



CPH-NEW

Center for the Promotion of Health
in the New England Workplace

From Research to Results:

20 Years of Promoting Worker Health & Well-being

Healthy Workers. Strong Workplaces. Measurable Impacts.



Center for the Promotion of Health in the New England Workplace

A partnership of the University of Connecticut School of Medicine, University of Connecticut Storrs, and the University of Massachusetts Lowell

Protecting & Promoting Worker Well-being

Our life expectancy is directly impacted by the kind of work we do. Some jobs are inherently high risk, but many jobs carry hidden threats to mental and physical health that can shorten our lifespan or create health challenges.

For the past two decades, the Center for the Promotion of Health in the New England Workplace (CPH-NEW) has worked to uncover those hidden risks and collaborate with employers on solutions to improve long-term outcomes.

Using the *Total Worker Health*® approach, established by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), we have helped organizations transform how they protect and promote health for their workers.

We are a joint initiative of the University of Connecticut School of Medicine, University of Connecticut Storrs, and the University of Massachusetts Lowell, involving experts in many occupational safety and health fields.

Our work is made possible by strong partnerships with over 30 organizations across multiple sectors. Many of these partnerships have spanned decades.

Our greatest success is giving workers and organizations the tools to create healthy workplaces. We have seen that giving workers a voice about their working conditions builds trust, enables collaboration, and promotes a culture of well-being. These are the necessary ingredients for addressing intractable problems facing employers such as absenteeism, turnover and burnout.

We hope this report gives you a sense of how 20 years of research and practice has impacted the lives of workers and improved work environments through training, empowering employees, and changing organizational policy.



High Impact Research That Improves Lives



Our research matters. From reducing violence and injury in the workplace to improving mental and physical health, our participants tell us we're improving their lives.

When we were named a *Total Worker Health*® Center of Excellence 20 years ago, we could not have predicted the

number of lives we've touched, the relationships we've made or the impact of our research. We also couldn't have predicted a global pandemic and how that would influence our work over the past five years.

Our work takes a holistic approach, bringing employees and employers to the table to raise problems and collaboratively develop solutions. The goal of our research is to test new ways to make work and the work environment more health-promoting for employees. The multi-year, multi-phase studies have focused primarily on the corrections, healthcare, education, and construction sectors, investigating musculoskeletal injuries, cardiovascular health, and mental health of workers. We look at the underlying influences of how work is organized

and the work environment in relation to worker and organizational outcomes such as workers' job satisfaction, work ability and retention.

