



LETTER TO THE CO-CHAIRS OF CONSTRUCTION SECTOR ACCORD

Dear Co-Chairs

We write on behalf of our own organisation and workers in the construction industry, asking you to take urgent action to save vital suicide prevention and mental health services that are under threat. Without financial support from the government MATES in Construction services will have to be significantly reduced including retrenching from the South Island, which will impact major projects such as the New Dunedin Hospital Build.

Right now, there is a mental health crisis in the construction industry. On average, we are losing one worker a week to suicide. We know that the mental health of our workers is getting worse and suicide ideation is increasing. The current economic context has added a lot of pressure to our industry. Labour shortages, resource strain, critical supply chain and logistics issues, combined with an extremely competitive procurement environment have created a perfect storm. Our industry employs a high proportion of our country's most vulnerable groups – both socio-economically and ethnically – and these workers and their whanau are directly impacted. The reasons for poor mental health and the highest suicide rates across industry are both internal and external, but regardless of the causes we need effective solutions and using our community at work approach has been proven to be highly effective.

We refuse to stand idly by while these unacceptable statistics plague our industry – this is why we decided as an industry in 2019 to implement the MATES in Construction programme across our sites, and to contribute financially to the programme so that all sites in New Zealand, regardless of means and resources, can do the same.

We know that this programme works. This model, which is applied directly at the workplace, has been shown to produce positive and statistically significant changes in workers' suicide prevention awareness, knowledge, and attitudes – including willingness to seek help themselves and provide help to workmates (AISRAP, 2017; King et al., 2018). It has been backed by the World Health Organisation as best practice and Ministers and officials here in New Zealand have expressed their confidence in this programme. But most importantly, we as an industry have seen the results of this mahi in our organisation and on our construction sites and community.

There is growing international awareness that difficult social problems such as mental health, wellbeing and suicide are no longer just the domain of governments and that tackling them in new and innovative ways to get better results will involve combining the expertise of public, social and private sectors. We are asking the government to step up and support our industry alongside us. We see MATES in Construction as a vital initiative in addressing unacceptably high rates of suicide in our industry and we see government backing and support for a proven, evidence-based, grass-roots programme that is backed and significantly funded by us as an industry as essential and a no-brainer. The high return on investment which covers up to 11% of New Zealand's workforce is without doubt one of the country's best opportunities to address poor mental health and suicide.

If MATES in Construction cut services across Aotearoa tens of thousands of our countries most vulnerable workers will lose access to support and this will impact them, it will impact their families and it will impact their communities. We must do something. We implore you to join us in turning the tide on these unacceptable statistics – we as an industry cannot do it alone.

Regards,