SAVING LIVES IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY
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Over the past 28 years, I have been heavily involved in the Queensland construction industry. Like many of us, I have been personally touched by suicide. This initiative was started by the construction industry in recognition that there was a serious issue.

Since 2008, I have watched MATES in Construction grow from a concept on the back of a coffee serviette to the success it is today. The success is solely due to the dedicated team we have who go beyond the job to deliver training, support and advice to the industry.

All of this would not be possible without the support of industry and this has been invaluable in getting us to where we are today. The lives of everyone in the construction industry are important to us at MATES in Construction. We want to reach as many construction workers as possible, to do this we need the support of the State Government. We require additional funding to expand the program to meet the needs of rural and regional Queensland and to include small and medium sized businesses.

Whilst we have had a positive impact on suicide rates in the Queensland construction industry, our work is not complete. We need to continue looking out for each other, noticing changes in behavior and having the courage to ask “Are you thinking about suicide?”.

Jorgen Gullestrup
CEO Mates in Construction.
Suicide has wide ranging and long lasting social and economic impacts on families, work colleagues and communities. A death by suicide has a ripple effect, impacting those around the bereaved with conflicting emotions. Suicide has a major cost to the community through its effect on others as unresolved grief leads to increased use of health services, absenteeism and social functioning by those bereaved. Suicide attempts resulting in a fatality or total incapacity and those resulting in a short leave from employment in the Queensland construction industry cost $345 million in 2012.

The estimated suicide risk in the Queensland construction industry has dropped by 7.8% since the introduction of MATES in Construction. The average age of each suicide fatality among construction workers in Queensland is 36.8 years. The construction industry is Australia’s third largest industry. In 2015, the Queensland construction industry generated over $50 billion and had 204,000 workers.

Under the Queensland Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2015-17 the Queensland Mental Health Commission is the lead agency to support the MATES in Construction project “Saving Lives in the Construction Industry” to identify options to expand its suicide prevention initiatives. The Commission provided funding to MATES in Construction to scope the expansion of its suicide prevention initiatives to rural and regional Queensland and to include small and medium sized businesses.

Traditionally, MATES in Construction has focused on accessing large construction sites where cranes are visible and major contractors are responsible for projects. Consultation was conducted with key industry stakeholders, regional businesses and construction workers to ascertain the best way to reach regional businesses and small to medium sized businesses. The industry recommended training inspectors, attending Trade Shows, working with delegates and attending onsite Toolbox Talks. Consultation with the community revealed a concern for young men, unemployment, a lack of medical services regionally and the importance of peer support. Construction workers considered communication and creating awareness the key strategies in making our industry safer.

A key strategy employed by MATES in Construction is site-based training to provide on ground awareness and support. MATES in Construction support community development onsite as part of the implementation of the program. The program has reached approximately 28% of workers across the State. The appointment of additional Field Officers is critical to the expansion of the program. Following a comprehensive review of the construction industry, it has been determined that MATES in Construction would need to triple our field positions if we want to reach smaller sites and regionally based operators. Reaching smaller sites and regionally based operators will be more labour intensive. Currently, we have five Field Officers servicing the whole State, it is required that we increase this to 15 Field Officers over the next four years if we are to successfully expand the program.

Since MATES in Construction commenced, evidence based research has been an integral part of the program. MATES in Construction will continue to collaborate with Universities to conduct further research on the impact of the program on suicide rates within the industry, suicide ideation and flow on benefits on other aspects of life.
The Program relies heavily on the industry to reach construction workers. Moving forward, a targeted strategy needs to be implemented that expands the reach of MATES in Construction from large construction sites to smaller contractors and regional businesses. The strategy will focus on raising our social media profile through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn.

The Lived Experience Panel is a program for people with lived experience of either attempted suicide or bereavement from suicide who want to share their story. These people volunteer to present at local community groups and meetings to raise awareness in the community and reduce the stigma associated with mental health. Participants in the program present their story at functions to spread awareness within the community.

Advertising was identified as a strategy for increasing program awareness. We will introduce advertising on local radio stations, as radios are on all small work sites. In addition, we will develop a billboard campaign.

MATES in Construction requires expansion of the program across Queensland so that the brand is easily recognised and the program is embedded in local communities. To achieve this outcome, we require expansion of service delivery, raising program awareness, engagement with industry and development of infrastructure to support the long term growth. In order to expand the service delivery model across the State, MATES in Construction needs State Government funding.
The Project

Background
Under the Queensland Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2015–17 the Queensland Mental Health Commission (QMHC) is the lead agency to support the MATES in Construction project “Saving Lives in the Construction Industry” to identify options to expand its suicide prevention initiatives. The QMHC provided funding to MATES in Construction to undertake the scoping project which was due to be completed by 30 June 2016 with a report by 29 July 2016. Currently, penetration of the market is approximately 20% in Queensland. There is a considerable gap in the market comprising mainly of small and medium sized businesses and regional and rural construction businesses.

Purpose
The aim of the project is to scope the expansion and reach of the program, target young industry workers who are most at risk, establish a ready deployment capacity to support natural disaster construction crews and develop a post intervention program for the industry.

Objective
MATES in Construction has the potential to reduce suicide rates in the industry by a further seven percent by implementing an expanded MATES in Construction program. To achieve this target, the organisation must connect with smaller contractors and expand operations more broadly across the State. This will be more labour intensive and require additional resources in terms of Field Officers and Case Managers. In addition, funds need to be raised and allocated to increasing program awareness across the State.

The Project Plan developed in the Funding Agreement with the QMHC was used as the template for delivery of the program (Refer Appendix 1).
The History

In 2002, the Building Employee Redundancy Trust (BERT) formed the Suicide Prevention Research Project to formally examine industry suicides. A Committee was formed and funds were raised for the Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention (AISRAP) to examine and validate the high suicide rates within the Queensland Commercial Building and Construction Industry (QCBC). Funding for the research was sourced from unions, associations, industry bodies, major contractors and government departments.