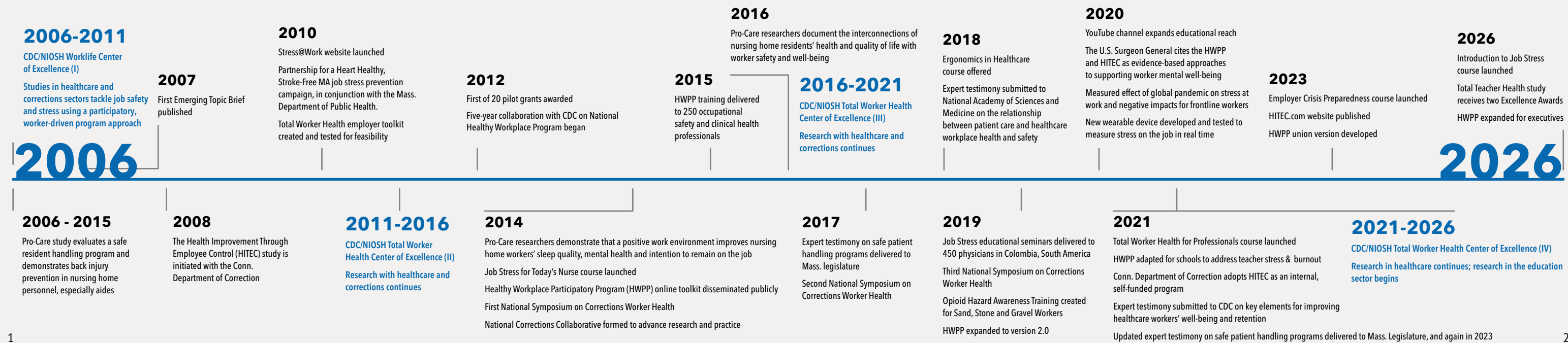
Impacting the Bottom Line for Employers

Employee turnover, workers' compensation claims, and sick time all cost organizations money and reduce productivity. Job stress is often to blame. Lack of job control and decision-making authority is a leading cause of burnout and turnover. We developed the Healthy Workplace Participatory Program based on a decade of applied research with employer organizations. The program was recognized by the Surgeon General's 2022 Framework for Workplace Mental Health and Well-being. It is a proven culture-change tool to build voice and meaningful worker engagement in workplace safety and health improvements.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) costs Americans about \$1 per year and is "the first line of defense for workers and a secret weapon for businesses," saving the U.S. billions of dollars a year.¹ We are proud to be part of that economic impact.



What began 20 years ago as a single grant has evolved into multiple research studies, thousands of workers impacted by training, and several toolkits that can be utilized by employers from various industries across the globe. Here is a brief timeline outlining our successes.



Transforming Workplaces from the Inside Out

The Total Worker Health Promise

Total Worker Health is a holistic, integrated approach to workforce health protection and health promotion. It amplifies worker voice, builds leadership, and transforms workplaces from the inside out through better culture and work organization.



The Total Worker Health concept recognizes that workers' health is influenced by many factors on and off the job.

Our Values for Healthy Work

The Total Worker Health approach prioritizes attention to healthy work design—that is, making work and the workplace more conducive to health. Our research and outreach activities embed four core values to optimize our impact for workers.

CORE VALUE 1 Healthy Work Design

Removing upstream determinants of illnesses and injuries before they cause harm.

CORE VALUE 2 Broad Risk Assessment

Identifying root causes broadly, both personal and environmental, to create effective solutions.

CORE VALUE 3 Multi-layered Solutions

Collaborating across disciplines to address complex health and safety risks.

CORE VALUE 4 Worker Voice

Centering workers when developing solutions to build organizational knowledge, collaboration, ownership, and commitment.

Worker Participation Promotes Improved Worker Health and Well-being

We have found that empowering employees to help improve work processes and the workplace environment has far-reaching impacts. Not only do workers report feeling safer and more satisfied at work, but many have experienced better job control and have taken on leadership roles. Moreover, the communications and facilitation skills they learn as part of the program can benefit other parts of their lives.

High Value, High Impact Research

Our research findings have been shared widely with great scientific impact. Researchers cited our scientific articles 1,880 times – equivalent to an average of 20 citation for each article published. A majority (58%) of articles generate a higher than average engagement; forty-one have been cited in multiple clinical trials, a gold standard for quality research. Thus, our research has become an important part of the pipeline for translating Total Worker Health research for real-world impact.

National, International Reach

While our research primarily focuses on workplaces in New England, our reach spans all 50 states and 160 countries. Our U.S. partners range from Oregon to Florida and we have delivered training to Mexican and Canadian government agencies interested in our Healthy Workplace Participatory Program.

By the Numbers



44,715

working people participated in research studies



15,614

health professionals received education and training



106

scientific articles published



\$26.3 million

received in federal grants



8

large multi-year studies



20

pilot project grants given



150

graduate students trained for occupational safety & health careers



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**“This is the first time I felt heard,
like someone was listening to us.”**

— Healthcare Worker

**“You have an opportunity to change the culture.
It’s your chance to be a part of the solution.”**

— Corrections Officer

Strengthening Our Healthcare Workforce

Safer Environments + Empowered Providers = Better Quality of Care

The Problem

The nation's healthcare workforce forms the backbone of America's healthcare system. Yet millions of healthcare workers face critical challenges that place their physical and mental health at risk. Ergonomic hazards of patient handling, staffing shortages, shift work, exposures to infectious diseases, and violence in the workplace contribute to high rates of injuries, illnesses, and poor mental health outcomes. The COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated these issues.

