

# Mental Health and Suicide in the Construction Industry

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# Agenda

Workplace Mental Health

Suicide in the Construction Industry

Conclusions



# What is Mental Health\*?

- Mental illness ~ a disturbance that adversely impacts our mental or physical state and ability to function productively.
- Mental health ~ our emotional, psychological and social well-being. Our overall state of our mental functioning
- Mental wellness ~ state where each person fulfills their maximum potential, copes with everyday challenges, works productively, & contributes to their environment.



- American Psychiatric Ass. <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/what-is-mental-illness>;
- WHO. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>;
- CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/index.htm>.

# What are Workplace Mental Health Programs?

## **(1) Mitigate adverse mental health symptoms**

- Meditation training for workers

## **(2) Reduce sub-optimal health behaviors**

- Smoking cessation

## **(3) Gatekeepers**

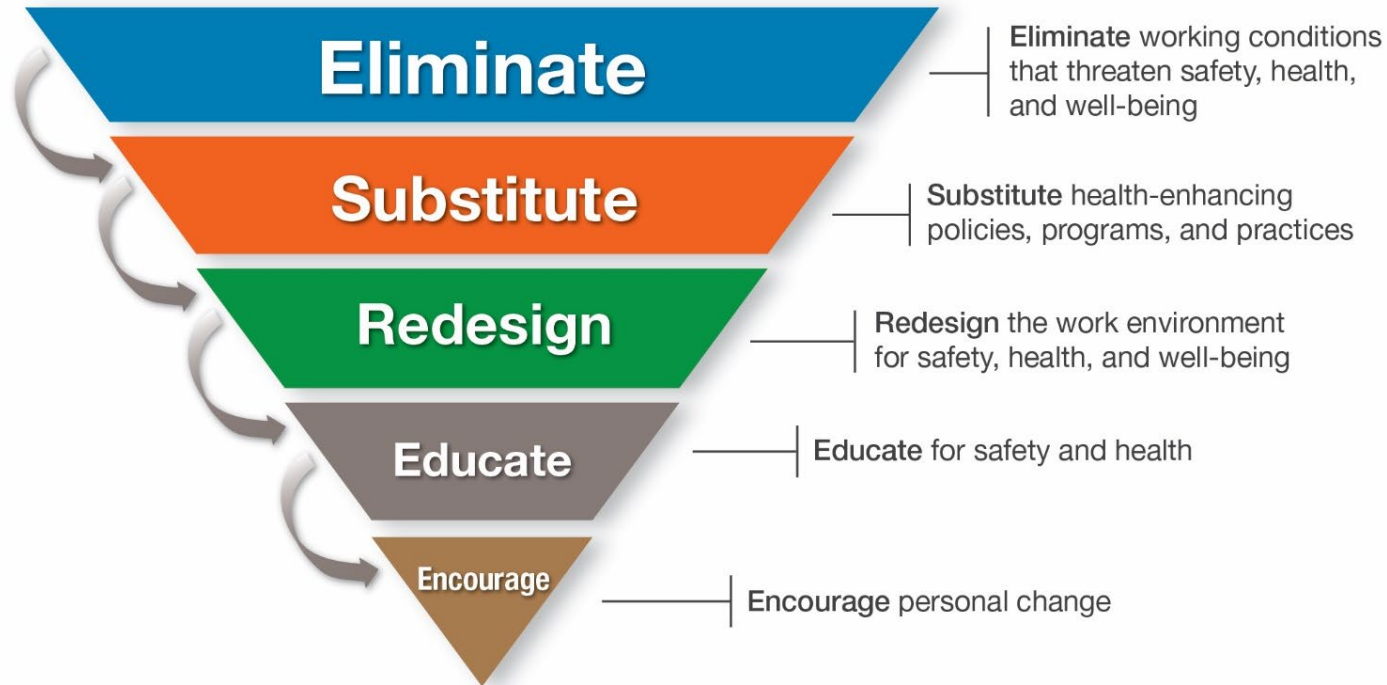
- Training supervisors to identify individuals experiencing a mental health crisis

## **(4) Improve factors within the workplace**

- Companies removing mandatory OT requirements



# Hierarchy of Controls Applied to NIOSH *Total Worker Health*<sup>®</sup>



**Suggested Citation:** NIOSH [2016]. Fundamentals of total worker health approaches: essential elements for advancing worker safety, health, and well-being. By Lee MP, Hudson H, Richards R, Chang CC, Chosewood LC, Schill AL, on behalf of the NIOSH Office for Total Worker Health. Cincinnati, OH: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 2017-112.

