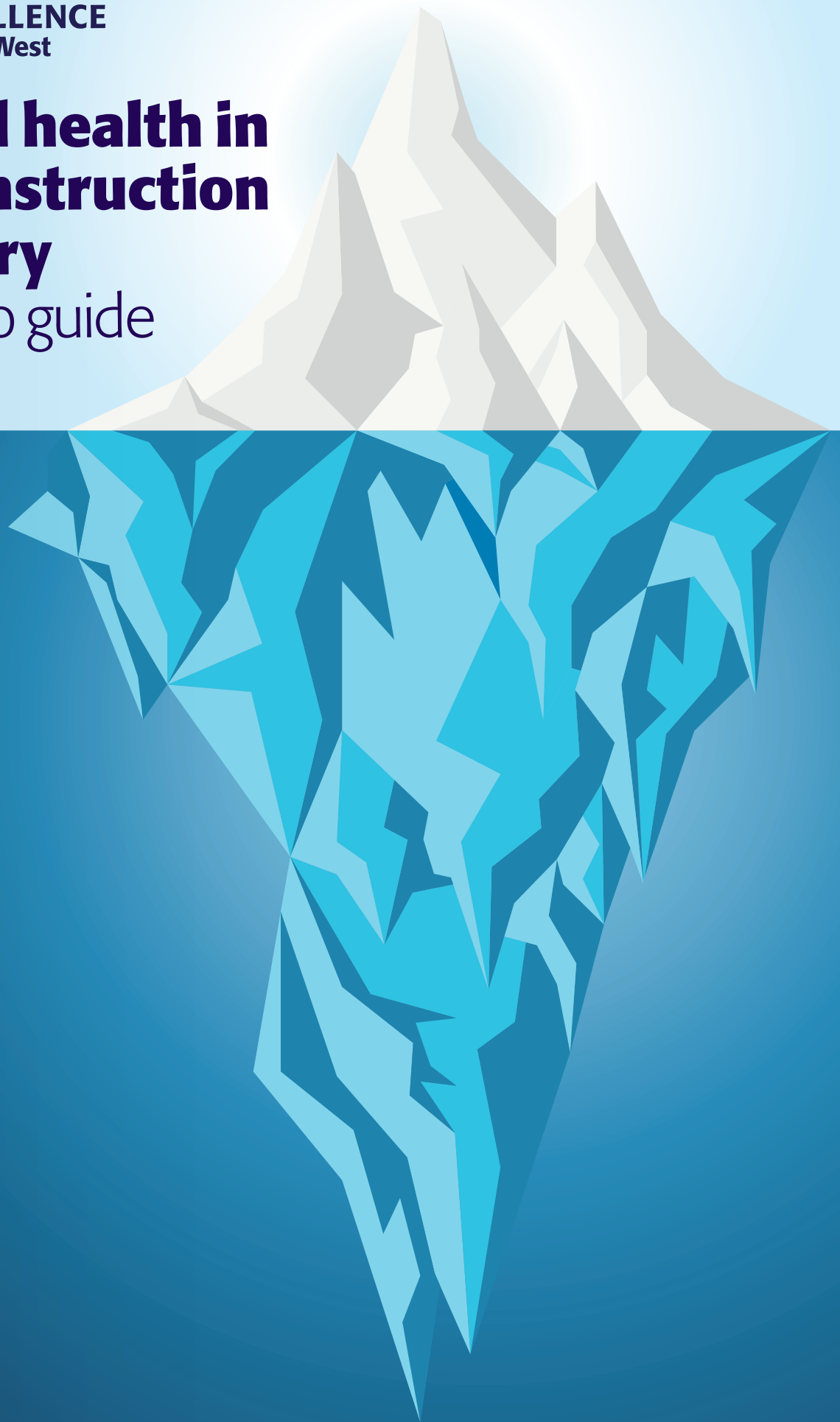




**CONSTRUCTING
EXCELLENCE**
South West

Mental health in the construction industry

A how-to guide



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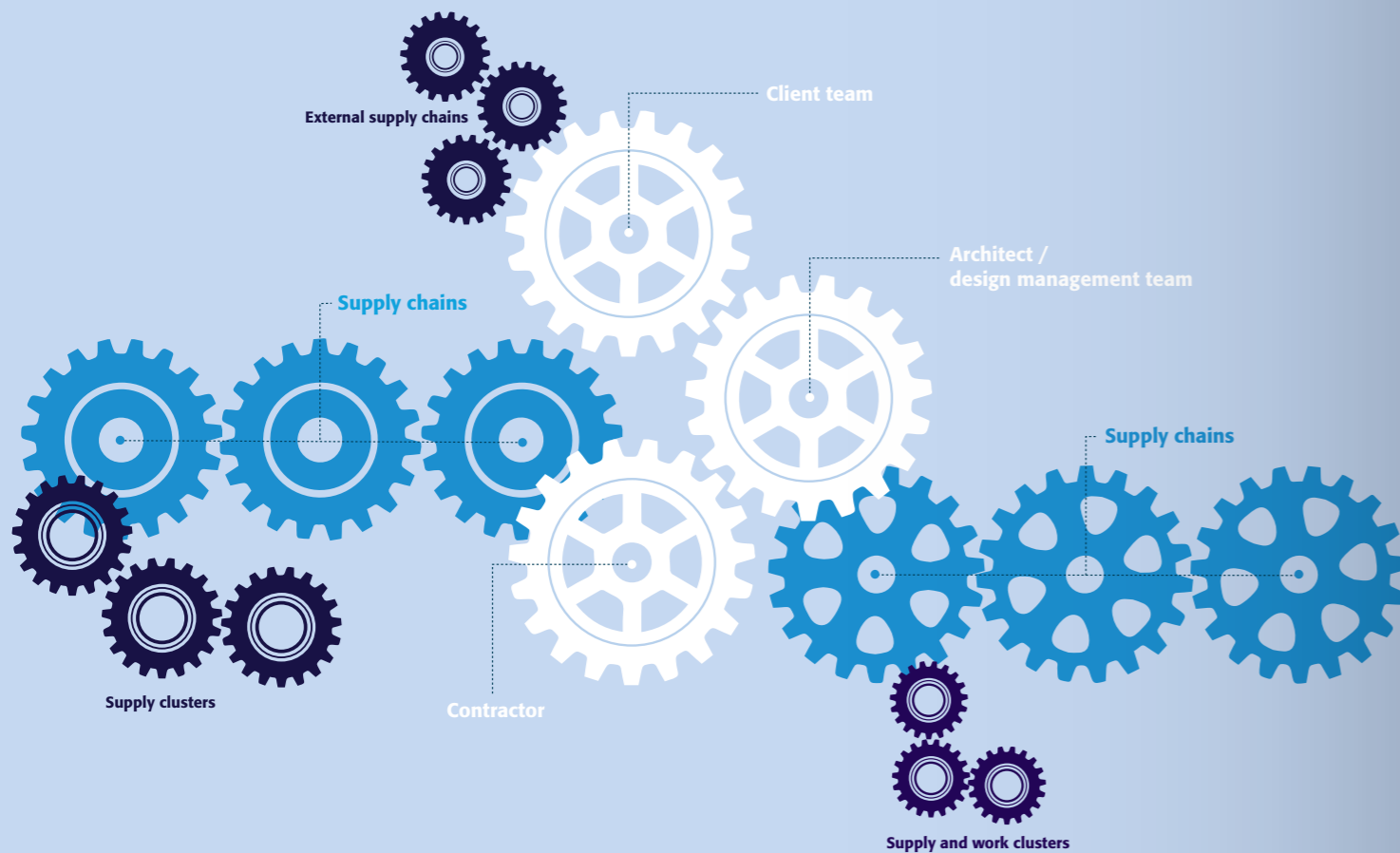


The construction industry is undoubtedly one of the most valuable work sectors globally

The industry makes significant economic, socio-cultural and technological contributions to the wider society. According to [Government Construction Strategy](#), the UK construction output exceeds **£110 billion** per annum and contributes around **7% of GDP**. Every project comprises a complex network of professions all working towards the same goal.

