



**BUILDING
RESILIENCY**

A Framework for Recovery-Inclusive Workplaces

**in the Industrial, Construction and
Maintenance Sectors**

January 2025

For further information:
Ian Robb irobb@bta.ca | 780-918-7197
buildingresiliency.bta.ca

A Framework for Recovery-Inclusive¹ Workplaces in the Industrial, Construction and Maintenance Sectors

Context for Change

The Building Trades of Alberta (BTA) coordinates and promotes the interests of eighteen (18) local construction trade unions in the Province of Alberta. The BTA's 60,000+ members work in the residential, commercial, industrial, construction, maintenance, and fabrication industries. The BTA's highest priority is its membership. The BTA knows that mental health, wellness, and overall wellbeing are essential to workplace productivity. The BTA also knows its members work hard and accept many personal sacrifices – they're away from home for long periods, have unpredictable work schedules, and engage in demanding physical labour. While these factors impact individuals in different ways, all can lead to issues impacting mental health, substance use, and wellness.

Economic growth in Alberta, particularly for the industrial construction and maintenance sector, is

contingent on the ability to recruit and retain highly skilled workers. By investing in and prioritizing mental health, wellness and recovery supports, the sector demonstrates its values to current and prospective workers and its commitment to Alberta's economy.

Since 2022, the BTA has collaborated with global leaders and researchers (i.e. TELUS Health, headversity, Dr. Paul Farnan, Dr. Carson McPherson, and Dr. Paul Sobey) on evidence-informed practices around workplace mental health, wellness, recovery, and reintegration supports. This collaboration extended to key industry partners including the Association of Maintenance Contractors of Canada (AMCC) and BTA trade union affiliates. The Government of Alberta, through the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, recognized the importance of the initiative and provided funding for initial development.

¹ Recovery-Inclusive is a term that is used interchangeably with Recovery-Informed, Recovery-Ready and Recovery-Friendly.

Rationale for Change

According to research conducted by TELUS Health, overall mental health and wellbeing is essential to workplace productivity. TELUS Health monitors critical issues impacting the mental health of Canadians through the Mental Health Index™² – or MHI – which provides a measure of the current mental health status of employed adults in each region of Canada compared to benchmarks collected in 2017, 2018, and 2019. Monitoring fluctuations in the MHI is intended to predict cost and productivity risks and to inform investment decisions in mental health supports by businesses and government.

The TELUS Mental Health Index™ reports on an overall MHI, which is a measure of change compared to the benchmark of mental health and risk, and a Mental

Stress Change (MStressChg) score, which measures the level of reported mental stress compared to the prior month. The methodology is an online survey of 3,000 Canadians currently employed or who were employed within the prior six months. Participants are selected to be representative of the age, gender, industry, and geographic distribution in Canada.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, TELUS began publishing monthly MHI reports in April 2020. In May 2021, TELUS published a special report highlighting the pandemic's impact on mental health and substance use since 2020.

Research revealed that 30% of people diagnosed with a mental illness will also have a substance abuse problem in their lifetime, and 37% of people who abuse alcohol (53% who abuse drugs) also have a mental illness.³ According to TELUS Health, more than one-third (34%) of respondents that used alcohol had increased consumption since the pandemic; and 25% that used drugs reported an increase in drug use since the pandemic.

Those reporting alcohol or drug use had lower mental health scores, and one in five indicated that alcohol or drugs made it difficult to complete job-related tasks and responsibilities and 25% indicated the use of alcohol or drugs had a negative impact on their job.

Nearly half (47%) of respondents indicated using alcohol at least once a week (occasional usage was not included); 28% used prescription drugs; 15% used recreational cannabis; and 7% used cannabis for medical purposes. Men were twice as likely as women to consume nine or more drinks per week; and 8% percent of people consumed 15 or more drinks per week compared to 2% in the pre-2020 benchmark.

More than one-third of Canadians that use alcohol have increased their consumption since the pandemic

- More than one-third (34%) of alcohol users have increased their consumption since the onset of the pandemic and this group is among those with the least favourable mental health score (-20.1) as well as the least favourable isolation score (-23.4).
- 8% of alcohol users consume 15 or more drinks per week compared to 2% in the pre-2020 benchmark.
- Nearly one-quarter (24%) would prefer to drink less than they currently do.
- Household income is strongly related to alcohol use. 32% of households with an income of less than \$30,000 report using alcohol at least once per week compared to 56% of households with an income of more than \$150,000.
- People without emergency savings are twice as likely to report that their drinking has increased compared to those with emergency savings.



