

AIB Policy on Mental Health in the Construction Industry

Summary

AIB advocates for greater awareness of and action on the issue of mental health in construction, and would like to see further growth of support networks in companies and on construction sites. Construction managers have a key role to play in boosting the morale and mental health of staff in their workplaces. It is a critical issue that must be addressed in a positive and proactive manner by Governments, the industry, individual companies, professional bodies, construction managers and all workers in the built environment.

Background

Mental health in the building and construction industry in Australia has long been a silent and destructive problem that has had a profound impact on individuals, their families, friends and colleagues, as well as on the productivity of the industry. For example, the suicide rate for young workers in the Queensland construction industry is more than double the national average for men. Further, a construction worker is up to six times more likely to die from suicide than from an accident at work.

AIB Policy Positions

AIB will be proactive, and do as much as possible to address this issue. AIB holds the following positions in relation to mental health in the construction industry:

- Suicide prevention is too large a task in the construction industry to be left to health professionals, and those in the industry should be proactive in being part of the solution;
- Workers in the industry should also be encouraged to seek external help where needed, and assisted to be put in touch with those professionals;
- Getting help should be an easy and hassle-free, and not just to prevent suicide, but for all mental health and wellbeing issues on construction sites. This help offered to workers must be relevant and effective;

- Mental health and wellbeing issues need to be de-stigmatised and construction workers should be encouraged to seek help for a range of issues, and not just those that relate to suicide. People should not be afraid or ashamed to admit that they have a problem with their mental health;
- Suicide awareness and prevention should become a part of everyday activities in the construction industry;
- AIB supports organisations and initiatives that assist with suicide prevention, such as Mates in Construction, Black Dog Institute, Beyond Blue, OzHelp and SANE Australia;
- Awareness should be raised of suicide as a preventable problem within the building and construction industry, and seminars, webinars, addresses and one-on-one and group discussions are all means of doing this;
- Construction sites should have access to appropriate and available suicide first aid resources;
- The culture on construction sites of conflict and intimidation by certain groups needs to end;
- Suicides in the industry are often indicative of a greater malaise, and so there is also a need to address the underlying issues; and
- Substance abuse, such as abusing drugs and alcohol, as well as gambling and other addictions, are also indicative of mental health issues, and need to be addressed.

Actions

To further the above policies, the Australian Institute of Building will:

- Raise awareness amongst its members about this issue, as construction managers have a key role to play in boosting morale amongst workers on construction sites;
- Encourage building professionals to join the AIB and attend AIB events to increase camaraderie and morale;
- Support Mates in Construction and other relevant organisations, and liaise with them to achieve tangible outcomes; and
- Raise awareness about this issue with politicians, the construction industry and the community at large.