

### What Is Mental Health?

Mental health refers to the psychological well-being of a person. It is both emotional and behavioural 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, but mental wellness needs to become a part of that. It will not be immediate or easy—though just like with physical safety—the impact can be life-saving.

It's time to bring attention to this silent crisis. Mental health struggles are especially common in the construction industry due to its demanding lifestyle.

Many workers spend weeks away from home, separated from their support systems. This can lead to high stress, loneliness, isolation, and depression. Winter months can make these struggles even more difficult to deal with.



The mental health of your employees actually plays a role in the productivity 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 also affects your business.

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

- Seasonal work and possible layoffs
- A highly competitive, “macho” culture
- The expectation of overtime and working long hours
- Difficulty securing payment from clients
- Physical exhaustion can impact life outside of work
- Workplace injuries that can lead to chronic pain, psychological trauma and missed hours
- Budget constraints

### What Can We Do?

Safety and construction go hand in hand. Posting reminders to wear PPE on the job site is second nature, but the impact of mental health on workplace safety is often overlooked.

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 with 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 based on 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 access to someone available for vulnerable, open and honest conversations.

*Mental health resources can be found at the Canadian Mental Health Association: [cmha.ca](http://cmha.ca)*