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# Mental Health



## MENTAL HEALTH – THE INVISIBLE CRISIS IN CONSTRUCTION

**Jerry Ouimet** - Executive Vice President - CSDZ

We've all heard of the 'hard hat' in construction. It's been around for a long time. In fact, it's more than a century old, stemming all the way back to World War I when [Edward Bullard](#) was tasked with bringing it back from the war in an attempt to reduce worker injury in construction.

The purpose of the hard hat has always been to help combat severe injuries and reduce the impact to construction workers from flying debris, overhead hazards, and the plethora of other hazards on the jobsite. The focus being on protecting the physical body.

What we've seen over time, though, is that while the hard hat reduced injuries to the outside of the head, we haven't really done anything to take care of what's going on inside — stress, emotional/mental issues, wellbeing, and distractions — and this is terribly dangerous.

### Crisis in the Construction Industry

Even before the current health and economic crisis caused by COVID-19, the construction industry has been in crisis. Here are a few startling [statistics](#) to illustrate the problem:

- The suicide rate has surged 40 percent in the U.S. over less than two decades, with blue-collar workers — particularly mining, oilfield, construction, and auto-repair workers — at a significantly higher risk.
- Researchers examined the suicide rates by profession for 20,975 people between the ages of 16 and 64. For both men and women, construction and 'extraction' workers, mostly in the mining or oil and gas fields, had the highest suicide rates.
- The total suicide rate among all men was 27.4 individuals per 100,000 people, but the rate among those in the construction field was 49.4 per 100,000.

This is shocking and gut-wrenching. On top of this, [an undeniable cause of the high suicide rate is the stigma surrounding mental health in the industry.](#)

Why is this? It's the stereotype factor and the need for men to feel 'tough'. They may shame themselves for experiencing anxiety, distress, depression, and suicidal feelings, because it contradicts the idea ingrained in them that men should not be affected by their emotions.

### What Can We Do to Address These Mental Health Issues?

In 1971, the federal government formed OSHA to create compliance and safety rules/laws for the industry. After creating a catalog of rules, standards, and training, the improvements we've seen in reducing serious injuries and deaths haven't quite covered all the bases.

It may be because we're missing a key component. We need to continue to evolve the historic approach to safety from the early focus on compliance, to leadership commitment, culture, and now caring. I don't mean to suggest people have not cared about safety. What I mean is that caring for the entire worker has to be the priority to improve beyond where we are now.

I think when most people think of risk hazards in the construction industry, they think of the operational hazards, and as an industry, we've improved greatly in identifying the approach to working from heights, for example, and how to work around unique project hazards.

The current pace and stress of the world we live in, though, has created another hazard, and that is not being fully present mentally in a potentially dangerous space. This new hazard, distraction caused by mental and emotional stressors, is real. Until we address these components, we'll continue to lose people to serious, even fatal, injuries and suicide.

So, what can we do to improve the level of caring we have for the workers? How do we get engaged, motivated workers to follow our intentional processes to stay safe?

### Start the Conversation

As leaders of a company and in the industry, we first have to start the conversation. Knowing the industry as a whole isn't used to being vulnerable, we have to open those doors.

If workers can't raise their hand to say they don't feel safe or they're having emotional or mental health issues, we'll never get there.

[A study of oil rig workers conducted back in 2016](#) found that if workers feel a strong sense of belonging and belief that they're worthy, they'll be more likely to embrace vulnerability.... even in construction. The study concluded that you cannot be safe if you cannot be vulnerable. These aren't easy conversations to start, but they're critical in making progress.

### Don't Tackle the Issue Alone

We're committed to bringing energy and resources to this industry crisis. To that end, consider the [Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention \(CIASP\)](#), which has become the industry leader in building awareness and resources to respond to this crisis.

Each day this week, there'll be a new resource made available to you, largely due to the addition of [Cal Beyer](#) by Cobb Strecker Dunphy & Zimmermann (CSDZ), our construction risk management consultancy firm. The objective is to remove the stigma of emotional and mental health from the construction industry. Cal has nearly 25 years of experience serving the construction industry and has catalyzed the mental health and suicide prevention movement.

The goal this week is to further the mission of curtailing the mental health crisis in construction. We believe solving this crisis is essential to building a safe and sustainable construction industry.

