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The ABC Cares Foundation's new mental health app is transforming psychological wellness in construction.

BY SONNY MAKEN

With suicide rates among construction workers more than twice the national average, the industry is grappling with the effects of high stress, physically demanding work and a rough-and-tough culture that often discourages seeking help. Recognizing this urgent need, the ABC Cares Foundation has launched an innovative mental health app designed specifically for construction workers. Developed in partnership with the Harm Reduction Center, this app provides immediate, confidential access to mental health support in both English and Spanish—offering a lifeline within 24 hours to those who need it most.

The numbers speak for themselves: One in five adults is currently experiencing a mental health condition ranging from depression and anxiety to more severe illnesses such as bipolar disorder. Substance abuse, chronic pain from job-related injuries and job insecurity all contribute to the high rates of depression and anxiety among workers. The unpredictable nature of construction

work, with frequent layoffs and project-based employment, exacerbates financial stress, making workers even more vulnerable. Yet, despite these alarming statistics, traditional employee assistance programs remain underutilized due to stigma, lack of awareness and accessibility concerns.

IT'S OKAY TO NOT BE OKAY

A recent study found that while 83% of construction professionals recognize the need for mental health support, only 15% feel comfortable discussing their struggles in the workplace. This reluctance highlights the deep-seated stigma surrounding mental health in the industry, reinforcing the need for discreet and easily accessible solutions like the ABC Cares app, which makes the suicide hotline front and center.

ABC Cares Foundation, the charitable arm of ABC Florida East Coast, saw the need for a more effective solution. Their new app provides construction workers with direct, discreet access to licensed mental health professionals without em-

ployer involvement. Jobsites will feature QR codes that allow workers to instantly scan and connect with providers. Services include case management, crisis intervention, addiction counseling and psychiatric care, with in-person appointments available within 48 hours. Most importantly, the app's HIPAA-compliant design ensures full privacy, addressing one of the biggest barriers to seeking help.

Unlike traditional EAPs, which can be bureaucratic and slow, this app streamlines mental health access. Workers can bypass red tape and receive immediate support—helping to prevent crises before they escalate. For uninsured workers, the foundation has secured reduced rates to ensure affordability, reinforcing their commitment to truly making mental health care accessible to all.

NORMALIZE IT

Construction is an inherently high-risk industry, with workplace safety being a top priority for employers and unions alike. However, mental health is routinely overlooked as a critical component of jobsite safety. Studies show that unaddressed mental health conditions can lead to impaired judgment, decreased focus and higher rates of workplace safety incidents. The ABC Cares app not only supports workers' emotional wellbeing but also contributes to overall jobsite safety by ensuring workers are in the best mental state to perform their jobs effectively.

The app's crisis intervention feature is particularly crucial. By offering workers immediate assistance, it can prevent dangerous situations caused by emotional distress. Safety managers and foremen are also encouraged to promote the app as part of broader jobsite safety initiatives, further normalizing mental health support within the industry.

The app launch is bigger than just a technological advancement—it represents a broader cultural shift within the construc-

tion industry. Historically, construction has championed toughness and resilience, often at the expense of mental wellbeing. By integrating mental health resources directly into jobsites, ABC Cares Foundation is working to normalize conversations about mental health and dismantle the stigma that prevents workers from seeking help.

This initiative aligns with a growing industrywide focus on mental health (see “Mind, Body and Soul,” p. 54). In October 2024, executives from major firms, including Bechtel, Fluor, Turner and Kiewit, formed an advisory council dedicated to reducing construction-related suicides. While this movement marks progress, real change requires tangible solutions like the ABC Cares app—ensuring workers have the resources they need, when they need them.

THINKING WIN-WIN

Industry leaders are also recognizing the business benefits of prioritizing mental

health. Companies that invest in worker wellbeing see improved retention rates, increased productivity and lower health-care costs. A healthier workforce leads to fewer sick days, reduced turnover and a stronger, more resilient industry overall.

ABC Cares is actively working with industry partners to expand the app’s reach, encouraging major construction firms and labor unions to integrate the platform into their worker support programs. The foundation is also exploring partnerships with insurance providers and regulatory agencies to secure funding that can further subsidize access for uninsured workers.

Beyond the construction industry, this model has the potential to serve as a blueprint for other high-risk sectors. Manufacturing, transportation and emergency response industries face similar mental health challenges, and the app could be adapted to meet their specific needs.

Through this groundbreaking initiative, ABC Cares Foundation is not only addressing a crisis but actively shaping the future of mental health care in construction. By breaking down barriers to access, fostering a culture of support and providing lifesaving resources, the foundation is ensuring that the individuals who build our communities are not left to struggle alone.

In an industry where safety is paramount, mental health must be part of the conversation. With the launch of this app, ABC Cares Foundation is taking a bold step forward, proving that caring for workers’ wellbeing is just as important as ensuring their physical safety. By embracing innovation and compassion, the construction industry can create a healthier, more supportive environment for all. 

SONNY MAKEN is CEO of ABC Cares Foundation. // For more information, visit abccares.org.