

INCLUDE MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING IN APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS

HB 2492/SB 6282

Washington state has robust standards for registered apprenticeship programs in the building or construction trades, ensuring apprentices are highly trained in both skills and safety practices. But currently, the state does not require safety curriculum to cover mental and behavioral wellness.

THE PROBLEM

Construction and building trades workers are far more likely to die from an overdose or by suicide than other workers. While labor unions have increased their focus on behavioral and mental health in the past decade, policy support is needed to save lives.



THE SOLUTION

The legislature should pass HB 2492 and its companion bill, SB 6282, to require state registered apprenticeships in the building or construction trades to provide behavioral health and wellness training. Training must focus on destigmatizing behavioral health and supporting wellness, recognizing signs of distress, suicide prevention, substance abuse disorder awareness and prevention, peer support, and connection to resources. The bill, which has bipartisan support, would also allow behavioral health and wellness training to be counted towards some continuing education hours.

- **Construction and building trades workers are facing a crisis.** In 2023 there were 982 fatal jobsite injuries among construction workers, but 15,910 fatal overdoses and 5,095 suicides. Construction workers are only about 8% of the U.S. workforce, but account for about 17% of overdose deaths among the working population. Male construction workers are almost twice as likely to die by suicide than other working men.
- **The nature of the industry puts workers at risk.** Construction is a male-dominated industry. Young men, especially white men, are at the greatest risk of suicide, according to the Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention. Working long, irregular hours can negatively impact mental health. Job loss, whether seasonal or due to economic downturns, is extremely stressful. And the physically grueling nature of the work wears on the body, which can lead to debilitating chronic pain and/or substance misuse.
- **Training can save lives.** Research commissioned by North America's Building Trades Unions indicates that empowering construction workers to identify warning signs of suicide and substance use disorder and emphasizing peer support can improve mental health outcomes. And training can encourage more workers to access the mental health and treatment services available to them under their union contracts.

Citations: The Center for Construction Research and Training, "Mental Health in the Construction Industry" & "Research Projects: CPWR and NABTU's Research and Action Agenda Tackles Suicide and Overdose in the Construction Industry"

Learn more at wslc.org

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