Takeaway: 'It's OK to not be OK'. Speak up. Reach out. Employee Assistance Programs:

**Gardner Benefits-Eligible employees**  
[EAP - The Standard](#)

**Laborers Union**  
[EAP - Sand Creek](#)  
[Laborer's Health Clinics](#)

**Carpenters Union**  
[EAP - TEAM](#)  
[Member Resources](#)

**Modified by Brett Smith**



# Emotional Masks



## THE INVISIBLE CONSTRUCTION CRISIS: REMOVING OUR EMOTIONAL MASKS

**Cal Beyer** - Vice President - Workforce Risk and Worker Wellbeing - CSDZ

Construction and industrial tradespersons help build America. From the hands of trades workers come the necessary infrastructure and buildings where we conduct our lives in every way. The construction workforce helps build the economic prosperity and social progress we all enjoy.

Unfortunately, the [construction workforce is paying a steep price for their efforts](#). There is mounting evidence the construction workforce is a high-risk industry for various physical and behavioral health conditions. The construction and industrial trades have high incidences of:

Physical Health Conditions	Behavioral Health Conditions
Fatigue	Social isolation and loneliness
Obesity	Stress and anxiety
High-blood pressure	Depression
Tobacco use	Propensity for risk-taking
Cardiovascular disease	Heavy/binge drinking
Musculoskeletal disorders	Substance misuse
Chronic pain	Suicide

### Why Are the Risks so High in the Construction Workforce?

There are many fundamental industry factors that influence the degree of risk. Workers are paid on an hourly basis, subject to cancellation by weather, schedule, or sequencing delays. This may result in no pay and can ultimately create access barriers to adequate medical healthcare and behavioral health services.

The ebb and flow of economic cycles, combined with end-of-project furloughs and seasonal layoffs, impact the financial wellbeing of workers. **Construction is a pressure-packed industry with increasing demands to meet rising performance standards:**

1. **Workforce culture**, including the stoic 'tough guy and gal' work ethic where feelings aren't talked about. [Stigma about mental wellbeing](#) runs high, typical of the industry.
2. **Company factors**, including the nature of the work of specific trades, location of work, amount of work, schedule and sequence of work, and the amount of overtime.
3. **Job stressors**, including the long hours, and physically and mentally demanding working conditions in sometimes harsh environmental conditions.
4. **Worker lifestyle choices**, including whether a worker is receptive to seeking medical care and behavioral health services; individual choices made with respect to nutrition, exercise, alcohol, and substance use; and adoption of stress management and self-care practices.

The [net effect of these risk factors](#) is that construction has the second highest rate of suicide, which is over three times higher than the rate for the general population in the United States. The reality is that more construction workers die by suicide annually than die in all occupational fatalities tied to safety-related incidents.

Construction workers are known for [being tough and strong willed](#) in the face of challenges.

An image often seen is of stone-faced workers showing no emotions regardless of the circumstance. Through the expressionless looks, they seem to be saying 'game on – challenge accepted'. [Wonder what they're really thinking deep down behind those steely eyes?](#)

### What's Behind our Emotional Masks?

If you grew up in Minnesota or Wisconsin, your favorite winter pastime may be, or may have been, hockey. Do you know the iconic 'scar face' goalie mask worn by Boston Bruins Gerry Cheevers who added a new set of painted surgical stitches every time he took a shot to the face? His mask protected him from the real danger of flying pucks.

Masks, or face coverings, worn during COVID-19 have become a reality at work. While these masks offer protection from the transmission of disease, they can also be a form of self-expression, like Cheevers' mask.

We've likely all heard the expression wearing emotional masks. When we wear emotional masks, we're seeking a different kind of protection by disguising our real feelings. We're projecting that everything's fine even when it's not.

Some of us wear masks to block out the pain of sadness, disappointment, or disillusionment with our lives. Some of us wear masks to pretend to be someone or something we're not, possibly to compensate for some perceived shortcoming. Some of us wear masks because we fear rejection. And, some wear masks because we never learned to be comfortable with who we are, perhaps due to unwarranted embarrassment or shame.

### It's Okay to Not Be Okay

**Removing emotional masks requires honesty and vulnerability.** A major benefit of taking off our emotional masks is being honest with ourselves and others. It's exhausting to keep up the appearance that everything is fine, knowing deep down it's not.

Rick Warren, author of the book *The Purpose-Driven Life*, said "Wearing a mask wears you out. Faking it is fatiguing. The most exhausting activity is pretending to be what you know you aren't."