The seven year study involved an examination and analysis of 158,749 workers from 1995 to 2001 using industry rather than coronial data. The study concluded:

“Suicide is a significant problem in Queensland’s Commercial Building Construction Industry (QCBC), with almost 10 members each year taking their own life. When compared to Australian male and Queensland male suicide rates across the same periods the QCBC rates were 46% and 25% greater respectively”.

The report found that work related factors (e.g. long work hours, pressure, bullying), interpersonal factors (e.g. family, relationship problems) and individual factors (e.g. alcohol and substance abuse) interact to contribute to an elevated suicide risk in the male dominated industry.

The Report recommended that a campaign raising awareness about mental health and wellbeing, combined with good ‘gatekeeper’ training should be implemented in combination with an industry specific intervention program for workers with suicidal thoughts.

A major industry workshop was convened in January 2008, with approximately 80 representatives of employers, unions and industry associations attending. The workshop was the catalyst for acknowledgement and formal acceptance of suicide as a real issue and that something had to be done about it. The dynamics at the workshop led to the catch phrase “mates helping mates” and the acronym “Men Actively Talking to Each other on Site” was coined.

MATES in Construction, created initially as OzHelp Queensland, was incorporated on 12 March 2008. Its principle role was to develop appropriate intervention strategies using existing industry structures and a best practice approach to suicide prevention.
Research Evidence

Despite the huge impact of suicidal behaviours and ideation there is limited research into the financial cost of suicide in the way other public health risks have been costed. One report directly investigating this with Australia wide and State specific data is the Doran report [1]. Using estimations and calculations based on established health economics, they found the cost of suicide in the construction industry was immense, and Queensland displayed some of the highest rates in Australia [1]. It was estimated, that suicide attempts resulting in a fatality or total incapacity and those resulting in a short leave from employment in the Queensland construction industry cost $345 million in 2012 with the majority of that cost (98%) borne by government.

The economic and emotional costs of suicide are vast, far reaching and disproportionately experienced across occupational groups. As suicide is considered a “largely preventable” cause of death [2] and considering the wide ranging negative impacts of suicide on the community and country, prevention strategies are essential. Further, suicide occurs at a much higher rate in some occupations indicating the workplace as a factor. However, the workplace is also a prime location for suicide prevention.

The majority of evaluations of suicide prevention programs have assessed programs implemented in schools or the general community with comparatively few in the workplace [3]. These evaluations generally find that prevention programs are effective in reducing suicide rates, improving knowledge of mental health issues and improving coping [3]. Interestingly, while targeting particular at risk groups (e.g. adolescents, those accessing mental health services) very few are evaluated outside hospital and mental health settings.

The two documented and discussed investigations were the Canadian Police Force [4] and the United States Air Force [5]. These programs shared common components with the MATES in Construction program such as a focus on workplace awareness training, gatekeeper training, promotion of resources and reducing stigma to improve help-seeking. The Canadian Police Force also had access to a telephone help service staffed with volunteers much like MATES in Construction. Evaluations revealed that both were well received, and considered a useful and essential component of suicide prevention in the workplace by participants. In addition, both programs saw large reductions in the suicide rate following their introductions.

Suicide and suicide behavior in the Queensland construction industry is costing $345 MILLION DOLLARS each year.
in suicide, while other departments in the same province reported a slight non-significant increase in suicide rates.

The US Air Force evaluation was unique in that it investigated the impact of the program on other areas of potential impact. This evaluation found not only a reduction in suicide rates but a corresponding 18-54% reduction in accidental death, homicide, moderate and severe family violence, suggesting overall better wellbeing and family functioning in the cohort.

These results demonstrate the potential of workplace suicide prevention programs in not only increasing awareness and changing attitudes but in significantly reducing suicide and homicide fatalities over time and improving overall wellbeing.

Those results, while impressive, need to be considered in context. In some ways these were ideal samples providing the opportunity for enhanced results. First, both the Police Force and the Air Force had stable workforces over the evaluation periods, this allowed for almost complete saturation of the workforce and an enduring change in attitude. In contrast, the construction industry is highly transient and variable, thus it is difficult to achieve and maintain a high level of saturation on a single site over a period of months, let alone across several years. Second, those samples experienced comparatively low rates of suicide compared to the construction industry, possibly because of protective factors associated with a higher skill level. Finally, these programs had large scale funding, allowing extensive training and continued development.

Considering the comparatively high numbers and cost of suicide to the construction industry there are surprisingly few workplace interventions in this area. MATES in Construction appears to be the only such program to have been comprehensively evaluated. To date three evaluations of the program or components of it have been published [6-8]. Overwhelmingly these evaluations find that respondents perceive the program positively and think it forms an essential part of the work environment [6-8]. There is strong evidence of engagement with the program as well as perceived effectiveness and social validity. Respondents report more positive state of mind and higher levels of morale when working on MATES in Construction supportive worksites than
in their experiences of worksites which do not support MATES in Construction training [7]. The flow on effects of the program have not yet been investigated, but as found with US Air Force cohort [5], MATES in Construction improves more than just suicide risk. Potentially, the program could reduce homicide, domestic violence and improve overall psychological wellbeing.

Beyond subjective ratings of usefulness, with 22% coverage, the estimated suicide risk in the Queensland construction industry has dropped by 7.8% since the introduction of MATES in Construction in Queensland [9]. Further expansion of the program into more rural and remote areas and onto smaller job sites, in addition to further support in higher density areas should increase coverage to 50% and lead to a further decrease in suicide risk of at least seven percent over the next five years.

Recent research released by MATES in Construction through Deakin University looked at the relative risk between construction workers and other employed men across each of the Australian states and territories between 2001 and 2013. In Queensland, in 2001 the risk for construction workers was elevated by 200% compared to other employed men. In 2012 and 2013 the risk was elevated by only 10%. In 2001, Queensland was amongst the highest in terms of age standardise suicide rates. In both 2012 and 2013 the Queensland industry recorded the lowest rates [10].
Case study 1

Dave is a young construction worker who has reached breaking point. Two years into his apprenticeship the small company he worked for closed shop and he could not find another placement.

The stress of unemployment and lack of money put a strain on his relationship with his partner. They eventually separated and he started to get depressed about not having a girlfriend, being unemployed and thinking he had no future.