The Solution

Over the past 20 years, CPH-NEW has investigated the most pressing health and safety risks for healthcare workers and what can be done to alleviate them. Our studies initiated participatory teams to engage workers and leaders together to create sustainable solutions that work. We worked with public and private hospitals, mental and behavioral health facilities, and nursing homes in the Northeast U.S. region.

Our Impact

Implementing the *Total Worker Health* approach produced lasting changes in our study partner organizations. For example, a social worker shared that the participatory program changed “the way we supervise, the way we provide feedback, and the way we organize meetings.”

Our goal was to demonstrate a new way of approaching safety and health for healthcare workers that is responsive to their needs. We have been able to show that worker engagement not only helps workers, but also is associated with better patient satisfaction and healthcare quality.

The Results

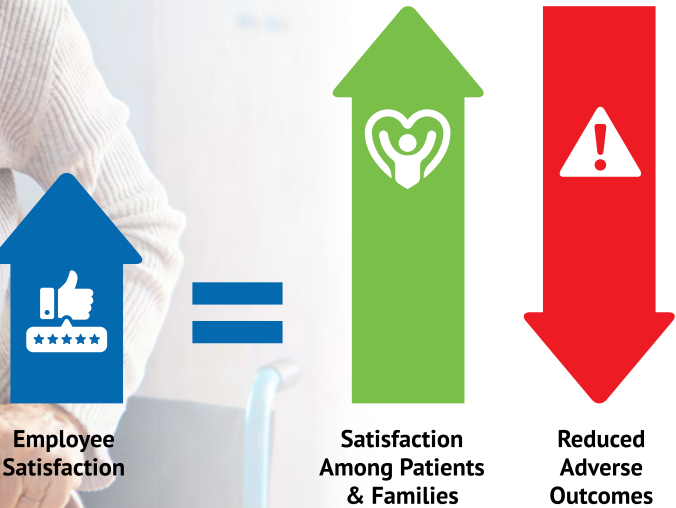
- A Safe Resident Handling Program (SRHP) was shown to be cost effective by saving money and reducing injuries
- A mental health hospital adopted a self-sustaining worker-led safety and well-being program
- Healthcare organizations increased capacity, communication, and collaboration to reduce job stress, burnout, and violence, and to improve employee retention.



“The value of the training I received for facilitating a listening session was indispensable. I am more comfortable leading group discussions.”
—Haylee Coogan, RN, Nurse Educator

Nursing Staff Satisfaction Is Good for Patients and Families

In a large nursing care corporation, we documented strong links between employees' satisfaction and resident outcomes. Our research showed that for every 1-point increase in employee satisfaction, resident and family satisfaction increased 17 points, and adverse patient outcomes (falls, weight loss, pressure ulcers) decreased by 19%.



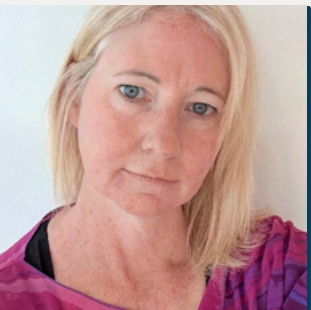
Spotlight: Worcester Recovery Center and Hospital

Empowering Employees to Become Leaders, Reduce Turnover

Mental health workers are often subjected to violence from patients, making it a stressful work environment with high turnover.

The Worcester Recovery Center and Hospital (WRCH) addressed these issues head-on as a partner in the Safety & Health through Integrated, Facilitated Teams (SHIFT) Study, implementing the Healthy Workplace Participatory Program. WRCH collaborated with CPH-NEW to explore the root cause of issues and analyze solutions. Eight years later, the program is still active and all of the original team members have been promoted, crediting the skills they learned from the program.

