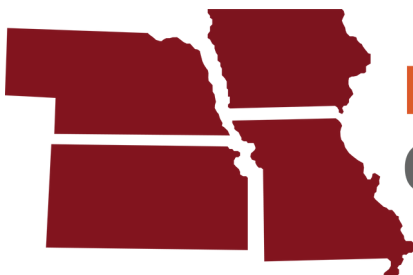




ANNUAL REPORT

2023-2024



HEALTHIER WORKFORCE
CENTER of the MIDWEST

ABOUT US

The Healthier Workforce Center of the Midwest (HWC) represents a collaboration between the University of Iowa, Washington University in St. Louis, the University of Kansas Medical Center, Penn State University, WorkWell Kansas, the Nebraska Safety Council, and the St. Louis Area Business Health Coalition. The HWC is one of ten NIOSH Centers of Excellence for *Total Worker Health*[®]. The Center was established in 2006 and is built upon extensive investigator experience in occupational health and safety, ergonomics, and health promotion. The vision of the HWC is to create a safe, healthy, and productive workforce.

personnel

- Diane Rohlman, MA, PhD, Center Director
- Bradley A. Evanoff, MD, MPH, Associate Director; Principal Investigator, Mental Health in Construction
- Jonathan Davis, PhD, Director of Pilot Projects Program
- Megan TePoel, MS, Center Coordinator
- Beth Livingston, PhD, MBA Principal Investigator, Supervising the Future of Remote Work
- Ann Marie Dale, PhD, OTR/L, Principal Investigator, Refining Workplace Opioid Guidelines for Dissemination through a Social Marketing Approach
- Jess Williams, PhD, Principal Investigator, Understanding the Implementation of *Total Worker Health* in Rural Nursing Homes
- Shelly Campo, PhD, Outreach Director
- Laura Keniston, MHA, Outreach Coordinator
- Michael Guhin, BA, Multimedia Specialist

partners

- Elizabeth Ablah, PhD, MPH, Co-Investigator, Outreach
- Karen Rehm, Co-Investigator, Outreach
- Annie Turner (Fitzgerald), CHES, Co-Investigator, Outreach

outreach and implementation

Providing Educational Opportunities to Health Plan Administrators

The Healthier Workforce Center of the Midwest developed a pilot course, “*Total Worker Health®* Approaches for Health Plan Administrators” in partnership with the International Foundation of Employee Benefits Plans (IFEBP). The 30,927 members of the IFEBP impact 25 million individuals in the United States and Canada through multi-employer (Taft-Hartley), corporate sponsor, and public employer benefit plans.

The foundational course offered in the Fall of 2023 was designed specifically for health plan administrators, to provide them with an overview of the *Total Worker Health* approach to protecting workers, promoting health and well-being, and increasing productivity in the workplace. Organized around the *Total Worker Health* (TWH) competencies, the course utilized case studies, hands-on activities, and a capstone project to demonstrate and apply the concepts learned.

The capstone projects developed by the course participants included novel approaches to 1) remove financial barriers for preventative care and address health access for members living in impoverished communities with limited health providers, 2) implement a personalized case management system for health and medication management of diabetic and pre-diabetic members, and 3) coordinate with union, employer, and benefit plan administrators to provide education, policies, and programing for musculoskeletal disease prevention.

A smaller introductory *Total Worker Health* workshop was presented to a broad audience of IFEBP Health Care Management Conference attendees in March 2024. The workshop engaged trustees of multi-employer trust funds, third-party and salaried administrators, members of bargaining committees, and fiduciaries, staff and trustees from governmental plans.



outreach

The HWC Hierarchy of Controls Video Series Goes Viral

The popularity of the Hierarchy of Controls video produced by the Center in 2019, has resulted in more than 86k views to date. Building on the success of the original Hierarchy of Controls video to address a *Total Worker Health* approach to hazard protection, the Center produced two new videos featuring safety examples, “Cold Stress” & “Outdoor Heat Stress”. They were released preceding peak climate events over the past year. Developed in conjunction with the Iowa Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the videos highlight the employer and worker well-being benefits to utilizing a hierarchy of controls approach to address work-related hazards. In each video example, Peggy Peterson, Bureau Chief for Iowa OSHA On-site Consultation, Education, and COOP Programs, describes solutions for protecting the health and well-being of workers at each level of intervention.

The release of the Cold Stress video led to a local news feature with Center Director, Diane Rohlman, describing how the hierarchy of controls approach can be used to protect workers:

<https://cbs2iowa.com/news/local/employers-take-measures-to-safeguard-workers-from-cold-weather-workplace-hazards>

The Outdoor Heat Safety video quickly reached thousands of individuals in the months following its release, gathering 3,860 views in the first 60 days. The hierarchy of controls video series continues to capture the attention of employers, academic institutions, and the news media, with frequent requests to utilize the videos in educational content.