# Examples of Mental Health Programs in Construction by Approach

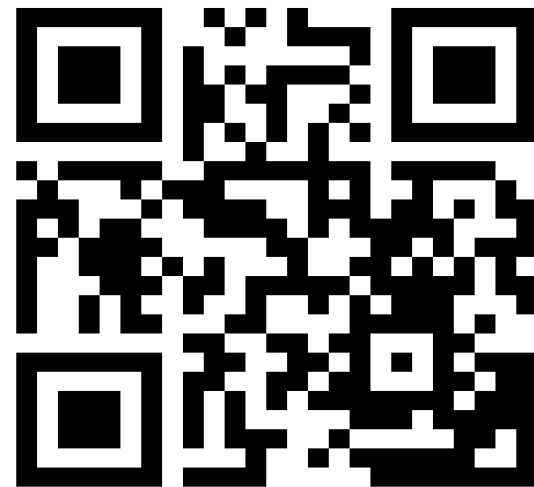
Individual*	Organizational**
Randomized controlled trial of a smartphone suicide prevention app to increase suicide prevention literacy and help-seeking intentions. Mobile app group showed significantly greater increase in help-seeking intentions for emotional problems and suicidal thoughts.	Case study in Queensland of a compressed work week (reducing length of working week by increasing length of workday). Found a beneficial impact on employees' work-life balance.

\* King TL, et.al. 2023. A blended face-to-face and smartphone intervention to improve suicide prevention literacy and help-seeking intentions among construction workers: a randomised controlled trial. *Soc Psychiatry Epidemiol.*58(6):871-81.

\*\* Lingard, et al. 2007. Improving Employees' Work-Life Balance in the Construction Industry: Project Alliance Case Study. *Journal of Construction Engineering and Management.* 133(10).

# MATES In Construction\*

- Established in 2008 to reduce high level of suicide among Australian construction workers
- Industry-based suicide prevention program that aims to raise awareness and facilitate help-seeking
- Multi-modal - pivotal piece is 1-hr general awareness training
- Rich evidence-base supporting its effectiveness
  - Gullestrup J, et.al. 2023. Effectiveness of the Australian MATES in Construction Suicide Prevention Program: a systematic review. Health Promot Int. 1;38(4).



