

## SUPPORTING BETTER MENTAL HEALTH IN THE INDUSTRY

---

*Our earlier research showed mental health and suicide to be major issues facing our industry. This year, new research with a wider lens across all industry occupations illuminated the full extent of the issue and the demographic groups most at risk. This new perspective will enable targeted interventions and more-effective development of tailored support.*

In the ground-breaking 2018 BRANZ study *Mental health in the construction industry*, we highlighted that construction workers were more likely than the rest of the workforce to lose their life to suicide.

A catalyst for action, our research prompted the establishment of workplace mental health programme MATES in Construction (MATES) in New Zealand in 2019.

MATES trains construction workers in offering mental health support to their colleagues and asking for help when they are struggling themselves.

Now, MATES has data from two new studies published this year, which it is using to target its interventions more effectively.

The first of these studies shows workers in the construction industry are more than twice as likely to commit suicide as workers in other industries. Men aged 20–24 are at highest risk, and Māori men are also significantly over-represented in the statistics.

The study also refines the occupations making up the construction industry, with an expert working group of industry professionals and researchers agreeing on an expanded definition of occupations. This means MATES can reach out to more people who may need support.

The second study shows the MATES training programme is having a positive impact. It found that, after taking part in MATES training, construction workers are more confident in noticing distress in colleagues and more competent in encouraging them to seek support.



*New Zealand construction industry workers are more than twice as likely to lose their life to suicide than the rest of the workforce. Men aged 20–24 are most at risk.*

The study also found the training was helping to improve the self-reported emotional wellbeing of those who took part in the study. The better the workers felt about their wellbeing, the more likely they were to seek help themselves.

MATES has attracted significant government funding this year. The Australian-originated programme also received international acclaim from the World Health Organization when it was held up as an example of best practice in suicide prevention in its new implementation guide.

“

*What this new research shows is that we may have been undercounting the number of suicides in the industry. This information will help to offer more targeted support as we now have a more detailed picture of the scale and who is affected.”*

VICTORIA MCARTHUR, CHIEF EXECUTIVE,  
MATES IN CONSTRUCTION



*New research this year is helping MATES target interventions more effectively, such as the general awareness training programme it delivers to construction workers.*

Research is one of four pillars in the MATES operating model, which is why our support has been so important in informing its approach to addressing industry mental health and wellbeing.

To be successful, suicide prevention initiatives like MATES rely on consistent data, including demographic information. Accurate industry data is critical to monitoring suicide trends and providing a baseline for assessing the effectiveness of suicide prevention initiatives.

By providing evidence that aids MATES to take action on suicide prevention, BRANZ is supporting workers to help themselves and their colleagues towards better mental health – and potentially saving lives.

#### GET SUPPORT

- » **MATES in Construction** – 0800 111 315: 24/7 helpline
- » **Need to talk?** Free call or text 1737 any time for support from a trained counsellor
- » **Lifeline** – 0800 543 354 (0800 LIFELINE) or free text 4357 (HELP)
- » **Suicide Crisis Helpline** – 0508 828 865 (0508 TAUTOKO)
- » **Healthline** – 0800 611 116
- » **Samaritans** – 0800 726 666

#### ➔ READ MORE

- » BRANZ External Research Report ER65 (2021) *Construction industry suicides: numbers, characteristics, and rates*
- » Mates in Construction (2021) *MATES in Construction New Zealand: A longitudinal assessment of suicide prevention programme for construction workers*
- » [mates.net.nz](https://mates.net.nz)

*Right: MATES supports construction workers to be more confident in noticing distress in colleagues and more competent in encouraging them to seek support.*