25%

report that alcohol or drug use has had a negative impact on their job

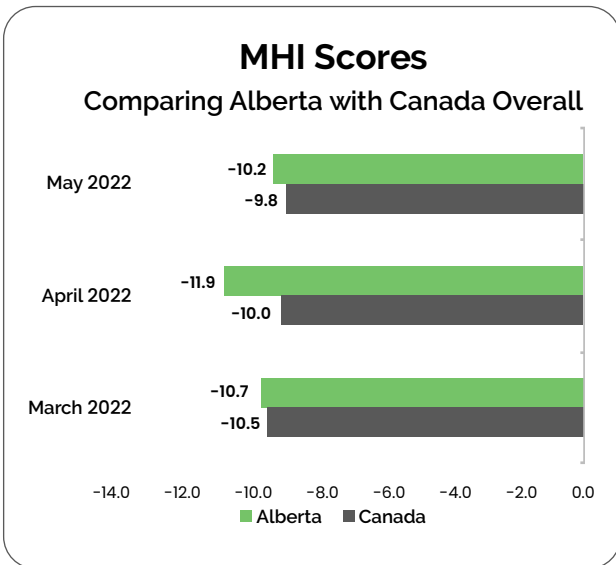
² TELUS Health Mental Health Index™: <https://TELUS Mental Health Index>

³ Out of the Shadows at Last: Transforming Mental Health, Mental illness and Addiction Services in Canada

Based on the TELUS March 2022 monthly report, the mental health of Canadians dropped 10 points from the pre-2020 benchmark established in April 2020; more than two in five Canadians end their workday feeling mentally and/or physically exhausted; and one in five were concerned, or were unsure, about their drinking or drug use. Those concerned about their drinking or drug use had a mental health score more than 16 points below the national average; nearly half (48%) were concerned about the career impact of a substance use issue; 16% were concerned about the drinking or drug use of someone in their household; and 15% used alcohol or drugs because of stress over money/finances.

TELUS data specific to Alberta showed general alignment with Canadians across the country; however, individuals living in Alberta reported slightly lower mental health scores compared to Canada overall in some areas. Respondents in Alberta compared to the rest of Canada who reported that inflation has impacted their ability to meet their basic needs (25% vs 23%) had a lower mental health score (-24.9 vs -22.8). Respondents in Alberta who reported finding it increasingly difficult to be motivated to work (32% vs. 34%) had a lower mental health score (-26.9 vs. -25.3) than Canada overall; however, individuals in Alberta who reported feeling a sense of belonging at work had a slightly better mental health score (-4.3 vs. -5.0) when compared to the rest of Canada.

In addition to research conducted by TELUS, experts in addiction recovery, Dr. Paul Farnan, Dr. Carson McPherson, and Dr. Paul Sobey, indicated that alcohol and drug use among employees and their family members are **among the most expensive problems for businesses in any industry**. Issues such as lost productivity, absenteeism, workplace injuries or fatalities, and low employee morale can lead to increased healthcare costs, worker's compensation costs, or legal liabilities. The overall cost of substance use in Canada rose to \$49.1 billion in 2020. The specific cost of lost productivity due to substance use was \$22.4 billion.⁴ These costs have risen since the COVID-19 pandemic. Drs. McPherson and Sobey report that one in ten Canadians is dealing with a substance use disorder.⁵ Costs to an employer for each worker with an untreated substance use disorder (SUD) have risen 30% in just three years.⁶ For example, recorded time away from work for illness, injury, or reasons other than vacation for a typical worker was 15 days annually, 24.6 days for a worker with a SUD, and 10.9 days annually for a worker in recovery.⁷ Growing evidence supports that recovery from a SUD is achievable and benefits workplaces and society.⁸



⁴ Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, 2023
⁵ Dr. Carson McPherson, Simon Fraser University (2021). Invisible Disability: Addictions Education for Front Line Professionals, Cedars Professional Workshop.
⁶ Dr. Carson McPherson and Dr. Paul Sobey (April 12-13, 2022). The Recovery Informed Workplace, Recovery Capital Conference of Canada, Calgary, Alberta.





It has also been increasingly noted that, in the case of SUDs, most workplace policies take a disciplinary approach rather than measures supporting recovery. Industry-wide knowledge of available treatment services for workers with mental illness and/or substance use disorders appears to be limited. Successful recovery-inclusive workplaces educate management and employees about substance use disorders and recovery. A culture is created to minimize conditions that perpetuate substance misuse, reduce stigma, and promote robust policies to celebrate individuals in recovery. A non-judgmental work environment views addiction treatment holistically as part of a broader employee health and wellness program that values people in recovery as important contributors to an organization.