He started distancing himself from his mates as he had no money to go out clubbing. He started drinking heavily, sleeping all day and eating poorly. He started having thoughts about suicide as he felt there was nothing to live for in life.

He got into a fight with another man whilst on a bender and was admitted to hospital for treatment. The nurse on duty had some training in mental health and realised he was at risk of taking his own life. She contacted one of his friends who visited Dave in hospital and suggested he talk to MATES in Construction. Together they made the call.

When John from MATES in Construction received the call he asked Dave if he would like to meet up. When John met Dave he asked how he was coping and he said, ”everything I touch turns rotten”.

Stories like this one are common in our current times. The positive is that a mate noticed he was struggling and took the time to connect him to help. We were able to help him put his life back on track by breaking down the issues into manageable pieces and connecting him to appropriate help.

Today, Dave has a career in the industry and is married. The key is to help breakdown the stigma of mental health and ensure that the suicide rate in the industry continues to decline.
The construction industry is Australia’s third largest industry. The industry operates in both the private and public sectors, across three broad areas of activity:

- Engineering civil construction (major infrastructure, mining and heavy industrial resource based projects)
- Non-residential building (including offices, shops, hotels, industrial premises, hospitals, entertainment facilities)
- Residential building (houses, flats, home units, townhouses)

In 2013, Australia had 1.03 million construction workers accounting for nine percent of the employment population. Employment in the construction industry is concentrated in New South Wales (28%), Victoria (24%) and Queensland (23%) (11). In 2013, Queensland had 241,000 construction workers whereas by the end of 2015 the number dropped to 204,000.

During 2015, industry generated over $50 billion for the Queensland economy, however total Queensland construction activity decreased by 21.8%. It is projected to average $46.6 billion per annum over the next two years (12).

In 2016, the engineering civil construction industry in Queensland is projected to decline by 28.6% due to the completion of the LNG projects and limited infrastructure spending by the government. The fall represents a decline in annual major project investment from more than $15 billion in 2012/13 to $4.4 billion in 2016/17 (13).

In 2015, non-residential building activity declined by nearly 10% and is projected to decline by a further three percent in 2016. Public sector investment in non-residential buildings is down by approximately $1 billion on the previous year (14). The ongoing lack of investment by both private and public sector is the biggest issue and there are few signs of this turning around.

In 2015, total private residential construction increased by nearly nine percent and is projected to increase by 16.9% in 2016. Master Builders Association recorded a 23.6% increase in dwelling approvals in the past 12 months and a 45% increase in multi-units. This is the first time in the history of approvals that multi-units have exceeded detached housing.
Major engineering civil construction projects currently underway in Brisbane North include the $1.3 billion New Parallel Runway project at Brisbane Airport, the $600 million Kingsford Smith Drive Corridor, the $105 million Bruce Highway Boundary Road Interchange and the $1.16 billion Gateway Motorway Upgrade North (13). There are two major engineering construction projects expected to commence in 2016/17 in Brisbane South. The $250 million Wyaralong Dam Water Treatment Plant and $450 million Logan Motorway Upgrade. The Gold Coast has the $164 million Coomera to Helensvale Rail project and the region is benefiting from the Commonwealth Games in 2018, with large scale infrastructure projects as the venues develop.

Brisbane North and Brisbane South have the highest concentration of licensed contractors, highest level of building activity (51%) and the most dwelling approvals (55%) for the State. The Gold Coast region is the next highest with a medium concentration of licensed contractors, high level of building activity (16.57%) and medium level of dwelling approvals (13.86%).

The Surat Basin is just coming out of the boom of the three major coal seam gas projects. The $1.6 billion Toowoomba Range Crossing is the major engineering civil construction project currently operating in the region. Darling Downs and West Moreton accounted for over 10% of the State’s residential building approvals. Building activity is at a very high level in the West Moreton part of the region and the number of licensed contractors is also high. The remainder of the Darling Downs and West Moreton region has a high level of building activity, however the number of licensed contractors is low. This indicates that fly in fly out (FIFO) work arrangements are part of the Darling Downs region.

Western Queensland is the worst placed in terms of building and construction activity. There are no major engineering construction projects scheduled for the region in 2016/17. In Western Queensland residential building approvals account for less than one percent of the total State approvals. Building activity is at a high level around St George and this would be the overflow from the Darling Downs projects. The remainder of the region has very low building activity and a low concentration of licensed contractors.

One major project influencing the region is the $5 billion Auru project in Caloundra, it will provide housing to 50,000 people over 30 years. The whole of the region accounted for 19% of the State’s residential building approvals. Building activity is at a high level around Charters Towers and medium through Cairns and Weipa. There are a number of projects under development in the Cairns region, including the $8.15 billion Aquis Great Barrier Reef resort. Should these projects proceed then the construction industry in the region will provide over 3,750 jobs at peak construction. Building activity is at a high level around the Sunshine Coast part of the region, however as you move further north it changes from low to very low.
Industry Consultation

Consultation was held with key industry stakeholders to gain an understanding of the challenges facing the industry; statistical data on location and number of licensees; advice on strategies for reaching smaller businesses; and how to reach businesses operating in remote areas. All industry bodies support expansion of the program and participated in the consultation.

In the past, MATES in Construction has focused on accessing large construction sites where cranes are visible and major contractors are responsible for projects. As we move forward, MATES in Construction will need to broaden its profile to reach smaller residential construction projects and rural and remote sites. Industry feedback from key stakeholders on strategies for reaching smaller contractors and regional businesses were:

- Work with Queensland Building and Construction Commission (QBCC) to co-ordinate training of Inspectors and Call Centre staff about mental health in the workplace
- Collaborate with the Civil Construction Federation (CCF) to attend shared training opportunities and road trips to regional Queensland
- Create a strategy for the expansion to smaller residential building sites by collaborating with Queensland Master Builders Association (QMBA)
- Attend Trade Shows and Industry Forums where appropriate
- Provide Field Officers with a strategic approach to accessing smaller developments
- Access smaller contractors through suppliers of material such as plumbing and building materials
- Engage with key stakeholders to find ways of connecting with smaller businesses
- Include a survey in correspondence with members about awareness of MATES in Construction
- Write articles for Industry newsletters
- Work with delegates
- Attend onsite Toolbox Talks to raise awareness
Case study 2

Approximately two months prior to Christmas, a MATES in Construction Case Manager, was called to a construction site by a Connector who was concerned about a workmate called Charlie who was behaving erratically on site, both emotionally and behaviourally.