“SHIFT has not only held me, and other administrators, accountable for implementing agreed-upon changes, but has also provided an opportunity to strengthen trust and credibility with staff. The sustained success of the program is a strong testament to its value and impact.”
—Tara Barrett, Chief Operating Officer, Worcester Recovery Center and Hospital



Reducing Job Stressors for Educators

Small Changes Lead to Big Impacts for Teachers

The Problem

During the pandemic, it became clear how stressful teaching can be. However, educators have long been experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Teachers experience a myriad of work stressors such as difficult student behavior, work overload, regular evaluation, unsupportive administration and families, and workplace violence. Low pay and unfunded accountability mandates also contribute to burnout.

As a result, many teachers leave education to pursue other careers. Teacher turnover negatively affects students and costs the U.S. \$73 billion annually in re-training.

The Solution

CPH-NEW researchers have pioneered the Educator Well-being Program (EWP), an innovative approach that engages teachers and transforms working conditions to reduce stress and improve well-being. EWP engages teachers directly to uncover factors that contribute to their stress and develop workplace solutions to improve their health and well-being.

Using *Total Worker Health* principles, the EWP generates actionable solutions to protect and promote teacher health and gives teachers a voice for change.

Our Impact

CPH-NEW partnered with two school districts in Connecticut to roll out the Educator Well-being Program.

At the start of the study, three out of four elementary school teachers reported moderate to high stress, and 43% reported clinically significant depression symptoms. This stress fuels teacher shortages, turnover, and declining student outcomes – yet most schools lack the guidance and programs needed to address educator well-being. The EWP is showing promising results, as shown on the opposite page.

The Results

The EWP empowered teachers and administrators to tackle the root causes of stress, which include:

- enhancing planning time,
- strengthening co-worker support,
- refining job roles, and
- shaping supportive policies.

Perhaps the most important outcome is how the EWP process makes teachers feel. “Validated” is the word study participants used again and again. One administrator described the program as “empowering my teachers and giving them a voice in their own health.”

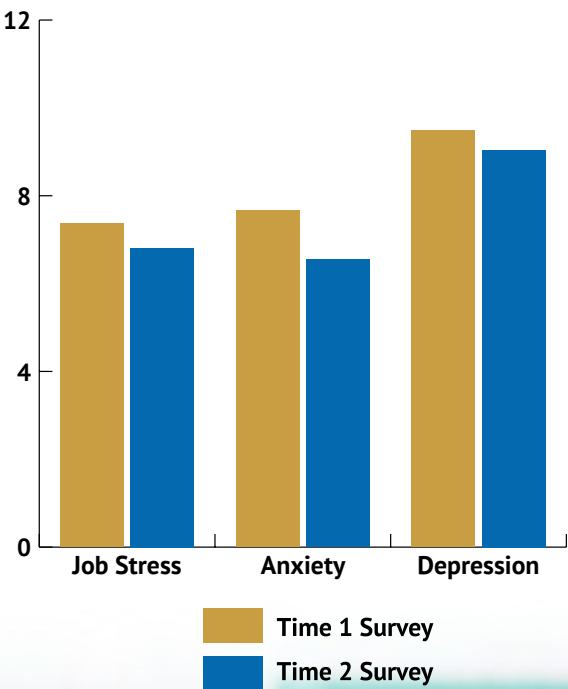


“I felt heard and had the opportunity to positively contribute to my school. Participation in this team reinforced my dedication to my school, colleagues and students.” –Elementary School Teacher, Study Participant

“The work matters. [The EWP] created a space to engage in problem-solving that otherwise would just have been continued complaints, and [our work] carried weight.” –Elementary School Teacher, Study Participant

CT Elementary Schools See Improvement in Teacher Mental Health

Early evaluations at three Connecticut elementary schools show promising results: participating schools report improved educator mental health, especially in reducing anxiety, and job stress.



Improving Health Outcomes for Corrections Officers

Collaborative Approach Creates a Sustainable Model



The Problem

Correction officers face a sobering reality—a life expectancy 12 years shorter than the average person. The gap stems from a high-stress environment where long shifts and psychological strain fuel a cycle of poor sleep, poor nutrition, and inactivity. These factors escalate into chronic pain from musculoskeletal injuries, hypertension, and obesity paired with severe mental health burdens, including post-traumatic stress, substance misuse, and depression.

