



Shifting Gears: Prioritizing Mental Health in Transportation

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You are Your Brain

- Mental health is all in your head → it *is* you!
- It affects how we think, feel, and act—including when it comes to safety.

The more we understand ourselves and the importance of our mental health, the better we connect, lead, and keep our communities safely moving.



Urban transit workers are at a high risk for mental health problems.

Studies show AL in the top for most stressful work environments.

Each year over 20,000 workers are injured in road construction work zones.

Transportation Safety

Transportation safety is a part of our everyday reality.

Ensuring the safety of our communities begins with safeguarding the health and well-being of the people responsible for it.

Over 5,000 people working in construction die by suicide each year.

40,901 people died in motor vehicle crashes in US (2023).

Most work zone crashes in AL result from speeding or inattentive driving.

What is Mental Wellness?

- Mental health includes our *emotional, psychological, and social well-being*.
- The foundation of how we think, feel, and act
- Not just the absence of illness but the presence of balance & resilience
- Critical to safety, productivity, life

How do we cultivate mental wellness?



Awareness: The First Step to Safety & Wellness

- Safety begins with you!
- Know yourself - thoughts, emotions, behaviors
- Understand others - how stress, environment, personality shape behavior
- Just like situational awareness - be alert to risks before they are accidents





**Health is not valued
until sickness comes.**

Stress on the Road

- Stress, fatigue, & burnout affect how we behave.
- Road rage, distracted & risky driving often stem from stress.
- Drivers are almost *ten times more likely* to get into a crash if they drive in a highly elevated emotional state.



The Impact of Sleep

- Sleep deficiency changes activity in some parts of the brain, leading to trouble:
 - making decisions,
 - solving problems,
 - controlling emotions, &
 - coping with change.
- Research shows that chronic sleep loss has serious consequences for health, performance, and safety.



The Impact of Sleep Cont.

- Fatigue is one of the most common contributing factors to fatal crashes.
- Sleep deprivation mimics impairment: 18 hours awake \approx blood alcohol level of 0.05%.
- Poor sleep is a public safety issue.



Better Sleep

Sleep loss is a common issue that often becomes more prevalent with age. Prioritizing good, sufficient sleep is critical for mental & physical health.

- Put electronics away for at least an hour before bed.
- Stick to a sleep schedule, even on weekends.
- Include movement & exercise in your day.
- Manage worries & stress.



Workforce Stress

Transportation is a stressful, often invisible, yet *critical* part of our communities.

Road safety workers are often at high physical risk but mental risk, too.

75% of truck drivers report that their job is both physically and emotionally stressful.

27% of employees in transportation logistics said they had to take leave from work due to unmanageable stress or mental health issues.



Job stress is estimated to cost American companies more than \$300 billion a year in health costs, absenteeism and poor performance.

Stress Impacts Everyone

Supporting every individual through stress and giving them the tools for mental wellness means supporting *industry strength and the communities we serve.*

- Normalize the conversation
- Offer benefits & resources
- Promote awareness & education





**Evidence shows
supportive
supervisors are linked
to lower absenteeism
across industries.**

Mental Health Matters

1 in 5 U.S. adults experience mental illness each year.

- Untreated mental health challenges can lead to burnout, absenteeism, and reduced decision-making capacity.
- Leaders who prioritize mental wellness foster stronger teams, improve communication, and enhance resilience.



Anxiety & Depression

Over 40 million adults in the U.S. (19.1%) have an anxiety disorder.

Major depression affects around 20 million U.S. adults each year.

Depression: 87.9% report difficulty with work, home, or social activities.

Anxiety and depression are among the most common mental health conditions.

They affect people in nearly every workplace, yet stigma still prevents many from seeking help.

Only about 43% of those w/ an anxiety disorder are receiving treatment.

Depression and anxiety are both more common in women than in men.

The prevalence of depression has increased 60% in the last decade.

Millions of Americans Are Affected

7.1% of women & **4.8%** of men have a serious mental illness.

- An estimated 15.4 million (~6%) U.S. adults have a serious mental illness (e.g., schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, PTSD).
- A survey conducted in 2020 revealed that 83% of construction workers had struggled with mental health issues.



The Truth about Suicide

Suicide is the 11th leading cause of death overall in the United States.

- Transport workers have been shown to have **higher rates** of suicide. More research is needed for specific industry sectors like road safety.
- Construction occupations have the highest rate of suicide, as well as the highest number of suicides across all occupational groups (CDC, 2018).



If you are in crisis, call or text the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](https://www.988lifeline.org/) at 988, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Stopping Suicide

- Preventing suicide requires strategies at all levels of society.
 - Strengthen economic supports
 - Create protective environments
 - Improve access to mental health care
- Break the stigma: **talk about it** .



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Invest in Mental Health in the Workplace

- Normalize the conversation
- Provide resources and benefits
- Promote work -life balance
- Build a supportive culture
- Invest in training & education
- Model from the top



The Bottom Line on Mental Well-being

- Breaking the stigma around mental health is critical to building healthy, inclusive workplaces—and to empower every individual to pursue a healthy, happy life.
- Mental health isn't separate from performance or safety—it is foundational to success.



Think about It & Talk about It

- Prioritizing mental health means prioritizing safety.
- When we grow in awareness, we strengthen our ability to serve, connect, and move our communities forward.



Shift Gears with Us

- Advocate for mental wellness awareness and policies!
- Connect with someone today!





Thank you !

For MTI events and webinar visit
[https://transweb.sjsu.edu/events.](https://transweb.sjsu.edu/events)