During the conversation with Charlie, the Case Manager became concerned that the worker was experiencing a psychotic episode (delusions, voices) and could be a risk to himself and work colleagues. Following some discussion, an agreement was reached for him to talk with the local Acute Care Team (ACT). Initially, the ACT declined to speak with Charlie and questioned the basis of the Case Managers concern. Following some discussion, the ACT reluctantly agreed to talk to Charlie and as a result, revised their initial appreciation and subsequently arranged to assess his mental state during a face to face meeting. However, Charlie was unwilling to leave his car at the work site. During a three-way consultation, an agreed safe plan was reached, which resulted in an agreement for Charlie to be escorted by the Case Manager to the ACT at the hospital the next morning.

The following day the Case Manager and Charlie attended the ACT unit and it was agreed by the ACT that the Case Manager would be notified of the assessment outcome and whether the client was available to be picked up for return to home. In quiet confidence, the Case Manager held the view that Charlie would be involuntarily admitted to the ACT.

By midday the Case Manager had not received a call from the ACT so he contacted the facility. He was advised that Charlie had been assessed, that they had made some adjustment to his medication and he had been allowed to return home by train. The Case Manager called Charlie to see if he was alright and established that he was ‘feeling better’ and that he would call MATES in Construction should he require further assistance. Given the handover of Charlie to the ACTs care, no further follow-up action was required of the Case Manager.

During the Christmas break, MATES in Construction was advised that Charlie had died by suicide on Christmas Day and that his workplace were shocked and upset about his death. MATES in Construction supported the site through a postvention process.
Community Consultation

Regional meetings were held across the State to identify best approaches to support small businesses and sole operators and emerging mental health issues within the industry. A total of 105 people attended meetings held in the following locations:

- Longreach
- Roma
- Townsville
- Biloela
- Rockhampton
- Bundaberg
- Cairns

There was a reasonable level of consistency across all regions, although some issues received specific emphasis. The key issues identified were:

- **Concern for young men** whom seem at greater risk because of binge drinking and/or drug taking behaviours. This was especially emphasised in Townsville where unemployment particularly among young workers was seen as a large concern.

- **Unemployment** was a concern in general, especially from construction companies who have lived off the coal seam gas projects and the flood recovery programs.

- Many never had to deal with mental health issues before – felt it was pretty much sink or swim mentality in the industry. However, most were open to helping those who were struggling but concerned they could make matters worse.

- There was an appetite for acquiring the skills to help and removing the stigma still currently held around mental health and mental illness.

- **Lack of services** was mentioned as an issue and sometimes having to drive long distances to receive appropriate help was also seen as a potential danger.

- There was a scepticism around outsiders coming from the city to tell locals how they should feel and what they should do. This was especially evident in Longreach where the drought had hit hardest. Longreach also highlighted that in tough times, many of the young workers (and sometimes mums or dads) would leave the area to gain employment. This splits and sometimes fractures the family, leaving those remaining at home without support.
• All mentioned the power of peer support as the best way to receive help. Having a mate to talk with who knew you were struggling somehow normalised things and gave you the encouragement to deal with the issues you were facing. Sharing the problem often provided perspective.

• Receiving support from someone within your culture or who understood the pressures coming from working in your industry and/or location was seen as important. In Cairns, this was expressed particularly as it relates to indigenous youth within our industry.

• Mentioned numerous times was the many roles within a community that one person may perform. They may be a plumber, coach the under 19s rugby, volunteer for State Emergency Services (SES) and be part of the school Parents and Friends Association. Skills learnt in one environment have a multiplying effect in the community. Some of our Connectors talked about using their suicide intervention skills at the football club and working for the SES with people in distress (particularly after the floods).

• Supporting those who support others was also mentioned several times. This was raised in particular reference to Field Officers working with apprentices or Safety Officers who were often first responders when an issue arose. These people can often be in remote locations or dealing with more than one person at risk and feel the burden of being supposed to know what to do and often with little or no training. The need for skills particularly around mental health and suicide intervention was seen as critical as well as the pathways to support for themselves. Connectors felt they had MATES in Construction as a key support in this role but a number of others had not yet had exposure to the program and were keen to access this type of service. Golden West apprentices in Toowoomba were a good example as their Field Officers support employees and apprentices across the South West all the way to Central Western Queensland.
A survey was conducted on construction workers from across the State, asking a series of questions concerning what issues are significant in the industry; what needs to be dealt with as a priority; what more can we do to make our industry suicide safer; how best do we support smaller businesses; and how we can improve our presence in regional Queensland.

Survey participants were asked whether they think the following four issues are significant in the industry:

- Family and Relations
- Drug, Alcohol and Addiction
- Work Related
- Suicide Ideation and Intervention

A total of 600 responses were received with some respondents providing multiple answers. All responses indicate that these issues are a concern across the industry. All categories scored over 73% with drug, alcohol and addiction (87.91%) and family and relationships (87.36%) being the highest. When compared to the issues case managed by MATES in Construction, the results are very similar. In 2015, 471 cases were managed by MATES in Construction, the most predominant issues were relationship related (31.31%) and employment related (17.04%). Alcohol, drugs and addictions (9.03%), financial (8.93%) and suicide ideation and intervention (5.95%) were the next issues of concern.

In response to which issue do you think needs to be dealt with as a priority a total of 281 responses were received, with some respondents providing multiple answers. The key issues requiring attention were suicide ideation and intervention (43.41%) and drug, alcohol and addiction (41.76%). Many commented that in order to prevent suicide, there is a need to address the other issues.
In response to what can we do to make our industry suicide safer a total of 232 responses were received, with some respondents providing multiple answers. The most prominent suggestions were communication (24.93%) and creating awareness (21.43%). It should be noted that a number of respondents indicated being able to identify when a mate needs help, which is what the MATES in Construction training program is all about.