\* <https://mates.org.au/>

# Suicide in the Construction Industry





Over

**49,000**

people died by  
suicide in 2022



**1** death every

**11** minutes

Many adults think about  
suicide or attempt suicide

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**13.2 million**

Seriously thought about suicide

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**3.8 million**

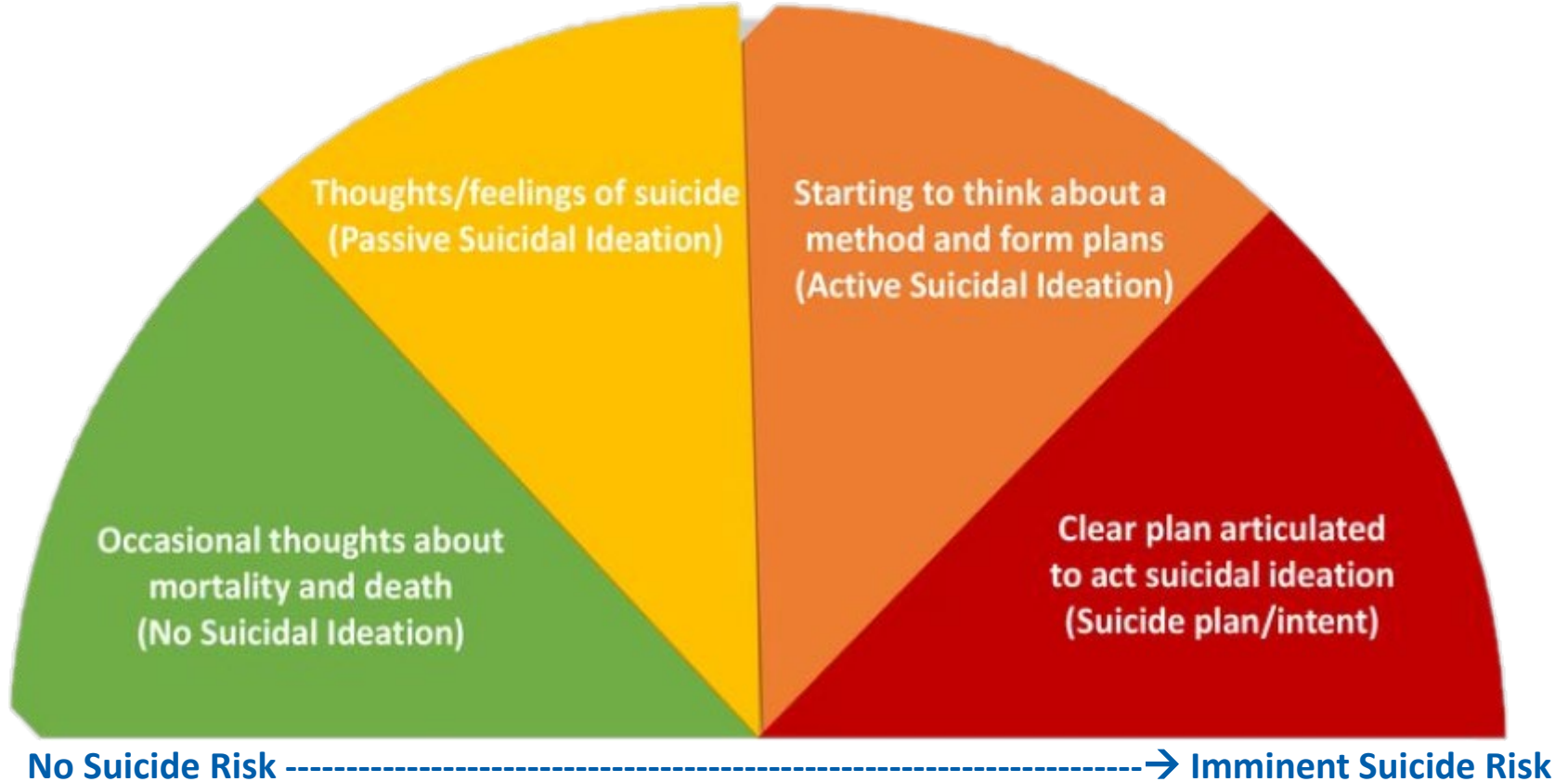
Made a plan for suicide

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**1.6 million**

Attempted suicide

# Suicidology on a Spectrum\*



\* Raue, et.al. 2006. Does every allusion to suicide require the same response? *Jrl of Family Practice*. 55:7; 605-12.



**Intimate Partner  
Problem**



**Crisis in the  
Past or Upcoming  
2 Weeks**



**Criminal or  
Legal Problem**



**Physical  
Health  
Problem**



**Alcohol or  
Other Drug  
Problem**



**Job Problem**



**Eviction or  
Loss of Housing**

**Many factors contribute  
to suicide**

**Work conditions  
put workers at risk  
for poor mental  
health outcomes**



Photo by © bsd studio /Getty Images

# Workplace Psychosocial Hazards



Work  
relationships



Job insecurity  
and organizational changes



Work  
demands



Traumatic  
events

\* Low Job Control OR = 1.23

\* Low Supervisor Support OR = 1.16

# Workplace violence HR = 1.75

\* Job Stress OR = 1.17

\* Work-Family Conflict OR = 1.69

*\*Milner et.al. 2018. Psychosocial job stressors & suicidality: a systematic review. OEM;75:245-53*

*# Magnusson et.al. 2023. Association of WPV & bullying with suicide risk: a multicohort study and meta-analysis. Lancet; 8(7):e494-e503*

# What Psychosocial Hazards Sound Like at Work\*

Why can't they let me get on with my job?

This place is toxic

That was humiliating

How am I supposed to do all of this?

