



## Wellness and Benefits Programs Taking on a New Meaning



**Chris Gardner**  
ICBA President

ICBA has offered benefits plans since the 1970s, and today with more than 110,000 people on our plans, ICBA Benefit Services is among the largest providers in Western Canada. In combination with our recently launched Workplace

Wellness Program, this gives us unique insights on the health of our industry and its people.

During the pandemic, the BC construction industry has worked hard and successfully to minimize worksite transmission of COVID-19. But we are seeing health impacts of other types, reflected most notably in a big uptick in use of our



Employee Assistance Program.

This comes as no surprise, as workers across all sectors deal with stresses relating to physical and mental well-being, resulting from the strains of disrupted routines and social isolation. Mental health is an issue running very deep, but very silent, throughout Canadian society, and the statistics for construction workers are sobering – a suicide rate seven times the national average, and construction workers accounting

for 55 per cent of opioid overdose deaths.

Studies show that cost remains a significant barrier for many people who need help with mental health and substance abuse; and that two-thirds of employees either don't have access to employer support in this area, or don't know if they do and aren't sure what support is available.

All construction contractors want to see the men and women working on their job sites physically and mentally well. For ICBA member and client companies, the support is there, and the need for it is greater than ever.

As we recover from the COVID-19 global pandemic, a deeper focus on health, safety and wellness simply has to be one of construction's most important priorities. To keep people and families whole, we must normalize the wellness conversation.

## Employee Assistance Program Proves its Worth

Through the ICBA Benefit Services EAP, employees have 24/7 access to professional, confidential counselling and other practical services and information to help support their mental, physical, social and financial well being. Participation in this program has spiked this year.

Use of ICBA Employee Assistance Program 2021 compared to 2020: **47%\*** ↑

**100%** of employees accessing the program in 2021 were seeking help for **MENTAL HEALTH**

**84%** of employees were accessing the program for the **1<sup>ST</sup> TIME**

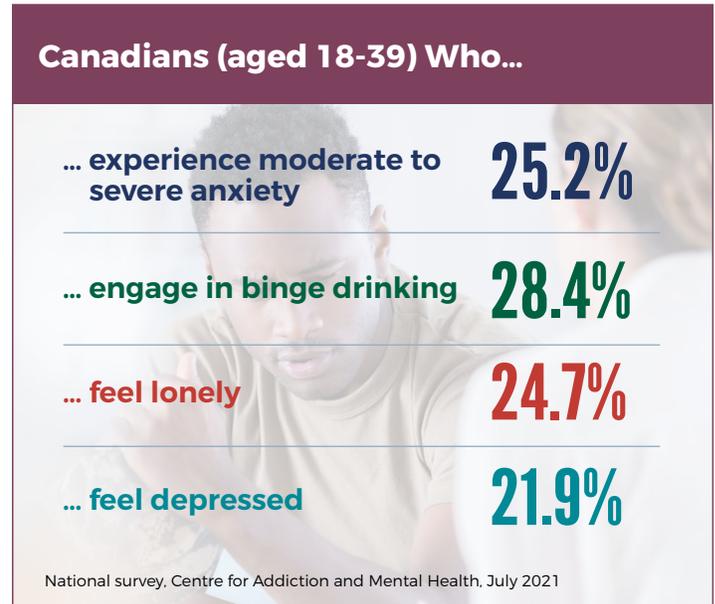
**55%** of employees accessing the program were **men** and **45% women**



\* Jan. 1 – Aug. 1, 2021 vs. Jan. 1 – Aug. 31, 2020

# An Anxious Pandemic Nation

It's been more than 18 months since the global pandemic was declared, and numerous studies confirm its impact on mental health. A great many Canadians are facing heightened stresses of various types, and a quarter or so say their mental health has been negatively impacted. Even more think their colleagues' mental health has deteriorated.



***In 2018, 5.3 million Canadians sought mental health care. Of those, 21 per cent reported that their needs went entirely unmet, and 22 per cent said their needs were only partly met.***

– Globe & Mail / StatsCan

## Mental Health Index by Industry

Measured in comparison to three prior years, the state of people's mental health on an industry-by-industry basis has uniformly worsened. Construction sits at roughly the mid-point in the range, indicating a concerning deterioration, although not as steep as in some sectors that have seen bigger job losses.

Best Index Scores by Industry	Real Estate, Rental & Leasing	-6.5
	Professional, Scientific & Technical Services	-6.9
Construction		-9.9
Worst Scores by Industry	Info & Cultural Industries	-15.7
	Arts, Entertainment, Recreation	-17.8



# Substance Use Looms Large

As people cope with greater stress and loss of familiar routines and settings, many are leaning more heavily on alcohol and other substances, and often worsening their mental health in the process. Multiple studies have confirmed that significant numbers of Canadians are drinking more during the pandemic, in a country where alcohol consumption is already well above the global average.

## Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction

In the early weeks of the pandemic:

**Close to 1/5** of the 94% of Canadians who were spending more time at home were also **drinking more**

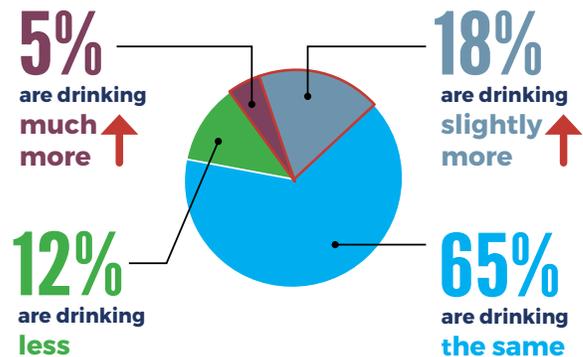
Reasons cited:

**Lack of Regular Schedule**  
**Boredom** • **Stress**

Nanos survey, Spring 2020

## Canadian Institutes of Health Research

Among respondents and compared to pre-pandemic:



Knowledge synthesis report, published September 2020

# A Particular Concern for Construction

While increased substance use is widespread, construction workers are particularly vulnerable. Pre-pandemic, there was already evidence of a higher incidence of alcohol and drug dependency in our sector, driven by such factors as the physically demanding nature of the work and the resulting potential for injury and pain management.

During the Pandemic:

**12%**

of construction workers regularly have 15 drinks or more a week compared to 8% of Canadian workers overall.



**54%**

of construction workers have > one drink a week compared to 47% of Canadian workers overall.



**21%**

of construction workers use recreational cannabis regularly compared to 15% of workers in other sectors.

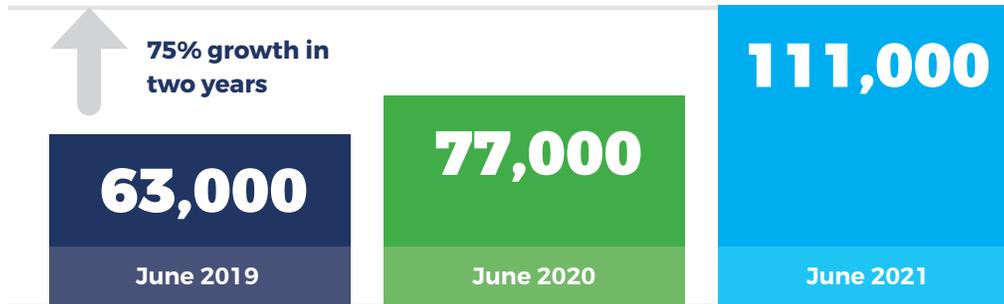


LifeWorks research as reported in Journal of Commerce, September 7, 2021

# Resources to Help Employers and Employees

ICBA Benefits' programs are designed and tailored to cost-effectively meet the unique needs of men and women working on job sites every day and the teams who support them back at the office. In the intense battle for talent that is overwhelming every sector of our economy, contractors are increasingly looking to enhance their benefit plans as a way to recruit and retain their people.

## Total Number of People on ICBA's Group Health & Dental Plans



Alarming, prescriptions for drugs designed to treat mental wellness-related issues have shot to the top of the most-frequently-prescribed lists on every health and dental plan administered by ICBA.

### Conditions Treated by Drugs Prescribed by Doctors

1. Diabetes
2. Depression/Anxiety/Sleep Disorders
3. Angina/Heart Disease
4. Asthma
5. Infection
6. Ulcers
7. Pain
8. Cholesterol
9. Contraception
10. Multiple Sclerosis

### Top Paramedical Claims

1. Chiropractor
2. Massage Therapist
3. Physiotherapist
4. Psychologist
5. Acupuncture

## ICBA Workplace Wellness Program

ICBA's recently launched Workplace Wellness Program is a new program designed by ICBA and its team of wellness professionals to promote individual wellbeing in the construction workplace.

The program is scalable to companies of all sizes, and features ongoing client support and self-paced online courses and other delivery tools. And most importantly, it's free for ICBA members.

There are more than 3,000 construction professionals currently enrolled in this innovative program.

For more information: [icba.ca/wellness](http://icba.ca/wellness)



The BC CONSTRUCTION MONITOR is an ICBA publication providing ahead-of-the-curve information and statistics on the B.C. construction industry and issues relevant to it.



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