A typical construction project structure

The complexity of projects leads to many individuals in the supply chain being overlooked in the discussion of project dynamics. It is worth noting that every role is valuable in delivering a successful construction project. From the site cleaner to the project director, all project stakeholders are responsible for ensuring project success which includes safety.



Understanding the demographics of the industry – some key facts

The UK construction industry has a variety of firm sizes ranging from a single employee to firms with thousands of workers. Some key facts of the industry's demographics according to Office for National Statistics (2017) are as follows:

Workers (manual and non-manual) have more than **1.1m each**

Highest number of manual workers are aged 30-34 with almost **175,000**

Highest number of non-manual workers are those aged between 45-49 **156,000**

...followed by those aged 50-54 **150,000**

...and then those in their 60s **146,000**

Thus, the industry retains a wide spread of workers from very different age ranges thereby leading to different social and working practices. It is important to understand the different demographics of the industry for reasons such as developing work programmes as well as training and safety measures.

Mental health in the industry

Unlike mental health, there is no shortness of discussion about physical safety of workers in the workplace. Mental health is described as a person's condition with regard to their psychological and emotional well-being.

Contrary to popular belief, the term mental health holds no positive or negative connotation hence must not be stigmatised.

However, poor mental health is problematic and has been described as the silent epidemic in construction due to the hidden nature and the devastation it has been causing for years. It is the leading cause of death in the industry in the form of suicide.

Three quarters of construction workers have expressed that their employers do not recognise the early signs of mental health decline.

Suicide kills more construction workers than falls

Visible signs

The iceberg of mental health

Due to the complex nature of mental health, the visible signs are dwarfed by the invisible aspects. Unfortunately, the signs that are visibly manifested are resultant of deep underlying conditions that need to be managed in order for the 'real' conditions to be effectively treated.

Underlying issue

Common signs and symptoms of poor mental health problems

Excessive fears or worries, or extreme feelings of guilt

Major changes in eating habits

Feeling sad or down

Detachment from reality (delusions), paranoia or hallucinations

Inability to cope with daily problems or stress

Withdrawal from friends and activities

Confused thinking or reduced ability to concentrate

Sex drive changes

Trouble understanding and relating to situations and to people

Significant tiredness, low energy or problems sleeping

Problems with alcohol or drug use

Excessive anger, hostility or violence

Extreme mood changes of highs and lows

Suicidal thinking

What can we do?

Employers and coworkers are encouraged to offer as much support one another during mental health crises. Employers are duty bound to provide a safe working environment.

This includes not just physical but also mental health. Thus, employers must ensure that workplaces are not contributing to stress and anxiety through workloads or hostile work environments.

The following practices must be harnessed at the workplace;

• **Clear commitment to good mental health attainment**

• **Creating awareness about worker assistance programmes**

• **Interactive ‘tool box talks’ to encourage workers to share good practices**

• **Raising awareness about signs of mental health decline**

• **Training line managers and team leaders in what to do when mental health issues arise**

• **Training and ensuring the presence of several mental health first aiders on projects at each time**

• **Ensuring both main and subcontractor employees have equal access to mental health support.**

Which approaches work?

Due to the complexity of mental health, it is important that a holistic approach be adopted to manage it. The Mental Health Foundation recommends the follow 10 steps:



Talk about your feelings



Ask for help



Keep active



Take a break



Eat well



Do something you're good at



Drink sensibly



Accept who you are



Keep in touch



Care for others

Where to seek help

NHS

www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mental-health-helplines/
0345 608 8888



Mates in Mind

www.matesinmind.org/need-help.html
0203 510 5018



Construction Industry Helpline

www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/resource/construction-industry-helpline-app
0345 605 1956



Lighthouse Club

www.lighthouseclub.org
0345 609 1956



Mental Health at Work

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This how-to guide to *Mental health in the construction industry* has been produced by members of Constructing Excellence Midland's Health and Wellbeing Theme Group:



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Demedicalising mental health
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