The Solution

The Health Improvement Through Employee Control (HITEC) project uses worker design teams to target four risk areas: diet and nutrition, fitness and exercise, ergonomics, and safety and injury prevention. We worked with corrections officers, supervisors, wardens and unions to develop a *Total Worker Health* program that was created by staff, for staff. We trained corrections officers and leaders across the state to work collaboratively to uncover and solve systemic challenges.

Our Impact

The research made clear that interventions could have significant benefits to the corrections workforce if adopted nationally. CPH-NEW was instrumental in forming the National Corrections Collaborative in 2014. This group convened three National Symposiums on Corrections Worker Health over a six-year period. Over time, attendance increased, partner composition expanded, and themes of concern evolved. This laid the groundwork for later research grants, which generated knowledge and needed resources for corrections officers and other public safety workers.

The Results

The Connecticut Department of Correction (DOC) took a leap by partnering with CPH-NEW 20 years ago to look at the health and well-being of its staff. Relationship building and trust had to be the first step. The union leadership had to believe that management truly wanted to hear feedback and make changes.

Twenty years later, staff and management remain committed to worker participation. With ongoing state funding, CT DOC launched its own program website, hitec-doc.com, proudly promoting HITEC as a program “for staff, by staff.”



“HITEC has helped to enable cultural change.”
— Sharonda Carlos, Deputy Commissioner, CT DOC

Highlights from the last 20 years:



- Improved indoor air quality
- Ergonomic mats added to standing posts to reduce musculoskeletal injury
- Annual stress education training
- Implemented nutrition and physical health intervention programs
- Dedicated report writing and decompression areas
- Improved sleep hygiene with the help of a smartphone-based app
- Established career and mentoring program



Spotlight: From Corrections Officer to Lecturer

A single “yes” changed the course of Wayne Cole, Jr.’s life.

As a corrections supervisor, Wayne was asked to participate in a design team for the Health Improvement Through Employee Control (HITEC) program. A decade later, he’s retired, serves as a HITEC consultant, and teaches public health at Johnson & Wales University.

Wayne’s first design team project introduced mental health training, and he saw a shift in his co-workers. “You see people talk about topics they wouldn’t normally talk about. Awareness is being built,” he says. Awareness around mental and physical health is something he noticed in himself as well. “I’m more aware of how health and work affect me.”

For Wayne, the health impacts are important, but he says HITEC is really about empowering employees and giving them a voice. “It’s a diverse group of people using all their talents and making changes.” Sounds like something worth saying yes to.



Improving Well-being in the Construction Workforce

Combating the Safety and Health Risks of Trade Work

The Problem

Construction and mining workers face intense physical demands, long hours, and a high risk of injury, which can lead to chronic pain, mental health concerns, and addiction. At the same time, these male-dominated occupations have only recently begun to talk openly about mental health and well-being alongside traditional job safety.

The Solution

Two projects using the *Total Worker Health* approach are helping these industries move from awareness to action by providing practical, industry-specific tools and trainings.

Built to Last

The Built to Last project, developed with the Colorado Center for Health, Work and Environment, tackles psychosocial risks in construction, such as stress, substance misuse, and burnout, by combining two proven approaches. It integrates mental health into leadership training (Foundations for Safety Leadership) and pairs it with an adapted, six-hour “design sprint” version of the Healthy Workplace Participatory Program. Together, these tools give supervisors concrete skills to support peer-driven teams of workers as they identify problems and co-design solutions, from preventing falls to addressing stress and substance use. The result is stronger leaders, safer job sites, and crews that feel more engaged and supported.

Opioid Hazard Awareness Training

In stone, sand, and gravel mining, workers have been hit hard by the opioid crisis, in part because work-related injuries have often been treated with opioid prescriptions. **The Opioid Hazard Awareness Training and the Employer Guide to Preventing Opioid Harms** were created specifically for this industry to address the crisis head-on. The training and toolkit help workers and supervisors understand opioid risks, recognize work factors that contribute to misuse, and take steps to reduce harm while building more recovery-friendly workplaces where people can seek help and support one another.