In response to the best way to support small sub-contractors and small construction businesses 152 comments were received, with some respondents providing multiple answers. The top three responses were:
- Communication/networking (12.5%)
- Training/workshops/presentations (11.18%)
- Information/education (9.87%)

Other comments to note included raising awareness (7.24%), partnering with large companies (5.26%), providing access to support services (5.26%), advertising (5.26%), more MATES in Construction (5.26%) and more onsite visits (4.61%).

In response to how MATES in Construction can improve its presence in regional Queensland, 136 comments were received, with some respondents providing multiple answers. The top three responses were:
- Advertising (19.12%)
- Training/workshops/presentations (17.65%)
- Onsite visits (11.03%)

Other comments to note included train more Connectors (7.35%), more MATES in Construction (7.35%), communication/discussion (6.62%) and raise awareness/presence (5.15%).
Mental Health care is provided through industry support; general practice management; patient support in a community care setting; allied health; and hospital based acute care.

Major contractors in the industry usually have Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) which aim to ensure that workers who experience mental health and other well-being issues are provided counselling and other support services. The union provides members will a wide range of support, which include but are not limited to funeral benefits; EAP; income protection; legal services; medical cover; and financial services.

The BERT was established to provide redundancy payments and benefits to its members and training grants for employees in the Queensland construction industry. The benefits paid from the Fund help provide members and their families with financial assistance in the event of ceasing employment because of redundancy or relief from financial burdens. BERT Training Fund (BTF) assists in the training of workers in the building and construction industry who are members of the BERT. Through training, workers can increase their skills, knowledge and expertise. This leads to better employment options, higher wages and a more productive industry. BTF provides assistance in both the trade and non-trade occupations and in the building, civil and engineering construction sectors of the industry.

There is clear evidence that people living in remote areas have limited access to general practice and psychological services which negatively impacts on mental health (15). This was also reflected in the comments made at the regional community consultation. In addition, people in suburbs with high unemployment and socio-economic disadvantage tend to have less general practices and psychological services. General practitioners (GP) can refer clients to a GP Mental Health Treatment Plan which allows for up to six individual or six group allied mental health services, which may comprise both psychological assessment and therapy by a clinical psychologist or focused psychological strategies by an allied mental health professional.

MATES in Construction has mapped Allied Health Services (AHS) across the State, for a wide range of services including but not limited to counselling; mental health; parenting; legal; suicide prevention; domestic violence; gambling; and alcohol and drug referral services. When dealing with clients from unfamiliar regions, staff often use the Lifeline Service Finder. This application identifies service providers by issue and location.
As part of the community development component of the program, staff work with a wide range of community based providers. MATES in Construction focuses on using a number of different resources to tailor-make the best intervention and assistance program for the individual. They also follow up with the worker to ensure the help they received was effective. In some cases MATES in Construction will advocate for the worker with a particular service to ensure the service can meet their needs.

MATES in Construction experience with the hospital system has not been as successful, because when trying to advocate for a client they are faced with privacy issues.

The patient confidentiality and divulging patient information restrictions to third party means that when a client is discharged the hospital does not contact MATES in Construction. A previous suicide attempt is among the strongest predictors of future suicide attempts. Those who had attempted suicide were three times more likely to repeat attempt during the first year follow-up (16).

MATES in Construction needs to be the primary referral pathway for construction workers being discharged from emergency, mental health services and acute hospital care facilities.
Expansion of the Program

Vision

To be Australia’s leading industry suicide prevention organisation focusing on raising awareness, building capacity, providing help and research.

Training and Support

Within five years of starting the program, MATES in Construction Queensland has reached approximately 28% of workers across the State, through workers participating in training:

- **General Awareness Training**
  - 54,091

- **Connector**
  - 4,297

- **Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training**
  - 515

A key strategy employed by MATES in Construction is site-based training to provide on-ground awareness and support. This training has helped reduce the stigma of mental illness and suicide (or the risk of suicide), improve awareness of mental health issues in the community and increase the priority of mental health in a work environment.

All MATES in Construction training is delivered by a minimum of two staff who have completed Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST). While one may conduct the presentation the other ASIST trained person is made available to provide support to any worker present who might need assistance. The program is delivered in this way to ensure the integrity of the program, continuous improvement in presenting and to ensure anyone present is not adversely affected by the training.

The training program comprises of General Awareness Training (GAT), Connector Training and ASIST. GAT is a one hour onsite awareness session that leads the workforce through a discussion about suicide and mental health in the industry. Connector is a four hour session conducted onsite and provides workers with the confidence to support co-workers in asking about suicide, mental health and in connecting individuals to help. ASIST is a two day intensive, practice based course to help recognise persons who may be experiencing thoughts of suicide and empower intervention to prevent the immediate risk of suicide. In addition, MATES in Construction provides Life Skills Toolbox training for young apprentices.

Following each level of training participants are provided with a hard hat sticker which indicates to fellow workers that they are someone to go to if in need of help.
MATES in Construction support community development onsite as part of the implementation of the program. The Field Officer helps site management provide an environment conducive to good mental health and wellbeing which ultimately will provide better productivity and workplace health and safety. MATES in Construction organises ongoing opportunities for events onsite, allowing important health and wellbeing information to be provided to workers. MATES in Construction provides onsite construction workers with access to a 24/7 helpline and through this they have access to immediate help and counselling.

Critical incidents and accidents are reasonably regular on construction sites. Sometimes these incidents can trigger emotions and reactions in workers that compromise both their safety and their mental health. In such circumstances, MATES in Construction will attend the site to provide support and assistance to workers. Part of this process is to recharge the onsite network (Connectors and ASIST workers) to be vigilant in keeping an eye on their mates in case this incident has had an adverse effect on any workers.

In addition to training and community development, all Field Officers take part in the telephone roster. Every day of the week one Field Officer is responsible for following up calls received through the 1300 hotline.