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In June 2024, Safety+Health Magazine, produced by the National Safety Council, reached out to develop a heat safety podcast in partnership with the Center. Representatives of the National Safety Council were connected with Peggy Peterson for the podcast interview. Two stories highlighting the Outdoor Heat Safety video were subsequently featured in the Safety+Health Magazine:

- <https://www.safetyandhealthmagazine.com/articles/25519-safe-side-podcast-keeping-workers-safe-in-heat>
- <https://www.safetyandhealthmagazine.com/articles/25591-video-use-the-hierarchy-of-controls-to-protect-workers-from-heat>

ON THE SAFE SIDE

Sponsored by **+Babbel** FOR BUSINESS

A podcast from **Safety+Health.**

EDITOR'S NOTE: Each month, the Safety+Health editorial team discusses important safety topics, and interviews leading voices in the profession.

In Episode 52, the *S+H* team examines content from the June issue, including a feature story with tips on keeping your safety committee fresh and effective. Also, Iowa OSHA Bureau Chief Peggy Peterson joins the podcast to discuss how to keep workers safe in the heat during the "Five Questions With ..." segment.

*translation and dissemination***Best Practices for Recovery Friendly Workplaces**

Professor Ann Marie Dale, of Washington University St. Louis, has spent the last decade investigating and addressing the opioid crisis, particularly within the construction industry. Center researcher, Dr. Dale, worked with the Healthier Workforce Center's outreach core to increase translation and dissemination of her [Workplace Guidelines to Prevent Opioid and Substance Abuse for the Construction Trades](#). The Guidelines highlight eight elements foundational to any recovery friendly workplace.

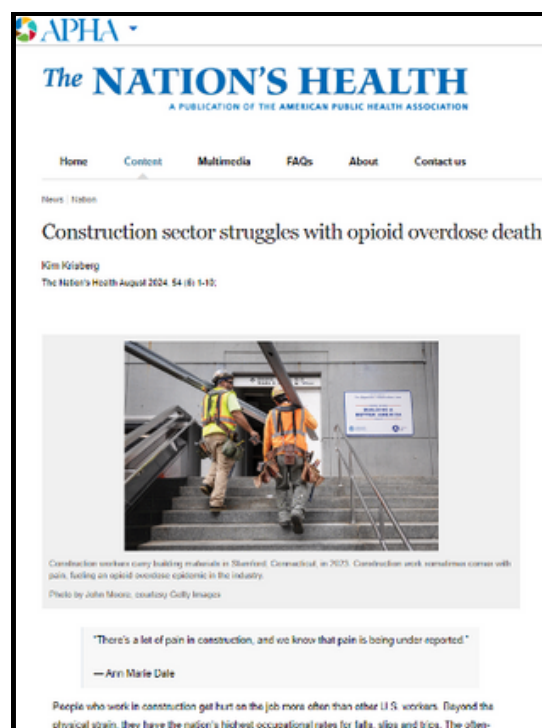
In cooperation with Dr. Dale and the Recovery Friendly Workplace Missouri Extension team, the Center highlighted several evidence-based policies, programs, and practices for recovery friendly workplace prevention and treatment. The Missouri Recovery Friendly Workplace (RFW) initiative is funded by a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Federal Region VII grant, to support the implementation of recovery friendly workplaces.

This relationship with RFW Missouri led to the development of four podcasts during the 2023-2024 FY. The following Center podcasts featured substance use experts, employers, employees, and peer support specialists:

- Employee Perspectives on Recovery Friendly Workplaces
- Retention Through Recovery Friendly Workplaces
- Naloxone in the Workplace
- Peers in Recovery

Dr. Dale's Workplace Guidelines to Prevent Opioid and Substance Abuse for the Construction Trades, which are housed on the Center's website, were recently featured in August 2024 edition of the American Public Health Association's The Nation's Health publication, which is distributed to 25,000 members

(<https://www.thenationshealth.org/content/54/6/1.2>).



collaborative learning community

Promoting Health and Safety Among Younger Workers



Recognizing the risk to younger workers, the HWC hosted a Collaborative Learning Community focused on promoting health and safety among younger workers. The goal was to better understand why adolescent and young adult workers are at greater risk and describe current state and federal regulations that can impact their health, safety, and well-being. Additionally, the Collaborative Learning Community focused on identifying best practices that can be implemented in the workplace and training programs for younger workers and their supervisors. The panel included representatives from the Department of Labor at state and federal levels, trainers in pre-apprentice and workforce development programs, safety experts, and employers. Over 70 people attended the online event. Using a question/answer format, a panel of experts addressed topics ranging from factors to consider when hiring and training young workers to making mental health part of the conversation. Questions about state versus federal labor laws were also discussed. We shared resources for supervisors and young workers.