“If you’re looking to invest in your people and build a workplace where safety, mental health, and well-being are part of the foundation, Built to Last delivers the structure and tools to make it happen.”

—Program Participant



“I’m proud that this training has helped employees in this sector feel they can play a part in reversing the [opioid] crisis.”
—Cora Roelofs, Sc.D.,
Principal Investigator

Stewarding Positive Relationships to Improve Worker Health

Union leaders are in a unique position to advocate for change with management and its members. Our long history working with unionized workforces has strengthened union leaders’ skills as *Total Worker Health* ambassadors.

The Healthy Workplace Participatory Program for Unions and Worker Organizations (HWPP-U) and the “Building *Total Worker Health* Leaders in Unions and Worker Organizations” train-the-trainer course were developed as tools unions can use to identify and prioritize health, safety, and well-being solutions. These solutions can be used to inform collective bargaining, union education, and joint labor–management work.



“The HWPP-U gives unions and workers a practical framework for collective problem-solving.”
—Jessica Espinoza,
Chief of Staff, Make the Road

Some of the labor organizations we’ve worked with include:

- Connecticut Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health
- Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health
- Service Employees International Union
- American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
- Massachusetts Nurses Association
- American Federation of Teachers
- Massachusetts Teachers Association



Responding to Emerging Needs in Occupational Safety and Health

Pilot grants are an opportunity for researchers to address emerging needs by receiving a small amount of funding to delve into a new aspect of an existing project or to test the viability of a larger research project. Twenty projects have been funded, but three stand out for their impacts and future potential.

“Investing a minimal amount of time in the course strengthens your organization’s readiness for the next potential crisis. It’s a smart investment that pays dividends in peace of mind and operational resilience.”
—Tracy Burns, CEO, Northeast Human Resources Association

Employer Crisis Preparedness Creates Processes and Peace of Mind

COVID-19 shone a light on the gaps in employers’ preparedness for protecting workers during crises. Whether it is a natural disaster, healthcare crisis or violence in the workplace, organizations are often not equipped to meet employees’ needs as they focus on business continuity. **Our Employer Crisis Preparedness research study began as a pilot project and has evolved into a successful course for business professionals.**

For the pilot project, we integrated a *Total Worker Health* lens with crisis planning domains and assessed gaps in preparedness among employers in the Northeast U.S. Next, we created and evaluated an educational course that combined business planning and human resources management. The study produced an educational program with a planning guide and workbook. The feedback about the course has been overwhelmingly positive.



Employed Breast Cancer Survivors Need Additional Supports

In the U.S., more than 3.8 million people have a history of breast cancer. Our grant focused on survivors who want to stay at or return to work and examined how they are supported by healthcare professionals and employers.

We found that many experience work–health conflict, where job demands hinder health management. Higher conflict is associated with poorer quality of life, reduced disease self-management, and greater anticipated turnover.

These findings can help healthcare providers better support survivors during recovery and continued employment. Although survivors often receive general medical information, many report little work-specific guidance, emotional support, and practical assistance. Addressing these gaps could improve survivors’ ability to balance work and health.

The findings also inform employers. Both formal supports (e.g., job accommodations) and informal supports (e.g., supervisor empathy) are critical for reducing work–health conflict and supporting job retention among cancer survivors and others managing serious health conditions.



Wearable Device Allows Real-time Feedback on Employee Stressors

“Are you stressed out?” For the past 20 years, we have relied on employee self-reporting while studying worker health and well-being. A new device is a game changer for measuring stressors.

A custom-designed, non-invasive armband has been developed to monitor heart rate, a biomarker of blood pressure and sleep quality. Paired with a wristwatch to log stress incidents and a survey app for a smartphone, we can track in real-time an employee’s stress response and recovery both during work and outside of work time.



While the pilot grant had a small number of participants, we plan to expand this research to assess reliability in a larger number of participants, different occupational settings, and different health conditions. The data will give us better insight into how stress responses are handled in the body and more reliably track interventions.