TELUS research on the topic of building a resilient workplace culture suggests that supporting the creation of mentally healthy workplaces can shape the behaviours that lead to psychologically safe and

healthy workplace culture. In other words: **resilient workplace culture matters**. To build a resilient workplace culture, workers and leaders need critical skills and competencies. This means learning about mental health and holistic wellbeing must become a shared priority and integrated into daily workplace interactions. Effective workplace learning is not a 'one and done' event but rather an ongoing strategic effort to create lasting behavioural change and engagement. Building resiliency within organizations means being more adaptive and agile to manage disruptions and challenges over time and be better prepared for the future of work. In general, workers are better equipped to manage their personal wellbeing and emotional stress and less likely to rely on substances in an unhealthy way.

⁷ NORC & National Safety Council. Substance Use Disorders by Occupation. Retrieved July 9, 2024.

⁸ Akhtar, 2019; McQuaid et al., 2017; Whitney, 2016.

⁹ Implications of Drug Use for Employers – National Safety Council (US).

Guidelines for Building a Recovery-Inclusive Workplace

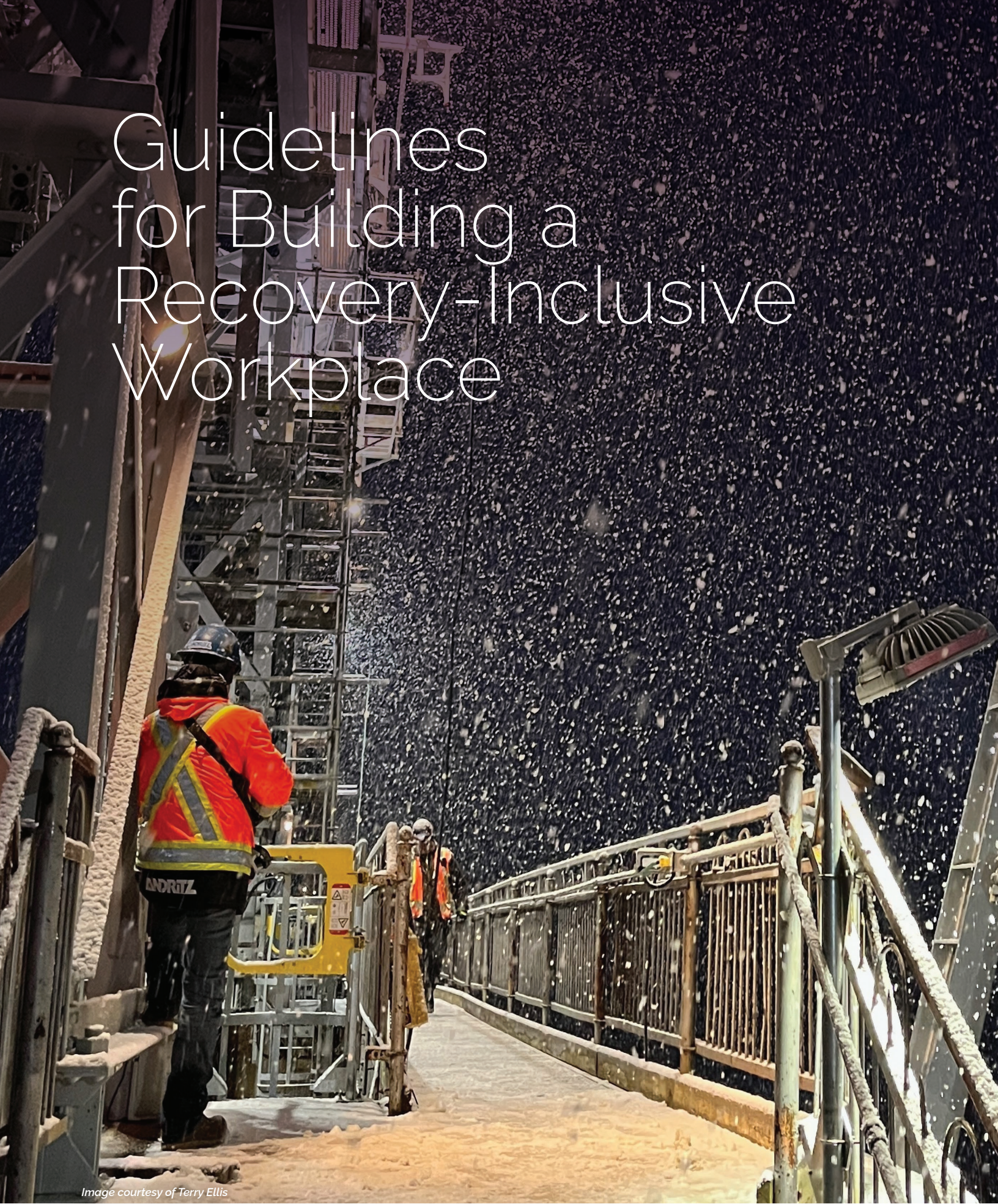


Image courtesy of Terry Ellis

Recovery-Inclusive Workplace Framework

Building Resiliency developed a framework to guide the development and implementation of Recovery-Inclusive Workplaces for the industrial, construction and maintenance sector. The framework is intended as a guide to practical application based on the needs of the worksite, workers, and organization.

The framework is a holistic, integrated, and outcomes-based approach that minimizes conditions that perpetuate substance misuse; helps to identify individuals with mental health and substance issues; supports constructive behaviours; and celebrates recovery in all of its forms.





Shared commitment and expectation means meeting workers where they are, through mutually respectful treatment and shared responsibility by the worker and organization. Internal policies should recognize foundational principles regarding the protection of workers and the public against safety risks.



A **non-judgmental, supportive environment** speaks to a workplace culture that acknowledges and respects the dignity of workers and assists those pursuing recovery, dealing with mental health issues, or substance abuse disorders. It is imperative to have clear policies that outline support for workers at all stages of recovery, including flexible leave for treatment, return-to-work programs, and non-punitive workplace policies.



Prevention and early detection are critical to providing the appropriate support. Training is crucial for Peer Supports and Supervisors/Managers to recognize the signs of addiction and mental health struggles and to understand the recovery process. A recovery-inclusive workplace enables a worker to self-disclose a need for help or have open conversations with peers or supervisors about support available.



