publication's website editor if op-eds can be posted on the online version of the newspaper. Online opinion pieces can be much easier to share with others through social media outlets such as Twitter (http://www.twitter.com) and Facebook (http://www.facebook.com).

Also consider that many newspapers now have online bloggers who cover local philanthropic events, and some may accept guest post contributions to discuss mental and/or substance disorders or a **Recovery Month** event in your area. Use the sample op-ed at the end of this document as a guide for a guest post, but remember to write in a more casual, personal manner when blogging. If a blogger does not agree to a guest post, offer information about **Recovery Month** and prevention, treatment, and recovery of mental and/or substance use disorders, and encourage the blogger to write his or her own post on the topic or link to a local **Recovery Month** event's website.



Keep in mind that **Recovery Month** celebrates individuals in long-term recovery, acknowledges those who provide prevention, treatment, and recovery support services, and empowers those in need of help to seek treatment throughout the year. Even if your op-ed or online piece does not get published in September, keep trying throughout the rest of the year to help spread these crucial messages.

Share...

SAMHSA is interested in receiving copies of published op-eds and hearing about any successes in promoting **Recovery Month.** Be sure to check news sites such as Google News (https://news.google.com) or Yahoo News (http://news.yahoo.com) to see if an op-ed is published or whether other outlets have picked it up. Posting on personal social media accounts is also a great way to share an op-ed. In particular, you can:

- Post a published op-ed on the *Recovery Month* website (http://www.recoverymonth.gov), and a personal Facebook page (http://www.facebook.com/RecoveryMonth) and Twitter account (http://twitter.com/recoverymonth). Visit the "New Media Glossary" and "Develop Your Social Network" documents in this toolkit for assistance on how to use these online tools.
- Distribute event details, materials, and pictures to the social media channels above.
- Send a copy of your published op-ed and placement information electronically to recoverymonth@samhsa.hhs.gov or by mail to:

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration ATTN: Consumer Affairs/**Recovery Month** Center for Substance Abuse Treatment 1 Choke Cherry Road, Seventh Floor Rockville, MD 20857

Also, please fill out the "Customer Satisfaction Form" to share local outreach efforts and give feedback.

Consult Resources...

For more information on **Recovery Month** and services available to people in need, please refer to the following resources:

- SAMHSA's National Helpline, 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD) (http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment): Provides 24-hour, free, and confidential treatment referral and information about mental and/or substance use disorders, prevention, treatment, and recovery in English and Spanish.
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255) (http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org): Provides a free, 24-hour helpline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress.
- SAMHSA's "Find Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment" Website (http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment): Contains information about treatment options and special services located in your area.
- The Recovery Month website (http://www.recoverymonth.gov): Contains all the materials from this toolkit and a wide variety of relevant resources.



- SAMHSA ADS Center's "Working with the Media to Support the Campaign for Mental Health Recovery" Webcast (http://www.promoteacceptance.samhsa.gov/CMHR/webcasts/default.aspx):

 Provides helpful tips for contacting the media and useful strategies for organizing outreach efforts.
- **Technical Assistance Centers:** Maximizes self-determination and recovery and assists people on their path to recovery, ultimately decreasing their dependence on expensive social services and avoiding hospitalization. The five technical assistance centers include:
 - National Consumer Supporter Technical Assistance Center at Mental Health America (http://www.ncstac.org);
 - National Empowerment Center (http://www.power2u.org);
 - o National Mental Health Consumers' Self-Help Clearinghouse (http://www.mhselfhelp.org);
 - o The Family Café (http://familycafe.net); and
 - o The STAR Center (http://www.consumerstar.org/index.html).
- **BHBusiness (http://www.saasnet.org/bhb):** Offers targeted training and support for behavioral health care executives, CEOs, and directors, including health care insurance enrollment training information.
- Center for Financing Reform and Innovation (http://www.samhsa.gov/healthreform): Supports the need for information, analysis, products, and technical assistance to address significant changes in the organization and financing of behavioral health care, as well as the need to guide and support governments and people on how to most effectively and efficiently use available resources to meet the prevention, treatment, and recovery support needs of the public.
- Healthcare.gov (http://www.healthcare.gov/index.html): Contains information on finding health insurance
 options, help using insurance, information on the Affordable Care Act, help comparing providers, and information on
 prevention and wellness resources.
- SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) (http://www.prainc.com/soar/about/default.asp):
 Increases access to Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Income for eligible adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and have a mental and/or substance use disorder.

Inclusion of websites and resources in this document and on the *Recovery Month* website does not constitute official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.



SAMPLE OP-ED

OP-ED TEMPLATE: Approximately 524 words

Recovery from Mental and/or Substance Use Disorders is Possible

All around us in **[Community]**, it is estimated that **[XX]** people are in recovery from mental and/or substance use disorders. They are contributing to our businesses, connecting with their families, and giving back to the community. But if we want more people to join them on a path of recovery, we need to take action – now. Too many people are still unaware that prevention works, and that these conditions can be treated, just like we can treat other health disorders such as diabetes and hypertension. We need to work together to make recovery the expectation.

Having [Been in Long-term Recovery for XX Years / Worked in the Recovery Field for XX Years / Other Statement of Personal Experience], I have seen firsthand the benefits of recovery. Individuals who embrace recovery achieve improved mental and physical health, as well as stronger relationships and a sense of self-worth. Mental and/or substance use disorders do not discriminate – they affect people of all ethnicities, ages, genders, geographic regions, and socioeconomic levels. An estimated [Number] people needed treatment last year in [Community/City/Town/State], and we need to address this real issue.

We can't get discouraged by the prevalence of these problems, because help is available. In fact, in 2011, 31.6 million adults aged 18 or older received services for mental illness in the past year, and 2.3 million people aged 12 or older who needed treatment for an illicit drug or alcohol use problem received treatment at a specialty facility.

These individuals have achieved healthy lifestyles, both physically and emotionally, and contribute in positive ways to their communities. They need the support of a welcoming community to help them on their path of long-term recovery. Fortunately, more than 80 percent of Americans would think no less of a friend or relative who is in recovery from addiction.

To further educate communities about the pathways to recovery and to support people in recovery, every September, people throughout the nation celebrate **National Recovery Month (Recovery Month)**, an initiative sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

In addition, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA) will significantly enhance access to the prevention, treatment, and recovery support service coverage for persons with, or at risk of, mental and/or substance use disorders. According to SAMHSA's 2010 National Survey of Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), providers will need to be prepared to provide services to up to an additional 11 million uninsured people with behavioral health problems. These providers have a unique opportunity to assist these populations navigate the insurance eligibility determination and enrollment process.

[Name of Organization] is celebrating *Recovery Month* by holding a variety of educational and entertaining events [Or Name Specific Event] to honor individuals and families who are in long-term recovery. A huge turn-out at these events will send a signal that [Community] embraces recovery and supports those working in the field to provide much-needed recovery services.



I urge local businesses, community organizations, colleges, schools, administrators, and government agencies to get involved in these activities. Let people know that free, confidential help is available 24 hours a day through SAMHSA's National Helpline, **1-800-662-HELP (4357)** or **1-800-487-4889 (TDD).** Additionally, you can provide information about local treatment and recovery resources on your website and link to additional information available at http://www.recoverymonth.gov.

These are small and easy steps to take, and they can make a tremendous difference in the lives of many in our community. We shouldn't think twice about getting involved because together, we make recovery a reality.

[Include Author Name, Title, and Brief Summary of Qualifications That Make Him or Her an Expert on this Topic.]