



SPARK CHANGE

2025 Construction Industry Well-being Survey.
Supported by ASB.



IMPORTANT NOTE ON SUICIDE CONTENT: THIS REPORT TALKS ABOUT SUICIDE

This report contains information about suicide that may be distressing. If you or someone you know is struggling, please reach out for help.

In an emergency: Call 111

Go to your nearest hospital emergency department
Or phone your local **Mental Health Crisis Team** ([find your local team here](#))

For free, confidential support 24/7:

MATES NZ Helpline → 0800 111 315

Lifeline Aotearoa → 0800 543 354 or text 4357

Suicide Crisis Helpline – Tautoko → 0508 828 865

1737 Need to Talk? → Call or text 1737



THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

This survey was only possible because of the generosity and commitment of our partners, industry leaders, and workers across the motu.

Every contribution, from financial backing, to pro bono expertise, to advocacy and grassroots support, has helped bring more than 3,300 worker voices into this report and shape meaningful analysis and clear recommendations for change. We are deeply grateful to all who stood alongside us to make this possible.

Our Primary Financial Supporter



Our heartfelt thanks to ASB, who for a second year have been our Primary Financial Supporter, making this mahi possible at scale.

Our Financial Supporters



Our thanks to our Financial Supporters, whose contributions make possible the survey translation and broad dissemination of the research findings. Their support ensures workers across our diverse industry can see themselves reflected and included, and that the findings reach those who can drive real change.



In-Kind and Pro Bono Supporters



We thank the organisations who have given their expertise, resources, and services to strengthen this kaupapa.

Advocacy Supporters



We also thank those who amplify worker voices, advocate for change, and ensure this research reaches the widest possible audience.



The MATES Partners

Without these partners, none of this mahi would be possible. Their ongoing commitment underpins every conversation, every training, and every worker voice captured in this survey.



Shaping the Outcomes Together

We are especially grateful to the industry leaders, partner organisations, and experts who sat down with us to reflect on the high-level findings and their impact. Their insights helped ensure the recommendations are grounded, realistic, and achievable, so the final outcomes reflect both the challenges and the opportunities facing our industry.

And to All Others...

Beyond our named supporters, we acknowledge:

- The **industry champions** who open their worksites and enable workers to participate.
- The **6,500+ trained MATES volunteers**, who are the beating heart of MATES and helped ensure so many workers had the chance to be heard.
- And our **dedicated staff team**, whose passion, expertise, and commitment bring this kaupapa to life every day.

Together, you have made sure workers' voices are at the centre of this report, sparking change for our industry, our whānau, and our communities.



WHAT WE HEARD (KEY FINDINGS)

Suicide takes more lives in Aotearoa/New Zealand each year than road crashes, workplace accidents, and drownings combined – and construction is among the hardest hit. Every week, more than one construction worker dies by suicide, and every day, others step away from work in suicidal distress. Male construction workers continue to face nearly twice the suicide rate of other men in Aotearoa.

This survey makes space for the mental health of our industry because **construction workers are nine times more likely to die by suicide than by a workplace accident.**

The MATES Well-being Survey gives voice to over 3,300 workers, showing the pressures they face, the groups most affected, and the supports that can turn the tide – and where change is possible.

This is one of the largest community-based mental health and well-being surveys in Aotearoa. These findings are drawn from data collected in July–August 2025 and released during World Suicide Prevention Day week (8-14 September 2025), providing one of the most up-to-date snapshots of worker well-being in the country.

The survey reveals both positives and challenges. Almost two-thirds of workers (64%) say they are satisfied with their work in construction, and overall mental health has improved since 2021 (though Covid means this comparison should be read with caution).

Yet beneath this surface, distress remains widespread. In just four months, almost one in five workers reported suicidal thoughts, with a smaller group going on to report serious thoughts, plans, or attempts – around four times higher than what is usually seen in the general population over a whole year. This paradox runs through the findings: many of those most affected – apprentices, younger workers, Māori and Pasifika, and people with ongoing health challenges – rated their mental health as “good” on the day of the survey, while still carrying high levels of stress or suicidal thoughts in the last four months.

Workers do not arrive on site as blank slates – home life comes with them, just as work stress follows them home. Exhaustion, financial strain, workload, deadlines, and poor communication are everyday realities, and nearly half the workforce reported living with physical or mental health issues – more than double the national average. In an industry long focused on physical safety, workers made it clear that mental health is just as critical for preventing injuries, mistakes, and burnout.

