



# REASON



Resources and Effective programs Addressing Suicides and Opioids Now

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Welcome to **REASON**, NABTU and CPWR’s first mental health-focused newsletter!

NABTU, our affiliates, and CPWR are fully committed to improving working conditions and promoting the best health, safety and training for construction workers. In our work, we are also prioritizing programs and research to improve mental health and taking an all-hands approach to reduce the development of substance use disorders among construction workers.

For this newsletter, we chose the acronym *REASON* (*Resources and Effective programs Addressing Suicides and Opioids Now*) because it embodies the purpose and urgency needed to combat these pressing issues impacting the construction industry. Immediate action, comprehensive solutions, evaluation, and research are essential to uplifting these issues and the positive steps being taken to address them.

In this newsletter, we will share good news about actions our industry is taking to support construction workers and improve working conditions. We will highlight free resources developed by CPWR and our partners for the industry to use. We will also provide updates on both ongoing and completed research and upstream preventive measures to reduce developmental precursors of substance use and mental health disorders.

We are excited to launch this inaugural issue during Mental Health Awareness Month! Please forward and subscribe to the newsletter below to stay informed. We also encourage you to reach out to us to share your feedback, good news and success stories that we can include in future newsletters. Together, we can build momentum, raise awareness, and take action to improve working conditions, mental health and the lives of all construction workers.

Sincerely,

Sean McGarvey  
President, North America’s Building Trades Unions  
Chairman of the Board and President, CPWR

# Launching the Massachusetts Building Trades Recovery Council and a Peer-to-Peer Movement

In 2021, the Massachusetts Building Trades Council invited two interns from the [Occupational Health Internship Program](#) to help them get information for a report about local construction trade unions' peer support programs for their members. Faced with a record number of deaths from overdose and suicide, the report documented diverse bootstrap efforts to engage construction workers who were struggling and connect them to a hopeful future. As a result of learning about these programs in all the unions, the Building Trades Council established a cross-trade collaboration called the Massachusetts Building Trades Recovery Council.



The Recovery Council convenes representatives from all Massachusetts building trades' recovery programs bi-monthly to share best practices and experiences and to advance the shared mission of growing the recovery movement in the construction industry. The Recovery Council members represent both member-run employee assistance programs and programs coordinated between union staff and external professional organizations contracted by the trades' health and benefit funds to provide employee assistance, detox therapy, treatment, return to work, and recovery services.

The Laborers and Teamsters have full-time staff devoted to peer support for their members as well as rank-and-file peer advocates. Other building trades' unions rely on a mixture of full-time union staff support and volunteer peer advocates to connect their fellow union brothers and sisters to professional employee assistance programs that can get them into treatment. The peer advocates are rank-and-file members who have held the tools and lived the experience of recovery. The goal of these approaches is to reduce the stigma of talking about substance use and mental health struggles and to build trust by assuring non-retaliation for coming forward for help.

One of the major activities of the Recovery Council is organizing All-Trades Recovery Stand Downs on jobsites. Recovery Council members, with support from the Massachusetts Building Trades Council, sponsor Stand Downs to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and give hope and encouragement to everyone on site. Recovery Council members tell their recovery stories and invite workers on-site to speak. These Stand Downs also share information on mental health and substance use and how to access treatment benefits. Stand Down jobsites get a Recovery Council banner with a QR code that links to a website with the contact information of construction worker peers who will help without judgement. Workers can call anyone on the list from their trade or another. These peer

volunteers help those who call access treatment, and they also follow up to make sure those going for treatment have a recovery community.

The Recovery Council has been a way to expand the construction recovery community across Massachusetts. One Recovery Council member is Jon Ashwell, who is one of three full-time Recovery Specialists with the Massachusetts Laborers Benefit Funds' [LEAN Program](#) (Laborers Escaping Addiction Now). Last year, an electrician who saw the Recovery Council banner and found Jon's number on the website, reached out about the support meeting that Jon helps facilitate. As a result, an additional all-trades support meeting in Western Massachusetts has been started, and that meeting is now on the Recovery Council's list. According to Jon, "Having this Council together with its diverse minds talking about different pathways to recovery has expanded my thinking and ability to help Laborers. Also, I can share my experiences with self-care. Sharing those experiences, asking questions, and getting feedback has been really beneficial."

After gaining non-profit legal status, the Recovery Council now participates in the Department of Public Health's [Community Naloxone Program](#) to distribute naloxone to construction workers willing to reverse an opioid overdose on jobsites or anywhere else. The Council also holds recovery community events, weekly recovery meetings at union halls, and bi-annual "Recovery Contractor Roundtable" meetings with contractors and owners to promote labor-management cooperation for helping tradesmen and women get the treatment they need to return to the jobsite. Future plans include expanding the resources available to support increased peer support, growing utilization of different union trades' recovery programs, and seeking representation and resources from the Commonwealth's Opiate Recovery & Remediation Fund which is distributing money received from settlements with pharmaceutical companies responsible for the epidemic. Visit [www.massbuildingtrades.org/recovery](http://www.massbuildingtrades.org/recovery) for more information.

## RESOURCE HIGHLIGHT

# Building Resilience: Training Activities to Promote Construction Worker Well-being

There are many new training resources available to help construction workers understand and take action on the suicide, mental health, and substance use issues facing the industry. CPWR has a unique contribution to this growing catalog: [Building Resilience: Training Activities to Promote Construction Worker Well-being](#). A few introductory slides accompany the CPWR workbook, but the heart of the training is nine activities to stimulate productive discussion among construction workers about these tough topics.

The Workbook provides discussion leaders with guidance to get folks talking about health and well-being in an engaging way. Activities include a "game" to understand the "Reach Out, Respond, and Connect" suicide prevention strategy and a video-discussion guide about Member Assistance programs. The Workbook is free for all.



## FOCUS ON PREVENTION

# Construction Working Minds Summit

The annual Construction Working Minds Summit brings together hundreds of individuals working to reverse the growing threat of suicide in the construction sector. This year, the Summit featured a keynote presentation from CPWR Executive Director, Chris Trahan Cain. Her presentation covered the comprehensive, all-hands-on-deck strategies that CPWR and NABTU support including reducing stigma, strengthening access to mental healthcare, and upstream prevention. Chris reviewed the strong scientific evidence about aspects of construction working conditions contributing to the “diseases of despair.” These include long working hours, injury risks, and poor psychosocial and safety climate. Using a public health model, Chris pointed to the tremendous opportunities for preventing suicide and mental health and substance use challenges by fixing what we know can really make a difference.

## RESEARCH CORNER

# Five New Research Projects Focus on Preventing Suicide and Opioid-Related Deaths Among Construction Workers

The data shows construction workers are dying from suicide and opioid overdoses at rates higher than those in other industries. Last year, CPWR invited industry professionals and researchers to propose studies aimed at preventing suicide and opioid-related deaths. An expert review committee considered 19 proposals evaluating the efficacy and scalability of the studied programs as a top priority. The committee [selected five projects](#) to receive \$50,000 in funding provided by a private sector donor. The research is examining: the development and impact of a local union’s member assistance education program; implementation and effectiveness of two new building trades union peer-support programs; impact of employment laws on construction worker suicide; training on and access to naloxone; and suicide prevention practices for Iron Workers. These one-year studies will report their results at the upcoming CPWR r2p Meeting in June; [learn more on CPWR's website](#).

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