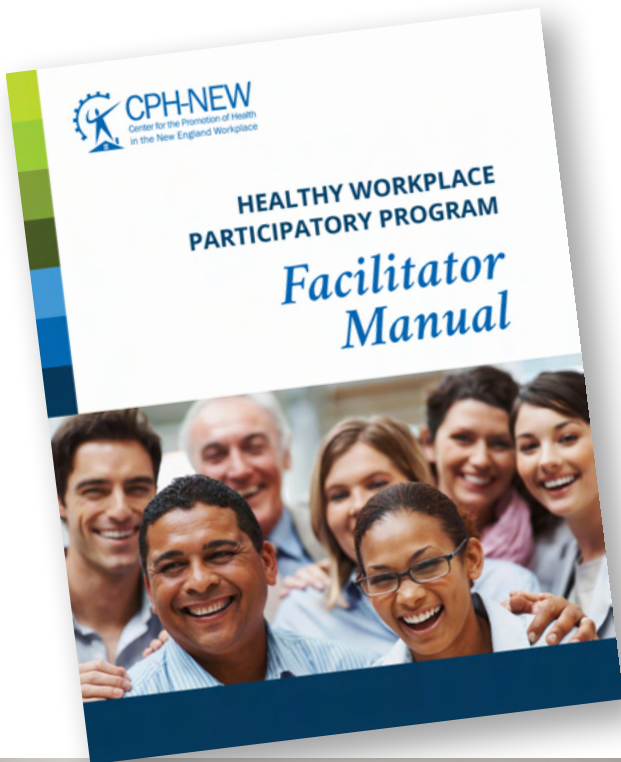
Bringing Total Worker Health to Workplaces



CPH-NEW has spent the last 20 years helping employers apply *Total Worker Health* (TWH) principles using the Healthy Workplace Participatory Program (HWPP). Developed to be adaptable and flexible for any industry, CPH-NEW created the HWPP Toolkit to enable employers everywhere to implement quality safety and health practices that are built on a participatory, integrative foundation.

The HWPP engages managers and frontline employees in a collaborative design process for continuous improvement of health and safety. A trained facilitator guides a step-by-step process for uncovering root causes to poor health and injuries, and developing a business case for complete, TWH solutions. Most importantly, the process engages and empowers employees, building confidence in the organization to change unhealthy working conditions.

CPH-NEW works directly with organizations to implement TWH approaches using the HWPP. The HWPP toolkit is also available online with extensive resources to allow organizations to adopt this participatory TWH approach on their own. We have trained over 700 people to learn the skills needed to implement the full program.



Healthy Workplace Participatory Program

A toolkit for advancing *Total Worker Health*®

Spotlight: Trillium Family Services in Oregon

Reducing Turnover with Worker Participation

Turnover is a common problem in healthcare, especially for mental health facilities, but many companies don't take the time to dig in and discover the root cause. Safety consultant Liz Hill decided Trillium Family Services would be different.

Armed with skills from CPH-NEW's facilitator training, Liz took a proactive approach to address retention issues facing Trillium, a residential youth behavioral health facility in the Pacific Northwest.

Using the Healthy Workplace Participatory Program (HWPP), facility staff were given a framework to raise their concerns and work collaboratively with the leadership team to develop possible solutions.

Through the HWPP process, frontline caregivers designed and won support for solutions that included better staffing, trauma support, and improved benefits. Their efforts led to wage increases, a new recruitment manager, and a supervisor development program.

According to Liz, "The tools provided the team with a systematic method to explore causal factors, generate solutions and assess the feasibility of those solutions. The organization has seen positive changes in staff morale, retention and the quality of care. They've built the outcomes into their strategic planning."



Building Tomorrow's Occupational Safety and Health Workforce

Supporting Safer Workplaces Through Education and Training

Education and training are bridges that transform research into real-world protection for workers. Our center serves as a premier educational hub, equipping professionals with the specialized tools and knowledge needed to navigate the complexities of today's labor landscape.

To date, more than 10,000 professionals—spanning occupational medicine, industrial hygiene, safety, HR, and industrial psychology—have used our online training to improve their workplace practices. Our national and international reach demonstrates the high demand for our expertise.