The survey also shows where change is possible. Workers said that protective factors like whānau, faith, good teams, and trusted supports improve their well-being, and high engagement with MATES (any three touchpoints) cuts suicidal behaviours in half. In an industry of 300,000 workers, where one in five report suicidal thoughts, halving risk is hugely significant.

Scaling proven programmes and aligning leadership priorities with what workers say keeps them well – fair pay, reasonable hours, and supportive cultures – would transform outcomes.



These findings show that suicide risk is not inevitable: construction has the power not only to build homes, schools, and infrastructure, but also to build safer, healthier worksites and a stronger, more resilient workforce for generations to come.



Executive Summary

Suicide in Aotearoa: The Scale of the Problem

In 2023, 579 people died by suspected suicide in Aotearoaⁱ – more lives lost than to road crashes, workplace accidents, and drownings combined.ⁱⁱ

In construction, the impact is particularly stark. Every week, more than one construction worker dies by suicide,ⁱⁱⁱ and a further 31 workers take time off due to self-harm.^{iv} Put another way;

Somewhere across the country every day – at morning smoko, lunch, afternoon smoko, and knock-off – a worker is in suicidal distress and needs time off work.

Male construction workers continue to face nearly twice the suicide rate of other men in Aotearoa (19.7 vs 10.6 per 100,000).^v

Construction's Power to Drive Change

This makes construction **one of Aotearoa's highest-risk industries**,^{vi} with risks concentrated among groups already overrepresented nationally.^{vii} Yet **suicide risk is not inevitable**.

Construction – one of our largest industries – is also one of the most powerful places to drive change and build a safety net that reaches workers every day.



MATES in Action Across the Industry

That is why MATES exists: a suicide prevention and mental health programme embedded in construction, standing alongside workers, reducing stigma, and creating safer, more supportive worksites.

Grounded in what New Zealand construction workers say they need – and in the real pressures our industry faces – research plays a vital role in shaping and strengthening MATES' mahi (work), while also guiding the bigger system changes needed to improve worker well-being.

Listening to Workers at Scale

The MATES Well-being Survey, supported by ASB, is one of our cornerstone research projects and one of the industry's largest pieces of evidence on worker well-being. It is how workers' voices are heard at scale.

Since 2021, the Well-being survey has tracked how workers are really doing, the pressures they face, and what supports make the most significant difference.

In 2025, more than 3,300 workers took part, making this one of the most extensive community-based surveys of its kind in New Zealand and the most significant sample in its four-year history.

The survey was translated into seven languages and taken directly to sites throughout the motu (country). It was also available online, and workers could scan a QR code to complete the survey by phone, enabling accessible technology. This helped to remove barriers and ensure workers everywhere had the chance to be heard.

Turning the Well-being Survey into Support

The survey became more than data collection – for many, it was a moment of self-reflection and a step toward support. As workers paused to check in on themselves, **194 (6%) requested a follow-up well-being call from a MATES staff member**. As one worker put it:

“This is a reminder to check in on yourself – this survey has made me think about things I have just brushed aside.”



The Hidden Struggles Behind ‘I’m Good’

Encouragingly, almost two-thirds of workers (64%) report being satisfied with their work in construction, and overall mental health has improved since 2021 – though this must be seen in the context of the COVID years, which were especially difficult for workers. However, suicide risk remains stubbornly high.

Almost one in five workers reported suicidal thoughts in the last four months (March–June 2025), with a smaller group going on to report serious thoughts, plans, or attempts.¹

The survey revealed a paradox: many in the highest-risk groups – younger workers, apprentices, Pacific and Māori workers, and those with ongoing health challenges – rated their mental health as ‘good’ on the day of the survey, while also carrying high levels of stress, distress, or suicidal thoughts.

Workers in the survey could feel ‘good’ in the moment while still carrying suicidal thoughts – because stressors and supports constantly push and pull against each other.

Mental health is not black and white, ‘good’ or ‘bad.’ Just like when someone asks, “How are you?” and the automatic answer is “good,” deeper struggles can remain unseen.

Tackling Pressures at Work and Home

This paradox – reporting good mental health today while still carrying distress or suicide risk – makes sense when you look at the pressures workers face.

Workers are not clean slates when they arrive on site – pressures from home come with them, just as work stress follows them home.

Two out of three workers said they were worried about at least one significant stressor.