Proactive education and awareness are important factors in increasing understanding and reducing the stigma of addiction and mental health issues. Building Resiliency provides headversity's personalized and confidential suite of programs (SOLO, TEAM, CERT) to build proactive awareness about personal and team mental health and their importance in the workplace. Training also encourages continuous skill building designed to address personal needs.



Peer Support are people who share knowledge and experience and provide practical support to a coworker. They are NOT counsellors or therapists. Peer Supports are mental health leaders and the front line in providing psychological safety in the workplace. Peer Supports are trained through the Mental Health Leadership Certificate Program (partnership with TELUS Health and Queen's University) to encourage and support a work environment that is safer for people to speak up, share ideas and reduce stigma around mental health challenges. They also complete additional training relating to substance use disorders and recovery allowing them to assist coworkers with those specific challenges.



Reintegration Supports proactively destigmatize addiction and mental illness. Recovery is a process where individuals improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their potential. Recovery supports in the workplace minimize conditions that lead to substance misuse, and enhance the process for workers seeking, receiving, and continuing treatment. Recovery involves emotional, social, and psychological wellness and the workplace can provide invaluable support during the reintegration process.



Accountability means all workers in the workplace, including management, are accountable and responsible for creating a supportive, non-judgmental work environment. The worker is responsible for their personal recovery, but the workplace is responsible for being a positive influence on that recovery. Accountability also means building an organizational action plan with identified outcomes to be monitored, measured, and reported.

Economic Benefits of Recovery-Inclusive Workplaces

Recovery-inclusive workplaces can lead to better workforce retention, engagement and productivity.



Return on Investment (ROI) in recovery-inclusive workplaces can lead to:

- ✓ Workers attracted to employment opportunities in healthier, safer work environments.
- ✓ Healthy workplace environments that support those facing personal challenges increase morale, foster a sense of loyalty, and increase retention.
- ✓ Fewer workplace absences, injuries, and fatalities, lead to a reduction in costs for healthcare, worker's compensation, and legal liabilities.
- ✓ Reduced costs associated with recruiting, onboarding, and training.
- ✓ Reduced workforce turnover and loss of experienced workers that impacts overall workplace productivity.
- ✓ Optimized workforce productivity benefits everyone. Efficient workers take pride in their work, and owners and contractors get projects completed in a timely, cost-effective manner.
- ✓ Workers recognize recovery-inclusive workplaces, and that recognition serves as a critical recruitment and retention tool.





buildingresiliency.bta.ca