



Supporting Skilled Trades Students Toolkit

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Introduction

Purpose of this Toolkit

This toolkit is a living document, meaning that as we continue to learn about this subject, more will be added to reflect wise, emerging, and best practices. Although there is limited research available on skilled trades students and their mental health and wellbeing, at every opportunity, the information presented has been informed by research.

This toolkit provides Ontario post-secondary campus staff with context, knowledge, resources, and tools to better support skilled trades students and the unique factors they face, affecting their mental health and wellbeing. This document is not meant to serve as a discourse on the trade industry. Instead, it aims to discuss the challenges trades students may face and the changes post-secondary institutions can focus on regarding their safety, health, and wellbeing. This toolkit also reflects R-EDIAA (Reconciliation – Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Anti-Racism, and Accessibility) principles and adopts an [anti-oppressive](#) and [trauma-informed](#) mindset.

As you move through this document, if you notice that we miss a mental health and wellbeing program from your post-secondary institution that could be featured in one of the spotlights, please contact us at info@campusmentalhealth.ca and we will make the addition, if appropriate.

Statement of Positionality

This toolkit was created in collaboration with individuals from Ontario post-secondary institutions that hold knowledge and expertise in working with trades students. The lead on this project is not someone from the trades industry, nor have they completed schooling in the trades. Throughout this toolkit, certain pieces speak to the experience of an apprentice and the journey of apprenticeships for people of varying backgrounds, cultures, and genders, some of which the creators are not members of and do not claim to represent.

Collaborators

This toolkit was co-created with campus partners across Ontario who hold distinct roles on Ontario's post-secondary campuses, dedicated to supporting skilled trades students. Their time, effort, and passion helped bring this document to life.

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What are the Skilled Trades?

With about 1.3 million Ontarians working in a skilled trades-related profession, at least one in three are aged 55 or over (Government of Ontario, 2023). As a result of the pandemic, Canada's apprenticeship systems showed the largest decline in registrations and certifications in 2020 since the program began in 1991, with a 28.5% decrease in apprenticeship registrations and a 31.5% decrease in certification from 2019 (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2022). A [report](#) released by Employment and Social Development Canada indicates that by 2028, there will be 700,000 skilled trade workers expected to retire. This aging workforce has pushed Ontario to take immediate action and reduce the skilled trades gap, which has led to the establishment of Skilled Trades Ontario through the *Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act, 2021*, an agency of the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skilled Development (Government of Ontario, 2023). In 2023, there was a 24% increase in trades apprenticeship registrations and a 28% increase in registration among women (Government of Ontario, 2023). Historically and traditionally, the skilled trades are a male-dominated sector with women being disproportionately underrepresented. In Canada, around 7% of trade workers are women and, in Ontario, they make up about 8% of trade workers, with over 80% of them being hairstylists, bakers, and cooks (Amery & Dubois, 2021; Statistics Canada, 2023).

Skilled Trades Ontario leads the research and development of all apprenticeship programs, including their standards, examinations, and certifications within Ontario colleges. They determine the number of experience hours needed for each apprenticeship, which varies from trade to trade, alongside course schedules, attendance rules, and more. The regulation of apprenticeships and course programming leaves little room for students to alter their academic journey (e.g., changing schedules, dropping classes, occasional absences) and factor in outside influences (e.g., transportation/travel, family, sleep, work, mental health, accommodations). With students being on campus for noticeably short amounts of time to complete their coursework, they often have very packed schedules. Having packed and unchangeable schedules can cause a lot of stress and anxiety for students, especially when considering outside influencing factors. Consequently, campus staff must navigate these rigid student schedules when offering students adequate support for their wellbeing, which can be extremely difficult.

For more information on stress and anxiety, check out CICMH's [Stress and Anxiety infosheet here](#) and [Managing Stress and Loneliness course here](#).

The skilled trades require a certain set of skills, knowledge, and/or abilities and are usually affiliated with hands-on jobs within the electrical, manufacturing, automotive, building, service, and mechanical industries, employing around 20% of Canadians (Finnie et al., 2021; McCann School of Business and Technology, 2023; Skilled Trades Ontario, 2024).

Trades in Ontario are traditionally categorized into four sections (Chatoor & Kaufman, 2020):



Industrial – including truck drivers, cabinet makers, welders, metal fabricators, draftspersons, and tool and dye makers.



Construction – including masons, ironworkers, painters, boilermakers, roofers, plumbers, carpenters, electricians, and sheet metal workers.



Service – including bakers, hairstylists, arborists, bakers, child and youth workers, horticultural technicians, and developmental-service workers.



Motive-power – including small-engine technicians, auto-body workers, truck and trailer service workers, and heavy-duty equipment mechanics.