At home, exhaustion (40%) and financial strain (29%) were the most common concerns. On-site, the top stressors were high workload (23%), time pressures (17%), ongoing demanding work (15%), fear of mistakes (16%), and stress among workmates (13%).

¹ National context: broader New Zealand studies suggest about 1 in 5 people experience mental distress or addiction in any given year, and 50–80% do so at some point in life – a similar order of magnitude to our 2025 finding, though the measures differ (indicative, not directly comparable) (Oakley-Browne et al., 2006; Schaefer et al., 2017).



When Stress Becomes Pain

These pressures do not stay “just stress” – they show up in workers’ bodies and minds.

Nearly half the workforce reported living with physical or mental health issues, more than double the national average.^{viii}

This was not limited to one age group: from young apprentices to older workers, the pattern was consistent. Workers pointed to stress and mental strain, alongside physical wear and tear from years in the industry, as the leading causes.

This is significant:

In an industry long focused on physical health and safety, workers said that stress and mental strain also drive back problems, fatigue, and injury risk.

The Cost of Inaction

Left unaddressed, this cycle of stress and pain leads to slower work, more mistakes, rework, churn, and higher accident risk.

Tackling both physical and mental health head-on is one of the most significant opportunities the industry must lift well-being and productivity.

Coroner statistics show construction workers are nine times more likely to die by suicide than by a workplace accident.^{ix}

Mental health and safety must be given the same weight as physical health and safety, not only to keep workers safe, strong, and productive, but also to reduce time away from work, cut the costs of poor well-being, and unlock the industry’s full potential. The costs are first and foremost human, but also financial.



What Makes the Difference

The survey confirms that when protective factors such as mateship, strong relationships, and access to trusted support are in place, risk drops significantly.

Engagement with MATES almost halved the likelihood of suicidal behaviours.

2.6% of workers highly engaged with MATES reported suicidal tendencies (many of whom have been offered or are receiving one-on-one support), compared to 4.7% with little or no MATES support. 'Highly engaged' means workers who had three or more touchpoints with MATES – such as MATES visiting their site, completing training, or taking part in a well-being callback – not only using the Helpline or one-on-one support when already in distress.

In an industry of around 300,000 workers^x, where one in five report suicidal thoughts or behaviours, cutting risk in half is hugely significant.

Moreover, this impact is being achieved with MATES currently reaching just 22% of the workforce^{xi} – showing the transformative potential if scaled to full industry coverage.

Workers are clear about what keeps them well: time with whānau (family), wairua/faith, a good team, and trusted supports available when they need them – alongside fair pay and reasonable hours.

The challenge now is to make these protective factors universal, so every worker has the support they need.

But workers also pointed to the barriers sitting above the site: lowest-cost tendering, unrealistic deadlines, and volatile pipelines. Many recognised that even the best leaders struggle to provide balance, inclusion, or job security when industry settings and contract structures are stacked against them.

Aligning Leadership With Worker Needs

The survey shows a key barrier to progress:

What workers say keeps them well is often overlooked or undervalued by leadership, where priorities tend to fall on productivity, pipelines, and deadlines.

Closing that gap means aligning leadership priorities with what workers say keeps them well – and ensuring the environment they work in enables those supports to be put into practice. This is the critical step for lasting change, because what works for workers and improves their well-being also unlocks productivity.



The People and the Purpose

Behind every statistic is a person, a whānau, and a community. The voices captured here reflect every corner of the industry and point the way towards safer, healthier, more productive worksites:

By keeping people at the centre and never losing sight of them in the drive to build, create, and deliver on construction's purpose.

Because construction is not just about what we build – it is about the people who build it.

Balancing productivity and the bottom line with worker well-being is not a trade-off; it is the pathway to a stronger, safer, and more efficient industry.

As one worker put it:

“We need recognition not just of doing the work, but of the whole person ... to feel part of the team and considered as a person.” (Worker, 2025 Well-being Survey)

About MATES: MATES NZ is a suicide prevention and mental health charity that has trained almost 100,000 construction industry workers, including a 6,500-strong volunteer network across the motu (country). Each year, thousands of workers and their whānau are supported through the 24/7 Helpline, one-on-one support, and peer networks on-site, ensuring help is there when needed – from suicide prevention through to postvention.



WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE (RECOMMENDATIONS)

Why System Change Matters – Grounded in Worker Voice

Workers told us what keeps them well on site – but they also showed us the system-level barriers that stop these supports from taking root. Our recommendations respond to both.