Our catalog targets high-impact concerns facing businesses and the workforce, including job stress, musculoskeletal injury prevention, and employer crisis preparedness. Every course is developed alongside industry advisors to ensure maximum relevance and knowledge transfer. By focusing on these critical areas, we directly reduce the burden of workplace injury and burnout.

"Professionals require education that is credible and immediately applicable," Outreach Director Suzanne Nobrega, Ph.D., says. "Our content isn't just theoretical—it's a blueprint for healthier, safer workplaces."

Proven, Evidence-based Resources

- ✓ Free online, self-paced short courses
- ✓ Quarterly webinars for safety and health professionals
- ✓ Free toolkits and resources
- ✓ Webinars and training videos available on YouTube

See all our resources on our website, www.uml.edu/CPH-NEW

Facilitator Training Delivers Global Impact

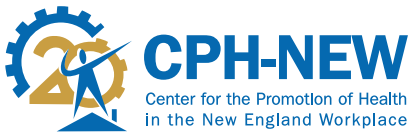
Since 2020, CPH-NEW's *Total Worker Health* Facilitator Training has equipped over 1,300 health and safety professionals across the U.S. and eight countries to lead worker-driven health and safety change, using the Healthy Workplace Participatory Program (HWPP) Toolkit.



One training graduate, a safety consultant, used what she learned to help one of her client organizations. At a time when workers are strained and solutions feel out of reach, this training offered a proven path forward—one that amplifies worker voice, builds leadership, and transforms workplaces from the inside out. (See the Spotlight on Trillium Family Services on page 16.)

Training for the Next Generation of OSH Professionals

CPH-NEW research and outreach activities provided meaningful training for 150 graduate and undergraduate students as they prepared to work in professions related to occupational safety and health (OSH). About 20% of graduate-level alumni went on to careers in which they lead OSH research and/or train students for future OSH careers. (See Alumni Spotlights below.)



Alumni Spotlights



"Really one of the best online learning experiences I have had. I found the material inspiring and the presentation extremely well-done."
—Industrial Hygienist

"Overall, the course was excellent. Professionals interested in learning about the TWH approach and ways to implement a program have the tools they need from this course."
—Laura Weems, Industrial Hygienist and Safety Professional



Jin Lee, Ph.D.

Associate Professor,
Department of Psychological Sciences, Kansas State University

"The CPH-NEW projects have served as a catalyst for collaboration with experts from diverse academic fields, including public health and human factors/ergonomics, resulting in substantial funding of over half a million dollars from organizations like FEMA, OERC, and USDA."



Luz Marin, Sc.D.

Associate Professor,
Department of Safety Sciences and Environmental Engineering, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

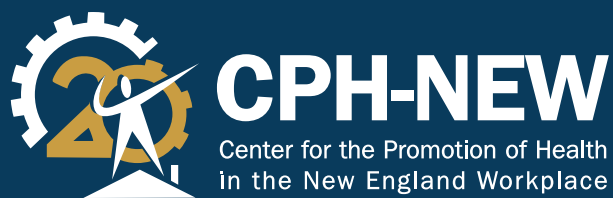
"As a pilot grant recipient, this experience has had a lasting impact on my research and teaching approach. Looking back, I can confidently say that this was key for me to learn examining complex occupational safety and health issues through a more holistic lens."



Sundus Siddique, Sc.D., M.B.B.S., M.P.H.

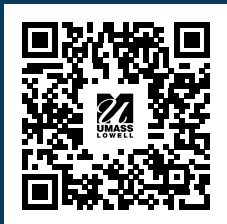
Post-doctoral Fellow in Occupational & Environmental Medicine, Northwell Health

"Working at CPH-NEW has been instrumental in my evolution from physician to epidemiologist in occupational health and safety. I have become acutely aware of the importance of setting safety standards, listening to the needs of workers, and providing them with safety-related training and education."



Learn More About **CPH-NEW**

uml.edu/cphnew



¹ Eidelson, J., Bloomberg News, September 18, 2025.