The first step to becoming a more authentic person is recognizing the emotional mask you're wearing. Work to understand why the mask was put on in the first place and acknowledge that the mask served its served purpose and is ready to come off.

Remove the mask...and in the process, 'make it OK to not be OK'!

If you or someone you know may need help, don't hesitate to reach out to [Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention \(CIASP\)](#).

**Modified by Brett Smith**





# Strategies for Wellbeing



## THE INVISIBLE CONSTRUCTION CRISIS: STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS MENTAL WELLBEING

**Cal Beyer** - Vice President - Workforce Risk and Worker Wellbeing - CSDZ

### Why Is There Such a Gap?

Many construction companies have yet to incorporate mental health, substance abuse, addiction recovery, and suicide prevention into safety, health, and wellness culture and programs. [A major reason for this gap is due to stigma.](#)

Stigma is a fear of the unknown. Stigma is looking down on someone as lesser because of a trait or condition that someone else does not understand.

[Stigma for mental health conditions runs high, and access to behavioral health services is low in the construction industry and among trades workers.](#) This is typical for male-dominated industries characterized by '[rough and tough](#)' cultures, though there are many reasons for this mental health stigma, including:

- Many families didn't, or don't, talk about it. Therefore, there isn't a lot of familiarity or comfort talking about these topics at work.
- Mental wellbeing is viewed as personal, and family matters historically haven't been something talked about at work.
- There are concerns about violating employee rights of privacy, confidentiality, and HIPAA compliance.
- There are few requests for accommodations for mental wellbeing or behavioral health conditions.
- There's no legal requirement or regulation requiring these topics to be addressed.
- There's been no tradition of talking about mental wellbeing in safety and health.

If we start talking about mental health and wellbeing, we can break down the stigma and better help people with existing conditions.

And, we can't put off talking about it. According to the [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#), the average delay of the onset of mental health conditions and treatment is 11 years.

Since 2009, resources have been being developed and communicated to help take on stigma and promote mental wellbeing in the construction industry. In 2014, the construction industry movement for mental health and suicide prevention was launched. The [Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention](#) (CIASP) was formed in October 2016 to help support these efforts.

### What Strategies Can Your Company Utilize?

The following list outlines how companies can incorporate mental wellbeing, substance abuse, addiction recovery, and suicide prevention into safety, health, and wellness programs:

### 12 ways to address mental wellbeing with construction workers:

- **Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)**  
**Gardner Benefits-Eligible employees:** [EAP - The Standard](#) | **Laborers Union:** [EAP - Sand Creek](#); [Laborers Health Clinics](#) | **Carpenters Union:** [EAP - TEAM](#); [Member Resources](#)
- **Workplace Posters** — Include EAP, crisis hotlines, and suicide prevention in your posters.
- **Company Newsletters/Blogs** — In these items, include contact information for EAP and crisis hotlines.
- **Hard Hat Stickers** — On these, be sure to provide EAP and/or crisis hotline information.
- **Wallet Cards** — Share EAP wallet cards or print them out with crisis hotline numbers.
- **New Hire Orientation Programs/Videos** — Discuss the EAP and share wallet cards, hard hat stickers, etc.
- **Pre-meeting Safety Moments** — Share focused safety moments on behavioral health topics and not just traditional safety topics.
- **Toolbox Talks** — An effective way to continue the dialogue and break down stigma at crew level.
- **Safety Huddles** — Use this as an opportunity to observe and ask employees if they're ready to work (without distractions) and allow a 'safety timeout', if necessary.
- **Pre-Season or Pre-Project Safety Kick-Off Meetings** — Reiterate *'it's ok to not be ok'* and what actions an employee can take if they need help for mental health concerns.
- **Supervisory and Employee Training Sessions** — Effective in providing more information and to expand awareness.
- **Safety Stand-Downs** — Hold these as a way to boldly demonstrate leadership support by focusing everyone on the importance of this potentially life-saving topic.

### **Employee Assistance Program (EAP)**

Our (Gardner Builders) EAP is **free, confidential, and available 24/7**. It's available to benefits-eligible employees and all of the members of their household. The program includes up to three face-to-face assessment and counseling sessions per issue. Examples of these issues include:

- Emotional well-being, depression, grief, loss
- Family, marital, other relationship issues
- Life planning and goal setting
- Addiction
- Stress and anxiety
- Financial and legal concerns
- Identity theft
- and more!