Micromanaging is undermining my confidence

I can't sleep thinking about it



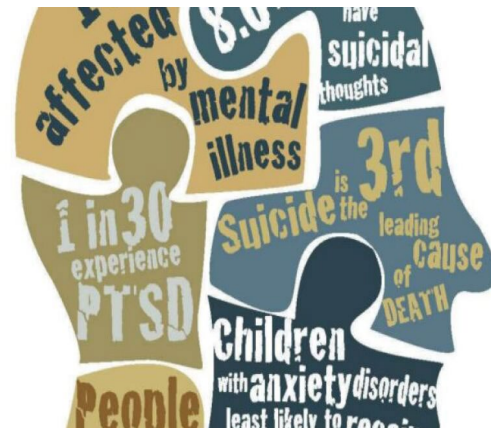
I am burnt out

I don't know what I am supposed to be doing

\* <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/safety-topic/managing-health-and-safety/mental-health/psychosocial-hazards>

# Mental Health and Suicide

- **46% of people who die by suicide had a mental health condition\***
  - People with major psychiatric disorders have the highest risk for suicide\*\*
  - Major Depressive Disorder ~ OR = 4.98\*\*
  - Substance Use Disorders \*\*\*
- **60% of male suicide decedents had no known mental health condition\*\*\*\***
  - But 50% died with alcohol in their systems



\* Stone DM, et.al. 2018. Trends in State Suicide Rates & Circumstances Contributing to Suicide. MMWR;67:617–624.

\*\* Moitra M, et.al. 2021. Estimating the risk of suicide associated w/mental disorders: A systematic review. J Psychiatr Res. 137:242-49.

\*\*\* Jones AA, et.al. 2023. The Role of SUDs on Suicidal Ideation, Planning, & Attempts: Nationally Representative Study. Subst Abuse.

\*\*\*\* Fowler KA, et. al. 2022. Suicide Among Males Across the Lifespan: An Analysis by Mental Health Status. AJPM. 63(3):419-422.

# Construction Suicide Risk Factors

## Workplace Factors:

Culture (Milner, 2016)

Bullying (Ross, 2019)

## Other:

Job insecurity  
(Milner, 2017)

Workplace injury,  
substance misuse,  
(Dong, 2021)

Low mental health  
literacy (King, 2019)

*Milner A, et.al. 2017. Male suicide among construction workers in Australia. BMC Public Health. 19;17(1):58.*  
*Milner A, et.al. 2016. Psychosocial working conditions and suicide ideation. JOEM. 6;58(6):584-587*  
*King T, et.al. 2019. Are young men getting the message? Suicide literacy & male construction workers. IJERPH. 6(475)*  
*Ross V, et.al. 2019. Understanding barriers & pathways to male help-seeking and help-offering. IJERPH. 16(2979)*  
*Dong XS, et.al. 2022. Pain & Prescription Opioid Use Among US Construction Workers. AJPH. Feb;112(S1):S77-S87,*

# Evidence-Based Prevention Strategies\*



**Strengthen economic supports**



**Promote healthy connections**



**Create protective environments**



**Teach coping and problem-solving skills**



**Improve access and delivery of suicide care**

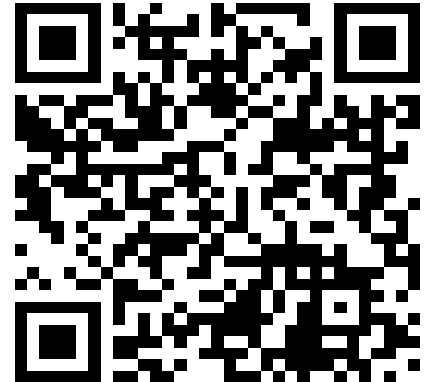


**Identify and support people at risk**

\* <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/resources/prevention.html>

# Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention (CIASP)

- Developed in response to a CDC study finding construction occupation to have highest number of suicide deaths
- **Mission:** To save lives by eliminating suicide in the construction industry.
- **10-Year Goal:** Reduce construction industry suicide rate to 18 per 100,000
- **STAND UP Pledge:**
  - Safe
  - Training
  - Awareness
  - Normalize



# Conclusions



Mental health is becoming a part of occupational safety & health



Many different types of individual-level programs - mixed evidence of their effectiveness. Much less at organizational level – more effective & sustainable?



Variation in suicide risk across occupations and workplace factors may play a role.



While mental illnesses are suicide risk factors, most people with a mental illness don't die by suicide. Men's disease symptomology may look different.

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**304-285-6067**

If you or someone you know  
is in crisis, please contact the

# 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline



- Call or text 988
- Chat at [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org)

The findings and conclusions in this presentation are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

