

What Is Mental Health?

Mental health refers to the psychological well-being of a person. It is both emotional and behavioral health.

Mental health can be impacted by a variety of serious illnesses including depression, anxiety, and chronic stress.

Mental health isn't just an internal emotion. A decreased ability to focus, lower quality of sleep, loss of appetite, and a decreased ability to interact with coworkers are all symptoms of mental illness.

It can also turn into physical symptoms. These include an increased risk of more severe health issues such as panic attacks, heart attacks, and strokes.

Together, these can increase the chance of injury in the workplace and put both an employee and those around them in danger. From 2016 to 2018, mental health claims to the Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board increased by 142%.

Why Is Mental Health A Problem in Construction?

Construction is primarily focused on safety and PPE, and mental wellness needs to become a part of that. It will not be immediate or easy, but just like with physical safety, the impact can be life-saving.

It's time to take this silent crisis and make it loud. There are a number of factors that make mental health in the construction industry more apparent than in other industries.

The construction industry lifestyle, particularly those who work on-site. People who work away from home, perhaps for weeks at a time, might be removed from their personal life. Stress levels, feelings of loneliness, isolation, and depression can all be impacted by these factors. This is especially relevant in the winter season.



The mental health of your employees actually plays a role in the production and value of a business. Healthy and happy workers at work will ensure the work keeps getting done. While the industry itself can impact the mental health of your employees, the mental health of your employees is also affecting your business.

The construction industry can also impact mental health due to the following:

- a) Seasonal work and possible layoffs
- b) A highly competitive, "macho" culture
- c) The expectation of overtime and working long hours
- d) Difficulty securing payment from clients
- e) Physical exhaustion can impact life outside of work
- f) Workplace injuries that can lead to chronic pain, psychological trauma, and missed hours
- g) Budget constraints

What Can We Do?

Safety and construction already go hand in hand. You do not think twice about posting reminders to wear PPE on the job site, but we rarely consider the impact of mental health on workplace safety.

Due diligence for safety should be expanded and applied to mental health services and wellbeing as well. Work to bring awareness to depression, loneliness, and anxiety the same way you would workplace injuries.

Seek out experts in the field of mental health and invite them to the safety talks. Educate employees on The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code, which protects everyone from discrimination and harassment. Under the Code, a mental disorder is considered a form of disability.

The Code prohibits employers from terminating an employee, refusing to employ anyone, or denying anyone a promotion they deserve on the basis of a mental health disability.

When implementing changes, you need the support of management. You can't leave managers and supervisors out. At the same time, people who show leadership qualities need to be included. This ensures that workers have access to trained individuals on-site, in the office, and have access to someone who is available for vulnerable, open, and honest conversations.

Tool Box Talk

When accidents and incidents happen on the jobsite, we are always quick to point the finger at lack of training, not following practices or procedures, or even improper supervision. The idea that the hazards and dangers associated with the job were not properly communicated to all of the workers is often missed.

Tool Box Talks can go by many names, and although formats may vary, these meetings all serve one purpose: to inform employees and contract workers. Tool Box Talks are short, informal, meetings between management and the workers on a jobsite. The goal of these meetings is to reinforce current safe job procedures, inform workers of new and/or relevant procedures, review recent safety violations/incidents, and ensure workers are up-to-date on the information required to complete their work safely.

Always use a Tool Box Talk form to record the meeting topic, date, who was in attendance, and any follow-up actions to be taken. Not only do these forms help with consistency of record keeping, but they also ensure that nothing is missed. At the end of the meeting have management sign off on the form.

One of the most important aspects of a Tool Box Talk is giving workers an opportunity to voice their concerns and ask questions. All employees have a right to participate in health and safety as it relates to their work and it is the supervisor or manager's responsibility to create an environment for them to do so. Once the meeting is over, and the form is filled out, it should be filed with other documented Tool Box Talks.

Remember that Tool Box Talks are short and informal, they are not meant to be intimidating. Use the opportunity to have fun and stay on top of what is necessary to keep safety culture a strong part of the business.

For a full listing of Tool Box Talk topics, visit: www.scsaonline.ca/resources/tool-box-talks

For a copy of the Tool Box Talk form, visit: www.scsaonline.ca/pdf/Tool_Box_Meeting.pdf

About the Saskatchewan Construction Safety Association

The Saskatchewan Construction Safety Association (SCSA) is an industry-funded, membership-based, nonprofit organization that provides cost-effective, accessible safety training and advice to employers and employees in the construction industry throughout the province to reduce the human and financial losses associated with injuries. Registered March 20, 1995, the SCSA is, and has been since inception, committed to injury prevention. Serving almost 10,000 member companies with business offices in both Regina and Saskatoon, the major business units of the association are Advisory Services, Business Development, Corporate Services, Program Services and Training. The mission of the SCSA is constructing safety leadership in Saskatchewan and the vision is to create the safest construction environment in Canada.