Currently, MATES in Construction has 5.5 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Field Officer positions covering the whole of Queensland. In 2015, the Field Officers had 1,050 contacts with 172 work sites. Field Officers report that demand for service is so high that there is insufficient time to seek out new sites and try to access smaller developments. The majority of onsite training and access is with major construction sites. Due to a lack of resources, MATES in Construction is failing to reach smaller contractors and remote sites, unless they are working as sub-contractors on major projects.

In order to expand the program to reach our target audience for this project, MATES in Construction will need to increase the number of Field Officers from 5.5 FTEs to 16 FTEs positions over the next four years. This will ensure there are sufficient staff in each region to conduct training in tandem, build on community development and implement strategies to reach small and medium sized businesses and regional and remote construction workers. Following a review of building activity within the State, the following sections outline where the Field Officer positions will be placed across the State.
Brisbane North, Brisbane South and Gold Coast

Currently, MATES in Construction has 1.5 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Field Officer positions covering both Brisbane North and Brisbane South and 1.5 FTEs covering the Gold Coast. In the 2015 calendar year, MATES in Construction Field Officers had 511 contacts with 86 work sites across Brisbane North, Brisbane South and the Gold Coast and reached over 4,200 workers with General Awareness Training.

It is proposed that eight Field Officer positions be allocated to the region over the next four years. These regions have the highest concentration of licensed builders and building activity requiring the greatest concentration of effort. The increase in positions will ensure that trainers can easily draw from resources within the region for tandem training and that each part of the region will have two trainers at any given time and more than one site can be visited on any given day. In addition, all positions will engage AHS and Primary Health Networks (PHNs) to ensure that the program is embedded in the community.

Darling Downs, West Moreton and Western Queensland

Currently, MATES in Construction has one Field Officer position covering Darling Downs, West Moreton and Western Queensland. In the 2015 calendar year, 384 contacts were made with 45 work sites across the region and over 750 construction workers attended General Awareness Training.

It is proposed that four Field Officer positions be allocated to the region over the next four years, this will increase the capacity to train, the ability to access remote sites within the region and build on community engagement and linkages with AHS and PHNs.

Central Queensland, Wide Bay, Sunshine Coast and Northern Queensland

Currently, MATES in Construction has 1.5 FTE Field Officer positions covering Central Queensland, Wide Bay, Sunshine Coast and Northern Queensland. In the 2015 calendar year, 155 contacts were made with 36 work sites across the region and over 760 construction workers attended General Awareness Training.

It is proposed that four Field Officer positions be allocated to the region over the next four years, this will increase the capacity to train, the ability to access remote sites within the region and build on community engagement and linkages with AHS and PHNs.
Industry Engagement

The program will create a Co-ordinator of Industry Engagement position to oversee the expansion of Field Officers across the State. This position will be responsible for collaborating with key industry stakeholders to reach more work sites and more workers through existing networks. MATES in Construction will provide GAT to inspectors, call centre staff, work cover staff and union delegates to recognise when mates are needing help. Consultation with key stakeholders identified that people in these roles are usually the first to know when someone is doing it tough and needs some help. This strategy will enable MATES in Construction to reach more workers and smaller contractors within the region. Another strategy identified for reaching smaller contractors is conducting BBQs at major supply companies, such as timber yards and plumbing suppliers. Smaller construction sites do not have the time to allocate an hour for training, it is more appropriate to conduct Toolbox Talks and regularly visit these sites. The Co-ordinator will work with key stakeholders and Field Officers to target smaller contractors and remote sites.

Case Management

Since starting the program MATES in Construction Queensland has managed 2,846 cases. MATES in Construction employs Case Managers to assist troubled workers with a plan to effectively address their issue(s). The Case Manager connects the worker to appropriate services in their industry and/or area. This could include such services as their Employee Assistance Program (EAP), financial counselling, drug and alcohol services, grief counselling, family and relationship counselling.

As most workers have a multitude of issues, the Case Manager focuses on using a number of different resources to ensure the best intervention and assistance program is provided to the individual. They also follow up with the worker to ensure the help they received was effective. In some cases MATES in Construction will advocate for the worker with a particular service to ensure the service can meet their needs. MATES in Construction staff connect two to three workers to help every day and every one to two days intervene with a worker who has thoughts of suicide.

Currently, MATES in Construction has 1.5 FTE Case Manager positions covering the whole of Queensland. By 2019-2020, it is proposed that MATES in Construction will need five Case Manager positions servicing the entire State. As awareness of the program expands this will increase demand for Case Managers, as they advocate on behalf of construction workers when dealing with complex cases that require treatment from multiple AHS.

Research and Evaluation

A portion of funding will be allocated to ongoing research and evaluation of the prevalence of suicide within the construction industry. Since MATES in Construction commenced, evidence based research has been an integral part of the Program. MATES in Construction will collaborate with the Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention (AISRAP), Griffith University and the Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety (CARRS), Queensland University of Technology to conduct further research on the impact of the program on suicide rates within the industry, suicide ideation and flow on benefits on other aspects of life.
Industry Partnership Program

In September 2015, MATES in Construction appointed a National Marketing Manager to deliver the Industry Partnership Program (IPP). The IPP provides a means for organisations within the building and construction industries to give financial support and receive industry recognition. Construction companies and industry can provide financial donations without this being a condition of the provision of MATES in Construction services to their workers or members.

Since industry organisations differ widely in size and areas of operation the IPP has been designed on a Tier basis at a National and State level.

On 23 March 2016, MATES in Construction officially launched the Queensland IPP. It is projected that as the Program grows across the State to more remote regions and reaches smaller operators, sponsorship will grow exponentially.

National Hotline

MATES in Construction has a National hotline for construction workers. In the six month period from September 2015 to March 2016, Queensland received the highest number of calls totalling 482 out of 763. Of these calls 51% related to suicide concerns.

As the program expands, it is anticipated that demand for the hotline will increase. MATES in Construction receives regular reporting on the usage of the service and this data will be closely tracked as the new positions are filled, program awareness is raised and coverage across the State is expanded.

Post Disaster Management

Recent experience in disaster cleanup across the State, highlighted the need to have response services embedded in the local community. In addition, the community consultation highlighted the reluctance for regional communities to have organisations from outside the area coming in and telling them how to operate.