#### **How to Contact**

- Visit [worklifehealth.com/Standard3](http://worklifehealth.com/Standard3)
- ^ Opportunity to live chat online
- Call 888-293-6948
- Text MSEAP to 53342
- [Email the Standard](#)
- [Download the EAP app](#)



# Suicide Prevention



## THE INVISIBLE CONSTRUCTION CRISIS: PLEDGE TO STAND UP FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION

**Cal Beyer** - Vice President - Workforce Risk and Worker Wellbeing - CSDZ

While you, or someone you know, may suffer from a severe mental issue, it's also important to discuss simple, day-to-day mental health. Proper balance of life and a clear vision of the world around us makes daily life more enjoyable and prepares us for the challenges it can present, i.e. loss of a loved one, financial hardship, challenges with relationships, and even difficulties at our place of work. The timing of these hardships is never ideal and often comes when we're already experiencing challenges, which is why it's important that we recognize the warning signs.

### What Are Some of The Warning Signs of Mental Health Risks?

- Change in personality.
- Uncharacteristic anxiousness, anger, or varying moods.
- Socially withdrawn and feelings of isolation.
- Lack of self-care or risky behavior.
- A sense of hopelessness or feeling overwhelmed.

Although the very nature of mental wellbeing is internal and emotional, it can manifest itself outwardly, as well: **inability to focus, lack of sleep, loss of appetite, and a decreased ability to interact with coworkers are all symptoms of mental illness.** There's also an increased risk of more severe health issues such as panic attacks, heart attacks, and stroke. Together, the chance of injury in the workplace is exponentially greater and puts the employee and others in danger.

The topic of [mental wellbeing and suicide prevention](#) is of paramount importance, hence the reason for repeat mention of the [Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention \(CIASP\)](#).

### What Is the CIASP?

The CIASP is a non-profit formed in October 2016 to help address the issue of high suicide rate and the high number of suicide deaths in the U.S. construction industry. The CIASP was formed by the [Construction Financial Management Association \(CFMA\)](#).

In 2009, the CFMA published the first article addressing behavioral health in the construction industry, [The Critical Human Element of Crisis Management](#). Six and a half years later, an article titled [Mental Illness & Suicide—Break the Silence & Create a Caring Culture](#) was posted on a digital chat board and officially launched the movement to incorporate [mental health awareness and suicide prevention](#) into construction safety, health, and wellness culture.

### Why Does the CIASP Exist?

According to the [Centers for Disease Prevention and Control \(CDC\)](#), construction is deemed to be at high risk for suicide. Construction is the industry with the highest number of suicides among all occupations and has the second highest rate of suicide among all occupations following only the mining and oil/gas extraction industry group.

CFMA decided to launch the CIASP to provide leadership support and structure to the growing mental wellbeing movement and to unify the construction industry around the vision of zero

suicides and to share resources to help all industry stakeholders to address suicide prevention in their organizations.

### What Is the STAND Up Pledge?

[CSDZ](#) is asking construction organizations to consider signing the pledge to [STAND Up](#) to suicide prevention in the industry. Each letter in STAND represents a step in a comprehensive suicide prevention program.

We can all **STAND Up** for suicide prevention and address it as a health and safety core value by:

- **S** = Creating **SAFE** cultures.
- **T** = Providing **TRAINING** to identify and help those at risk.
- **A** = Raising **AWARENESS** about the suicide crisis in construction.
- **N** = **NORMALIZING** conversations around suicide and mental health.
- **D** = **DECREASING** the risks associated with suicide in construction.

### Suicide Prevention Pledge - Contractor

Adopting and committing to the principles to **STAND Up** to suicide in construction:

**Safe:** Creating a safe culture where employees feel **safe** to ask for help if they're wrestling with mental health or having suicidal thoughts, or if they're concerned for co-workers who may be experiencing the same.

**Training:** Making mental wellbeing and suicide prevention **training** available to all employees so that they can recognize the warning signs and be equipped to help those at risk.

**Awareness:** Raising **awareness** through organizational activities such as safety meetings, toolbox talks, company meetings, newsletters, and social media to share the message of mental wellbeing and suicide prevention.

**Normalizing:** **Normalizing** the topic of suicide prevention as a health and safety priority by talking about mental health and wellbeing and suicide prevention.