PROTECTING YOUNG WORKERS

A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

OVERVIEW

Young workers, under the age of 25, make up almost 12% of the workforce (1). While there are many benefits to youth working, including the development of job skills and responsibility, increased self-esteem, and earned income, young workers are two times more likely to get injured on the job than older workers. In 2020, over 350 young workers died from work-related injuries; 26 of these workers were under the age of 18 (2).

EMPLOYER RESPONSIBILITIES

- Follow federal and state labor laws addressing working hours and assigning appropriate tasks for young workers, including restrictions on performing dangerous or hazardous work. Label equipment that young workers are not allowed to operate.
- Provide training on hazard recognition and safe work practices, including required safety gear. Training should include prevention of fires, injuries, violent situations, and what to do if injured.

YOUNG WORKERS ARE DIFFERENT THAN OLDER WORKERS

Young workers' brains and bodies continue to develop up to age 25, putting them at increased risk for injury. They may:

- Engage in risky behaviors and lack impulse control
- Be afraid to speak up when they have questions or concerns
- Have poor decision-making skills
- Be smaller in stature and not as strong as adults (but perform the same work)

Employers play an active role in protecting these vulnerable workers. Enforcing workplace policies, providing consistent training and supervision, and communicating effectively with young workers about health and safety hazards are key to protecting them.

SAFETY POLICIES

Workplace policies keep employees and employers accountable. Having consistent policies and consistently enforcing them protects all workers. Young workers should be aware of policies and consequences when they do not follow them.

Include in a policy:

- Employees are not required to do job if unsafe – but need to communicate their concerns to a supervisor
- (and near-misses) should be reported immediately
- Unsafe equipment you have been trained to operate
- Use of cell phones when moving or performing dangerous work

TRAINING YOUNG WORKERS

Training should be ongoing: when hired, when given a new task or tool, whenever there is a new hazard in the workplace, after an injury or close call, and periodically review.

Training should cover:

- How to do a job or task
- How to recognize hazards
- How workplace policies apply to the task or tool being taught
- How to use personal protective equipment (PPE)
- What to do if problems arise
- What guidelines to follow in case of an emergency
- How to report an injury or near-miss (close call)

Ask open-ended questions to check for understanding (rather than yes/no)

- "Don't ask, 'Do you understand?'"
- Do say, "Please tell/show me how to do this."
- "Describe how you will perform this task."
- "What safety precautions do you need to think about?"
- "Tell me who you will ask if you have a question about this job."

1. Hurdle (2022). Analysis of the Current Population Survey. Morgantown, WV: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. Unpublished.

2. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022). Table A-1. Paid occupational injuries by worker characteristics and event or exposure. All United States, 2020.

3. <https://www.osha.gov/young-workers/employer-responsibilities>

HEALTHIER WORKFORCE
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IOWA
College of Public Health
Institute of Public Health
Research and Policy

SCAN FOR MORE
WORKPLACE RESOURCES

HEALTHIER WORKFORCE
CENTER of the MIDWEST

--> www.healthierworkforcecenter.org

collaboration

HWC Renews Alliance with OSHA

An alliance agreement between the Healthier Workforce Center, Federal Region VII Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA), and Iowa OSHA has prioritized the development of workplace mental health resources. OSHA has recently developed materials addressing mental health in the workplace, providing guidance for leaders on how to address mental health and communicate with employees. However, they do not address prevention. Working with our alliance partners, the HWC developed materials targeting workplace hazards and other upstream solutions. This resource was shared during a regional all-hands meeting.

“
 This is a nice compliment to what OSHA put out. I like the theme of prevention.
 Brian Wood, CSP, OSHA Compliance Assistance Specialist
 ”

alliance
An OSHA Cooperative Program

Workplace Mental Health

Addressing Psychosocial Risk Factors

Addressing mental health in the workplace can improve worker well-being, enhance retention, reduce health care costs, and improve productivity.

Recommendations for Addressing Mental Health at Work

- prevent work-related mental health conditions by eliminating the **risks** to mental health at work
- protect and promote mental health at work
- support workers with mental health conditions to participate and thrive in work
- create an enabling environment for change

Psychosocial Hazard

Hazards at work that can lead to stress, strain, or relationship problems for the worker.