MATES in Construction will not be providing first response services, rather they will activate what they have already embedded in communities. MATES in Construction has trained organisations such as Roadtek, who are first responders in post disaster management. The organisation will help construction workers in disaster affected areas to better support their community.

Life Skills Toolbox

The 2016 CSQ Apprentice Annual Report highlights a number of changes in the industry. As at 30 June 2015, there were 26,000 apprentices working toward a construction trade qualification in Queensland. Brisbane North and South account for almost half of apprentices, however it should be noted that Darling Downs leads the State in taking on apprentices (17). Only 40% of apprenticeships are from traditional school leavers, there is a shift towards older apprentices (25 years and older) across the industry. The most popular occupations for construction apprentices are carpenters and joiners (27.1%), electricians (25.1%) and plumbers (12.2%).

The Life Skills Toolbox is an essential part of the MATES in Construction program, as it has been shown statistically that young construction workers are a higher suicide risk cohort. It is a resilience skills program aimed specifically at young workers which includes such topics as financial literacy, drug and alcohol awareness, communication, bullying and harassment, managing emotions and suicide awareness.

Queensland Plan for Mental Health
“To provide a comprehensive, resilience and recovery-based mental health system across Queensland, with emphasis upon promotion, prevention and early intervention.”

Life Skills Training targets the development of “resilience” and effectively aligns with the objectives of “promotion, prevention and early intervention”. The course comprises six modules of four hour duration. The modules can be conducted individually or presented fully over two days. The course is usually delivered to a group of no more than 15 apprentices. One in four apprentices who complete Life Skills Toolbox ask for help.

In the past twelve months, 640 modules were delivered to 106 students. Whilst the number of apprentices reached is positive, we are not even reaching one percent of the population. A Life Skills Senior Trainer position needs to be established to be responsible for driving the training and connecting with apprenticeship training organisations and small contractors to encourage participation in the program.

Critical Incident and Postvention

Despite the best efforts of MATES in Construction, sites will periodically experience critical incidents as may be identified through the trauma associated with injury and/or death. On invitation, MATES in Construction will agree to be involved in critical incident or postvention activities whenever practicable. Postvention is an intervention conducted after a suicide, largely taking the form of support for the bereaved (family, friends, professionals and peers). Family and friends of the suicide victim may be at increased risk of suicide themselves. Postvention has the objective of alleviating the effects of the stress and helping survivors to cope with the loss they have just experienced. Postvention occurs:

- after negotiation and agreement is reached with relevant site personnel
- onsite
- in the hours/days/weeks following the incident
- for a minimum period of three (3) months

In the past 12 months, MATES in Construction has provided postvention services on 23 work sites in Queensland.

The organisation is currently working with Standby Response Service to develop Community Postvention Response Plans across Queensland. The StandBy Response Service is one of Australia’s leading suicide postvention programs dedicated to assisting people and communities affected by suicide.

The focus of StandBy is the establishment and operation of a long term program of support for people bereaved by suicide. In response to emergent community needs StandBy has also developed the short term Critical Postvention Response (CPR). This brief rapid response model is intended for use in communities where concerns exist about high incidence of suicide and its effects on the community. MATES in Construction will engage a consultant to collaborate with Standby to develop Community Postvention Response Plans across the State.

Office Support

The overall increase in staff across the organisation will require additional administration support, information technology and staff management resources. These positions will focus on developing an integrated Customer Relationships Management system with the existing data management system and supporting delivery of the program.
Program Awareness

One of the Strategic Objectives of the Board is to “Lift the profile of MATES in Construction”, this involves taking every opportunity to raise the profile in terms of the programs developed and their effectiveness. The program relies heavily on word of mouth, moving forward a targeted strategy is needed that expands the reach from large construction sites to smaller contractors and regional businesses. MATES in Construction hosts three major events throughout the year to raise program awareness and celebrate achievements to date:

- **Annual Charity Lunch**
  Each year we host a lunch for the construction industry to come together to celebrate the achievements of the industry through the MATES in Construction program.

- **Kokoda Trek**
  Each year over 40 individuals walk the Kokoda Trek on behalf of MATES in Construction to raise awareness about suicide prevention.

- **Fly the Flag Day**
  MATES in Construction flag is flown from makeshift flag poles, cranes, scaffolding to coincide with World Suicide Day and raise awareness of the prevalence of suicide in the construction industry.

**Social Media**

In March 2016, the MATES in Construction website was relaunched with a focus on live feeds and current information. Our Facebook account has over 6,500 likes while the Twitter feed is building and currently sits at 614 followers. Building program awareness will focus on a social media campaign that compliments the redesigned website. The campaign will include weekly postings on the website, facebook, twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. These services will be outsourced to a social media advisor to co-ordinate timely, relevant and attention grabbing posts that ultimately raise awareness of the program.

**Lived Experience Panel**

The Lived Experience Panel is a program for people with lived experience of either attempted suicide or bereavement from suicide who want to share their story. The program is a two day course designed to train participants to share their story in a way that does not harm themselves or their audience. Participants in the program present their story at functions to spread awareness within the community. To date, MATES in Construction has 10 volunteer speakers in the program and a further 15 are scheduled to be trained in September 2016. Three one minute videos have been made of participants in the program sharing their life story. These stories are powerful and help lower the stigma associated with suicide. The videos will be used online as an education and awareness tool.

**Volunteers**

The construction workers who volunteer to attend Connector and ASIST training are our way of ensuring that mates are looking out for mates onsite and workers know that there is someone available should they need support. Currently in Queensland we have 4,753 Connector and ASIST workers. Feedback from the survey, highlighted a need for more Connectors as they are a great source of referral. Unfortunately, due to a lack of resources we do very little with these volunteers when they have completed training. Another suggestion from
the construction worker survey was to advertise through social media. A quick and affordable way to reach these volunteers is through SMS messaging. Messaging will provide volunteers with updates and encouragement, ensuring awareness of the program is maintained.