Workers were clear about the everyday anchors of well-being: **mateship, fair pay, realistic hours, and supportive bosses**. These protective factors make the most significant difference to daily life on site.

However, workers also pointed to the barriers sitting above the site: **lowest-cost tendering, unrealistic deadlines, and volatile pipelines**. Many recognised that even the best leaders struggle to provide balance, inclusion, or job security when contracts and industry settings are stacked against them.

This means that calling for systemic change is not stepping away from workers' voices – it is staying true to them.

Workers themselves drew the line between what helps them every day and the bigger forces that either enable or block those supports.

To honour their voices, our recommendations tackle both: strengthening protective factors at the site level and removing the systemic barriers that prevent them from taking root.

Consultation with those who can drive real change is now critical. This ensures we respect the workers who shared their experiences and turn their voices into action.

The 2025 Recommendations outline practical steps for government, industry, NGOs, and communities to shift industry culture and ensure workers receive the support they need, when they need it.

These are MATES' recommendations, grounded in what more than 3,300 workers told us and focused on realistic, achievable actions.



The recommendations form a pathway:

- **Start at the top** with procurement, which sets the tone for the whole industry.
- **Strengthen national strategies and regulations** to close gaps, target priority groups, and give psychosocial risks the same weight as physical ones.
- **Enable grassroots supports and programmes** to thrive within these conditions.
- **Sustain momentum with research and worker voice**, keeping change responsive and effective.

In short, each recommendation plays a different role, but all align to the same goal: **safer, healthier worksites where workers and whānau are supported, and suicide prevention and mental health are treated as non-negotiable.**



At a Glance: Recommendations

SYSTEM-LEVEL LEVERS: PROCUREMENT. At the highest level, government procurement rules shape how the whole industry operates. By embedding mental health and suicide prevention into the already mandated Broader Outcomes, the Government can role-model best practice, set expectations across major agencies, and create stable funding streams. **Recommendation One is the key that unlocks many of the other actions, providing the foundation for lasting change across the sector.**

1. Make suicide prevention and mental health a mandated part of the Government Procurement Charter point one to ‘deliver economic benefits to New Zealand,’ starting with major agencies that hold large infrastructure portfolios.

Since 2018, government procurement has required contractors to deliver *Broader Outcomes* beyond cost and quality. Recommendation One builds on this by making suicide prevention and mental health a mandated part of the Government Procurement Charter's first principle – to *deliver economic benefits to New Zealand*. By embedding worker well-being into procurement expectations, especially for Tier One contracts held by major infrastructure agencies (Waka Kotahi, Kāinga Ora, Ministry of Education, Health, Corrections, Justice, ACC), the Government can ensure projects deliver measurable economic value through reduced absenteeism, higher productivity, safer sites, and long-term savings in health and social costs.

This approach aligns with the Procurement Rules' definition of public value, which includes the total costs and benefits of a procurement across its lifecycle. Mental health and suicide prevention are directly tied to economic outcomes – the construction sector alone loses hundreds of millions annually through suicide-related costs, injuries, and lost productivity. With \$6 billion of government-funded projects underway through the Infrastructure for Growth agenda (MBIE, 2025), this is the moment to lock in economic returns by recognising worker well-being as an economic lever, not just a social good.



STRATEGY AND REGULATION: NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS. Next comes strengthening the national strategies and laws that guide action. Updating the Suicide Prevention Action Plan, establishing a Men's Health Taskforce to guide a Men's Health Strategy, convening national stewardship, and amending the Health and Safety at Work Act ensure the right risks are recognised and addressed at scale. Just as importantly, this work ensures that national strategies target the priority groups identified in research and that actions flow directly from the strategy, avoiding the disconnects that too often leave higher-risk workers without meaningful support.

2. Ensure the Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2025-2029 delivers for construction.

The Well-being Survey showed that construction concentrates many of the Plan's highest-risk populations – young men, Māori, Pasifika, disabled workers, and rural contractors – and that workers in the sector report suicidal thoughts at around four times the national average. Without funded actions, recognition in the Plan remains hollow. Making construction a dedicated, resourced priority – with MATES named as a delivery partner – would translate worker voice into targeted national support, ensuring suicide prevention reaches one of the country's most at-risk industries and amplifies the impact of other recommendations.