Psychosocial Risks to Mental Health at Work

- Work Schedule:** Shift work, inflexible work schedules, unpredictable hours
- Lack of Control:** Decision making, workload, pace
- Poor Work Environment:** Noise, lighting, lack of maintenance
- Organizational Culture and Function:** Poor communication, lack of support, competition for scarce resources
- Understaffing:** High workload, mandatory overtime
- Interpersonal Relationships:** Isolation, poor relationships with supervisors or coworkers, interpersonal conflict, microaggressions
- Workplace Violence:** physical or verbal abuse
- Role Ambiguity:** Lack of job security, job satisfaction
- Home-Work Interface:** Blurred lines between work and home, living away from home, living with work-related stressors

Hierarchy of Controls

The hierarchy of controls can be applied to both physical and psychosocial hazards. Solutions that change the work environment are more effective than those that rely on individual protective measures.

Effectiveness	Physical Hazards	Psychosocial Hazards	Control Strategy
Most Effective	Physically remove the hazard	Elimination	Eliminate the hazard
	Replace the hazard	Substitution	Adjust tasks and responsibilities
	Isolate people from the hazard	Engineering Controls	Re-design how responsibilities are shared
	Change the way people work	Administrative Controls	Educate workers to follow policies, procedures
Least Effective	Protect the worker with Personal Protective Equipment	PPPE	Provide opportunities to be resilient and withstand psychosocial hazards

Adapted from Healthier Workforce Center of the Midwest
 Developed through an OSHA Alliance Agreement between the Healthier Workforce Center of the Midwest and OSHA

1-800-321-OSHA (6742) | TTY 1-877-889-5627 | osha.gov/workplace-stress

FOCUS ON PRIMARY PREVENTION

Organizational policies and programs should focus on prevention of workplace/psychosocial hazards, creating a culture of safety, and raise awareness and knowledge about mental health, substance use, and suicide prevention.

Make mental health part of the safety conversation.

Organizational Interventions

- Create a workplace culture that promotes mental health from the top down: Model and promote mental health practices, communicate resources, include mental health in safety conversations
- Flexible Work Arrangements: Time, place
- Participatory Intervention: Engaging workers in job design and hazard control
- Changes to workloads or breaks
- Prioritize strategies targeting organizational level changes vs. individual level (Hierarchy of Controls)
- Performance Feedback/Reward: Promotion opportunities, mentoring
- Provide Reasonable Wages and Benefits: Health care, Employee Assistance Program, paid sick leave
- Promote Mental Health Resources: During onboarding, at benefits renewal, monthly communications
- Remove barriers to seeking treatment
- Address work conditions that impact mental health
- Consider mental health when performance issues develop

Recovery-Ready Workplace Toolkit

Substance use disorder is a treatable health condition from which one can recover. This toolkit provides resources for employers to prevent & respond to substance misuse, employ people in recovery, and build a recovery-supportive culture.

dol.gov/agencies/eta/RRW-hub/Toolkit

Training & Education

- Senior leadership commitment
- Select evidence-based training
- Assess application of training (how knowledge and skills have been applied in the workplace)
- Offer training during working hours
- Peer support programs
- Provide anti-bullying and harassment training
- Train staff members as gate keepers/introduce a peer support program
- Educate workers on EAP programs and mental health benefits
- Promote local mental health and addiction treatment resources
- Build protective factors for individuals (financial planning, conflict resolution, communication skills, parenting)

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pilot projects program

Pilot Study Measures Stressors Specific to Women in Agriculture

Over half of all farms in Iowa have at least one producer who is a woman. Despite women's significant contributions to farm operations, there is a gap in knowledge about the stressors they face. Carly Nichols, Assistant Professor of Geographical and Sustainability Sciences, alongside Jonathan Davis, Assistant Professor of Occupational and Environmental Health, sought to create a survey tool to measure these stressors.

The result is the Women Farmer Stress Inventory: a 36-item survey that asks women to rate the impact of stressors on a scale of 1 (no stress) to 5 (extreme stress). The survey, which included 600 respondents, found that women were most impacted by time pressures and workload, including responsibilities at home, on the farm, and off-farm employment often necessary to provide their families with health insurance. Additional stressors included environmental concerns, government and market pressures, and rural amenities.

This research was featured in regional publications including The Cedar Rapids Gazette, WQAD9 ABC, and the Progressive Farmer.

Media Stories

- [Iowa study uses new tool to examine stress among women farmers. University of Iowa College of Public Health News. January 2024.](#)
- [What are women farmers most stressed about? A UI study found out. The Cedar Rapids Gazette. February 17, 2024.](#)
- [Stressed out: The new tool examining stress among women farmers. WQAD9 ABC. March 5, 2024.](#)
- [Gender differences exist in farmer emotional health. Progressive Farmer. April 30, 2024.](#)

Publications

- [Nichols CE, Carter A. It doesn't bother me: An intersectional analysis of discrimination among white women farmers in the US Corn Belt. J of Rural Studies. July 2023.](#)
- [CE, Davis J. The Women Farmer Stress Inventory: Examining women farmer stress in the United States Corn Belt. The Journal of rural health. 2023 Nov 14.](#)

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