**Decrease:** **Decreasing** the risk of suicide in construction by helping to ensure access to and awareness of EAPs, behavioral health benefits, screening tools, community crisis support, the Suicide Prevention Lifeline, and Crisis Text Line.

- [Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention \(CIASP\)](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) - NIOSH - Suicide and Occupation](#)
- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline \(800-273-8255\)](#)
- [Crisis Text Line](#) (text "HEAL" to 741741)

**Modified by Brett Smith**



# Talking About Mental Health



## THE PERFECT TIME TO TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

**Cal Beyer** - Vice President - Workforce Risk and Worker Wellbeing - CSDZ

Each year, millions of Americans face the reality of living with a mental health condition. However, mental illness affects *everyone*, directly or indirectly, through family, friends or coworkers. Despite mental illness' [reach and prevalence](#), stigma and misunderstanding are also, unfortunately, widespread.

- [1 in 5](#) U.S. adults experience mental illness each year.
- [1 in 25](#) U.S. adults experience *serious* mental illness each year.
- [1 in 6](#) U.S. youth aged 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year.
- [50%](#) of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14, and 75% by age 24.
- Less than 45% people with mental illness seek treatment, and only approximately 65% of people with *serious* mental illness seek treatment.
- People with depression have a [40%](#) higher risk of developing cardiovascular and metabolic diseases than the general population.
- [19.3%](#) of U.S. adults with mental illness also experienced a substance use disorder in 2018 (9.2 million individuals).

### Mental Illness Awareness Week

Each year, during the first week of October, [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) (NAMI) and participants across the country raise awareness on mental illness, educate the public, [fight stigma](#), and provide support. And each year, the movement grows stronger. Mental health conditions are inarguably important and should be discussed in some form year-round. Highlighting them during Mental Illness Awareness Week provides a dedicated time for mental health advocates across the country to come together as one unified voice.

### Mental Illness Defined

According to the NAMI website, "mental illness is a condition that affects a person's thinking, feeling, or mood. Such conditions may affect someone's ability to relate to others and function each day."

NAMI teaches that mental illnesses are diseases of the brain. As a result, each person will have different experiences (and different treatments) — even people with the same diagnosis.

### Breaking the Stigma of Mental Health Issues

Unfortunately, the [stigma surrounding mental issues](#) often keeps people from seeking or accepting help.

As part of our work to help break the stigma, steps are being taken to tackle this issue head on in the industry. The first step is to simply [understand the numbers](#). Millions of people in the U.S. are affected by mental illness each year. It's important to measure how common mental illness is, so we can understand its physical, social, and financial impact — and so we can show that no one is alone. These numbers are also powerful tools for raising public awareness, stigma-busting, and advocating for better health care.



Secondly, below are a couple of additional resources certainly worth sharing:

- **Webinar** — Holmes Murphy's webinar titled [Mental Health, Depression & Stigma Ending in Construction](#) for the [American Psychiatric Association's Center for Workplace Mental Health](#).
- **Article** — *Construction Executive* magazine article titled [Understanding and Addressing Depression in the Workplace](#).

### Tools for Organizations to Use

It's important for all organizations to better understand how to tackle depression and other mental health conditions affecting their workforce and dependents enrolled in health benefit plans.

Here are a few tools you may find useful:

#### Depression Cost Calculator

This [tool](#) uses a wealth of the latest research to model how depression impacts a company or organization, based on just a few key demographics.

#### Right Direction for Me

This is a [national campaign](#) with free downloadable resources for employers or individuals and/or families.

#### Mental Health Screening Tools

Online screening is one of the quickest and easiest ways to determine whether you're experiencing symptoms of a mental health condition. The Mental Health America website offers [free and anonymous screening tools](#).

Additionally, [MindWise Innovations](#) is a program that's also anonymous and confidential. Immediately following the brief questionnaire, you will see your results, recommendations, and key resources.

Our commitment to staying safe and focused on the job is a point of pride and strength that runs across our entire industry. We must strive to create both a physically and mentally safe environment and make every aspect of our wellbeing part of our safety culture and programs.

We must prioritize both physical and psychological safety in the workplace, and how together, they play an important role in our relationships with our team members and our ability to bring our safest, most productive, best selves to work every day.

There's no doubt you probably know someone who struggles from some type of mental wellbeing issue...maybe it's even you. If it is, know you're not alone, and that [it's OK to not be OK!](#)

**Modified by Brett Smith**