



A new mental health eLearning program for the trades

***Opening the Door to Support* teaches workplace leaders how to support mental health.**

Workplace leadership is responsible for more than worker health and safety—it also defines workplace culture. Employers, managers, and supervisors set the standard for how workers are expected to act on the job and influence how the workplace views mental health.

IHSA created a new eLearning program, *Opening the Door to Support*, to give leaders the awareness, skills, and tools to support mental health in the workplace. Using an interactive, story-based format, the course explains how to break down stigma, spot mental health “red flags,” and start difficult conversations. We developed the course in partnership with the Mental Health Innovations.

Creating a culture of care

Work environments have a major impact on mental health—and it’s an increasing concern in the construction and trades sectors in Canada. Strict deadlines, unpredictable schedules, physical strain, injuries, and exposure to traumatic incidents can cause significant work-related stress in these sectors.

The stress can build up over time and lead to serious mental health challenges. Workers in the trades, as a result, face a higher risk of suicide, suicidal ideation, substance use, and overdose than the general population. Those with mental health challenges may also be unfit to work safely.

Industry leaders want to support the mental well-being of their workers, but positively impacting their mental health is not always easy. Many leaders worry about saying the wrong thing, crossing a line, or making a situation worse—especially in high-risk, male-dominated workplaces where a “tough guy” mentality is often the norm.

“Every interaction we have on the job, whether we realize it or not, can influence someone’s mental health—either positively or negatively,” says Enzo Garritano, President and CEO of IHSA. “That’s why it’s so important to increase awareness, build knowledge, and reflect those insights in our policies and practices.”

“It’s about leading. It’s about challenging ourselves to move forward in a manner that is respectful of mental health and people’s challenges. It says that we care and that we are a community.”

While IHSA created the course with workplace leadership in mind, the material applies to everyone who works in a trades environment. Everybody has a role to play in fostering a supportive workplace—whether that means recognizing signs of distress in a co-worker or connecting them to mental health resources.

Focusing on sector-specific experiences

IHSA consulted with workers and industry leaders who had first-hand experience with mental health to create *Opening the Door to Support*. The input from industry partners, mental health experts, and frontline workers helped us understand how the industry could benefit from mental health resources that reflect the day-to-day reality for leaders and workers in the trades.

Mental health stigma, for example, is a particularly harmful factor in male-dominated workplaces like many of those in the construction industry. Stigma is a set of negative beliefs and prejudices about a person or group of people that is often based on myths or outdated social norms.



Society teaches men that talking about mental health is weak or “unmanly.” These beliefs can create situations where workers experiencing a mental health challenge are negatively stereotyped, discriminated against, bullied, harassed, or targeted with violence by people around them. Some may choose not to reach out for support when they’re struggling to avoid dealing with the stigma.

The course covers topics, such as stigma, with an industry-specific focus to give attendees relevant, practical information for construction workplaces.

“When I took the program, one thing that stood out was that it reflected experiences and conversations I’ve had on construction sites,” Garritano says. “It helps you apply what you’ve learned and make a tangible difference in your workplace.”

Knowing better, doing better

Workplace leaders in the trades are beginning to recognize how mental health shapes overall safety. Workers who aren’t in the right frame of mind to focus on their work may be less aware of their surroundings and less vigilant about following health and safety policies and procedures.

Policies and training that address mental health and its impact on health and safety are essential to preventing incidents. Garritano says that workplaces should integrate mental health policies into their occupational health and safety management systems, rather than treat physical safety and mental health as two separate issues.

“Over time, we’re likely going to find that mental health is deeply connected to health and safety outcomes,” Garritano says. “Because of this, we can’t treat mental health as something separate from physical risk. When we start asking questions like, ‘Was mental health a factor?’ during incident investigations, we create opportunities to prevent more injuries in the future.”

Workplace leaders can more effectively make these changes and embed mental health in everyday safety practices when they understand mental illness and the available supports. *Opening the Door to Support* gives leaders the practical tools and strategies to get started—helping to protect workers, reduce risk, and build a more resilient workplace.

Looking forward

Leaders don’t have to be mental health experts to influence the mental health culture in their workplace, nor do they have to have all of the answers. But gaining a basic understanding of these important mental health topics shows the workplace that mental health is a priority.

“If you want great outcomes, you need to recognize when someone might not be in the right frame of mind to engage,” Garritano says. “That awareness allows leaders to adjust, offer support, and see better results both for individuals and the business.” ■

Register now!

You can complete *Opening the Door to Support* on any smartphone or tablet. However, you will have the best user experience if you work from a computer. The course can take two to three hours to complete, depending on how much time you spend looking through the supplemental resources for each module. We recommend completing the course over several days or weeks to make sure that you absorb the information.



Put your mind to it



DISCOVER IHSA’s mental health safety talks: ihsa.ca/safetytalks



LISTEN to Episode 120 of the *IHSA Safety Podcast* to learn more about *Opening the Door to Support* and the importance of mental health training in the workplace: ihsasafetypodcast.ca