

# Connections between MSDs and Prescription Opioid Use in Construction

## Musculoskeletal Disorders and Prescription Opioid Use among U.S. Construction Workers

*Xiuwen Sue Dong, Raina D. Brooks, and Samantha Brown.  
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### Overview

The opioid crisis has had a substantial impact on the U.S. workforce, particularly construction workers. Studies have found that both the prevalence of opioid use and death rate due to opioid overdoses were significantly higher among construction workers than for workers in other industries. Previous CPWR research suggests that work-related injuries were strongly associated with higher prescription opioid use among construction workers, and approximately one-fourth of the industry's nonfatal injuries are musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). Most studies on construction workers evaluated MSDs and opioid use separately; others were either clinical research or estimates based on workers' compensation data in non-construction settings, which cannot meet the needs of occupational surveillance and intervention in the construction industry. This study analyzed a large national survey dataset—the 2011-2017 Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS)—to examine the relationship between MSDs and prescription opioid use among construction workers.

#### For more information, contact:

Xiuwen Sue Dong, [sdong@cpwr.com](mailto:sdong@cpwr.com)

#### See abstract:

<https://bit.ly/3kGtW1A>

#### Learn more about CPWR's research on opioids:

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### Key Findings

- About 34.2% of construction workers reported at least one type of musculoskeletal disorder (MSD).
- MSDs were more prevalent among construction workers who were older, self-employed, or in poorer physical or mental health; but MSDs were less likely to be reported by workers who were racial/ethnic minorities or lacked health insurance.
- Compared to workers without MSDs, prescription opioid use tripled among construction workers with any type of MSD and quadrupled among those with MSD injuries.
- Prescription opioid use increased among workers with more than one type of MSD.
- The findings suggest:
  - The prevalence of MSDs in construction may be underestimated by injury data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as the estimates based on MEPS data indicate that the figure is much higher.
  - To reduce the combined burden of MSDs and the opioid epidemic, the construction industry must adopt ergonomic solutions to reduce MSDs and support workers in injury recovery with effective, non-opioid pain management methods.



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