**Advertising**

Advertising was identified as a strategy for increasing program awareness. A new strategy to raise program awareness on smaller regional work sites will be the introduction of advertising on local radio stations, as radios are part of the toolbox on smaller work sites. Currently, there are 150 regional radio stations located across Queensland and the average cost of advertising ranges between $1,000 and $4,000 per week depending on the frequency and timing of the advertisement. It is proposed to run a campaign targeting Darling Downs, Northern, Central and Western Queensland. A radio advertising agency will be engaged to identify the best stations to target, when the advertisements should be placed and the frequency of advertising.

With 55% of the Queensland population living regionally, a billboard campaign will extend the reach of the program and compliment the radio campaign. The cost of a regional billboard campaign ranges from $1,900 to $3,600 per month. An advertising billboard specialist will be engaged to determine the best location, duration and design of advertising.

**Newsletter**

On-Site is an eight page newsletter with 20,000 Queensland only hard copies distributed across the industry four times per year. We have a regular e-newsletter that is sent to 15,000 active e-mail addresses with an open rate of 30%. MATES in Construction provide editorial material to a number of industry magazines including every second issue of Queensland Master Builders Magazine.
Case study 3

Phil and Amanda, MATES in Construction Field Officers were staying at an accommodation camp in Miles, when a worker named John came up and asked if he could speak with them. John advised he attended the General Awareness Training (GAT) session that afternoon, but had also attended a session six weeks earlier in Spring Gully. John owned a small civil contracting business in his home town near Kilcoy, which his staff managed while he was away on business.

John was home the previous week and spoke with one of his workers, a young 23 year old apprentice and asked how things were travelling. He said “I don’t know what he said, or how he said it but I remember thinking it didn’t feel right”. John asked the young man if he wanted to grab a coffee and have a chat about what had been happening lately.

John eventually reached the point in the conversation, where he asked “are you thinking about suicide” to which the young apprentice replied “yes”. Being able to ask the question is the first step towards ensuring you keep your mate safe.
# Evaluation of Program

MATES in Construction in collaboration with the AISRAP of Griffith University has developed an evaluation model. Following implementation of the expansion program, the program itself will be evaluated in each year of the roll-out.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MATES in Construction</th>
<th>Method of evaluation</th>
<th>Measuring mediating effects</th>
<th>Measuring Outcomes</th>
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<td>Awareness building</td>
<td>Media</td>
<td>Knowledge and attitude</td>
<td>Suicide rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Media</td>
<td>• Random stratified sample</td>
<td>• Suicide and mental health knowledge</td>
<td>• Suicide rates in the Queensland construction industry (2011-2015, 2016-2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• SB</td>
<td>• Resident Feedback Panel (RFP)</td>
<td>• Attitudes toward suicide and mental health</td>
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<tr>
<td>• GAT</td>
<td>• Yearly systematic sample</td>
<td>• Psychological wellbeing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gatekeeper training</td>
<td>• Focus groups (dependent on funding)</td>
<td>• Reaction criteria (self-reports of trainees’ affective and attitudinal responses to the training program);</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Connector</td>
<td>• Probability sample of construction workers</td>
<td>• Learning criteria (how much they learned from the program);</td>
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<tr>
<td>• ASIST</td>
<td>SB and GAT</td>
<td>• Behavioural criteria (changes in their job-related behaviours or performance), or</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Resilience building</td>
<td>Pre-post-follow up measurement of reaction of participants to SB and GAT</td>
<td>• Results criteria (the utility of the program to the organization)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Life skills Toolkit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Suicide attempts and ideation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Case management</td>
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<td>• Disability rates due to suicide attempts</td>
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<td>• Postvention</td>
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<td>• Surveys with probability samples</td>
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<td>Other potential impacts</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Homicide rates</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• DV Rates</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>• Accidental death rates</td>
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</table>
Acknowledgements

MATES in Construction would like to acknowledge the support of industry in establishing the program and assisting in developing this model for expansion across the Queensland construction industry.

Building Employee Redundancy Trust
BUSSQ Building Super
Civil Contractors Federation
Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union
Construction Income Protection
Construction Skills Queensland
Contracting Industry Redundancy Trust
Housing Industry Association
Master Builders Queensland
QLeave
Queensland Building and Construction Commission
WorkCover Queensland
References

1. Doran, C.M., R. Ling, and A. Milner, *The economic cost of suicide and suicide behaviour in the Queensland Construction Industry*, 2015, Hunter Medical Research Institute, University of Newcastle: NSW.


## APPENDIX 1

### Project Plan for “Saving Lives in the Construction Industry Project”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment of specialist resource/project officer</td>
<td>Specialist resource with experience across project design, evaluation and implementation within the mental health field as well as policy development and project costings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry consultation</td>
<td>A series of formal and informal meetings and workshops across all sub-sectors of the industry identifying areas of priority and gaps for intervention. Identify best approaches to support small businesses and sole operators and emerging mental health issues within the industry. Consultation will occur in select regional and rural locations (in conjunction with any feedback on priorities by the Mental Health Commission).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapping Industry evidence</td>
<td>Collating existing data from Queensland Building and Construction Commission, Construction Skills Queensland, Workcover and Q-build with a particular focus on labour needs and the composition of the industry in various regions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapping allied services</td>
<td>Mapping regional services relevant to the program, including industry based, community and government services. The focus is referral pathways generally but also in the context of using the industry as community resources following natural disasters. Sources for this information include local suicide prevention networks, health networks, acute care teams, domestic violence networks, drug and alcohol services and existing MIC Case Managers and Standby (pathway to care model).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope labour requirements</td>
<td>Based on the mapping exercises, a plan will be developed of the required resources and split between case management, field support and supervision and impact on the 24/7 hotline as well as a plan for implementation of the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPIs and Evaluation</td>
<td>The project will lead to a net saving to the State and Commonwealth Governments when implemented. The scoping study will quantify these benefits against measurable KPIs and established credible mechanisms and principles of evaluation. The evaluation plan will be developed in consultation with the MIC academic reference group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding Models</td>
<td>The project will develop recommendations for future sustainable funding models. Preliminary consideration has been given to use the current Workplace Health and Safety Levy. Other models will also be examined including Industry licensing, social benefit bonds and industry co-contribution.</td>
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matesinconstruction.org.au

MATES in Construction gratefully acknowledges the funding provided by the Australian Government