3. Update the Health and Safety at Work Act to give psychosocial risks equal weight with physical risks.

The Well-being Survey highlighted that stress, exhaustion, financial pressure, and unsafe cultures undermine worker health as much as any physical hazard, with nearly half the workforce self-reporting a physical or mental health issue – more than double the national average. Of those affected, workers pointed to stress and mental strain just as often as physical wear and tear as the leading cause. Yet, under current law, psychosocial risks are not enforced as rigorously as physical ones. Updating the Act would turn worker voice into enforceable standards, ensuring that bullying, burnout, and job insecurity are treated as seriously as physical risks, and aligning New Zealand with international best practice.

4. Explore the establishment of a Men's Health Taskforce to guide men's health and suicide prevention strategy.

The Well-being Survey confirmed that construction workers face high levels of distress and suicidal thoughts – around four times the national average – with men making up most of the workforce. Coroners Court data reinforces this, showing that over 90% of confirmed and suspected construction suicides involve men (Coroners Office, 2025). This mirrors broader national trends but is even more pronounced in the construction sector. Establishing a Men's Health Taskforce, as proposed by Movember (2025), would ensure policy, services, and investment are tailored to men's needs, with mental health and suicide prevention at the centre. MATES, embedded in a predominantly male workforce, is well placed to bring worker voice into this national forum.



GRASSROOTS PROGRAMMES AND SUPPORTS: WORKERS AND WORKSITES.

Change must also reach the ground. The Well-being Survey showed that while every worker feels industry pressures, some groups – apprentices, rangatahi, workers new to the industry, supervisors, SMEs, rural workers, Māori, Pasifika – carry a heavier load. Building on what already works, these recommendations embed and extend the current MATES programme more deeply across the industry, while adding two new touchpoints where workers told us the need is greatest. This ensures that workers do not just encounter MATES in passing, but can access the complete wraparound model – including peer networks and site culture change – across the full diversity of the workforce, not only on the most significant sites or in the largest cities. **Delivering this requires dedicated and sustained funding for all three recommendations:** supporting co-design with workers, piloting (including robust research and evaluation), and scaling up the rollout where models prove effective.

5. Expand and embed MATES more deeply across the industry.

The Well-being Survey found that trusted mental health supports are one of the strongest protective factors for worker well-being – and that engagement with MATES halves the risk of suicidal behaviours. However, many workers, particularly in SMEs, rural areas, and smaller sites, have limited access to the full model and may only encounter a one-off training. Expanding and embedding MATES more deeply would amplify its proven impact, while making peer networks and wraparound supports consistently accessible across the whole workforce.

6. Co-design and pilot a dedicated Rangatahi and Apprentice programme.

Survey findings showed that apprentices and young workers report higher distress, lower satisfaction, and poorer well-being than more established peers. At the same time, these groups called for trusted supporters they can rely on as they enter the industry. A dedicated programme, co-designed with rangatahi and apprentices themselves, would provide tailored support at this key stage – building resilience, reducing stigma, and embedding suicide-prevention skills early.

7. Scale up a Supervisor/Manager programme.

The Well-being Survey highlighted supportive leadership as one of the strongest protective factors for worker well-being. However, many supervisors, especially in SMEs, lack access to MATES and the tools to address psychosocial risks. A dedicated programme would fill this gap, equipping supervisors to balance productivity, safety, and well-being, foster supportive site cultures, provide pastoral care, and strengthen their own ability to access support.

This recommendation also reinforces **Recommendation 6**, ensuring apprentices and rangatahi are backed not only by peer networks but by supervisors with the skills to support them from day one.



RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE: KEEPING IT WORKER-INFORMED.

8. Embed mental health and suicide prevention as a core research pillar for the construction industry.

The Well-being Survey showed that poor mental health and suicide risk are not side issues for construction – they are central to whether the industry can deliver safe, productive, and sustainable outcomes. Yet despite \$24.39 million being raised for research through the Levy in 2024/25, less than 2% was directed to worker well-being, mental health, or suicide prevention, with just two projects funded out of more than 100 that financial year, including one supporting MATES. This highlights not a lack of importance, but a clear opportunity to strengthen investment in worker well-being alongside BRANZ's existing pillars. Embedding worker well-being as a BRANZ research pillar would unlock sustained, ringfenced investment, giving effect to what workers told us in the Survey and ensuring mental health is treated on the same footing as affordability, resilience, sustainability, and quality.



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