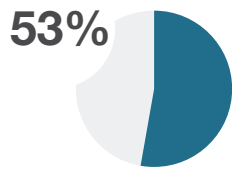
In Ontario, there are 23 compulsory trades (requires certification or registration as an apprentice), and 121 non-compulsory trades (does not require certification) (Skilled Trades Ontario, 2024). A full list of compulsory and non-compulsory trades professions can be found [here](#).

Current Landscape Within Post-Secondary

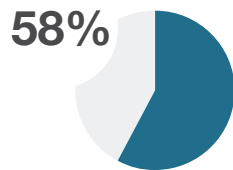
The educational pathway for a skilled trades student within the post-secondary realm may look a little different when compared to someone majoring in business or psychology, for example. Within an apprenticeship, which can take between 2 to 5 years to complete, many trades students only spend about 20% of each academic year (8-12 weeks) on campus taking classes and learning theory (i.e., [the block release method](#)). Limited time on campus also means limited availability to access resources and support offered by the campus. A study of Canadian apprentices reported that 62% of men and 41% of women rated their mental health as good or very good (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, 2020). These Canadian apprentices also identified stressors that may negatively impact their overall mental health and wellbeing, including (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, 2020):

- No available personal time to see a physician
- Physical pain that prevents apprenticeship work
- Limited or no access to counselling and other support services
- Financial and employment concerns
- Time management strain between apprenticeship, family/friends, and school

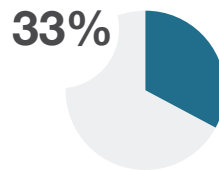
Areas of dissatisfaction within the trades are as follows (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, 2020, 2023):



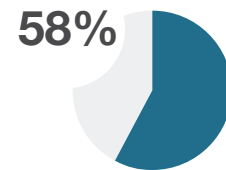
53%
said they do not get the support they need from both their post-secondary institution and apprenticeship employer



58%
said their trade negatively impacts their personal life



33%
said that not being able to take time off from school or apprenticeship is a barrier to seeking professional help



58%
said their trade interferes with their sleep

For more information, check out CICMH's Rest and Sleep infosheet [here](#) and our Improving Rest and Sleep course [here](#).

Recent data from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) shows that permit approvals do not reflect the labour market gaps that would allow students to obtain jobs and transition to becoming permanent residents in Canada (Crawley & Ouellet, 2024). Between 2018 and 2023, permits relating to skilled trades and vocational training only accounted for 1.25% (Crawley & Ouellet, 2024). With the recently implemented [international student cap](#) for Ontario's post-secondary institutions, Ontario is prioritizing permits for programs that will now fill these 'in-demand jobs' within the province, one of them being the skilled trades. The government has also implemented the [Federal Skilled Trades Program \(FSTP\)](#), which permits skilled trade workers to obtain permanent residence status within 6 – 8 months to address Ontario's need for skilled trades workers.

For more information on how to support international students, check out CICMH's International Student Toolkit [here](#).

Substance-Related Harms

In Canada, trade workers are the most impacted workers by substance use and addiction (Government of Canada, 2023b). This is due to many factors (Government of Canada, 2023b):

- Trades can be a physically demanding job with stressful components
- Substances are used as a coping mechanism for pain, stress, and/or injury that occurs due to their work, which often serves as an introduction to opioids
- Stigma makes it hard to ask for help or talk about mental health struggles, which can lead to using substances as a coping mechanism

Since 2016, 3 out of 4 opioid-related deaths have been men and between 30-50% of men who have died from overdoses or substance-related harms were employed in the trades industry at the time of their death (Government of Canada, 2023b). A study by the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (2023) indicates that the most cited consequence of substance use among apprentices and tradespeople was harm to their mental health. Overall, substance use and addiction can affect a student's academic performance, increase absences from class and increase the risk of not graduating (Fletcher, 2019).

Current Landscape of Substance Use among Skilled Trades Students

In collaboration with Health Canada and the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC), a nationwide survey by the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (2023) gained insight into the lived experiences of apprentices and key pieces of their substance use, stating that:

- Apprentices and pre-apprentices are more likely to use cannabis than tradespeople
- Mental harm was the most cited consequence of substance use, with physical health, homelife/family relationships and financials situations following
- In Ontario, the most consumed substances in the past 12 months were alcohol (82%), cannabis (56%), psychedelics (17%), and stimulants (15%)

*“I think a lot of people don’t even know the negative effects of substance use until it literally happens to them or to someone close to them. A lot of people I know, they have substance issues — maybe not issues but use substances frequently — they do not see it as a problem, not at all.” - **Apprentice interview***

When working with student apprentices who are using substances or thinking about self-harm and are surrounded by large tools and/or machinery that can be dangerous to them, it’s important to employ strategies that help mitigate negative outcomes, such as implementing safety training and risk awareness campaigns. A client-centered, harm reduction approach maintains an individual’s dignity and respect while trying to reduce social and health harms associated with substance use (Draper, 2024). For more information on harm reduction relating to substance use, visit CICMHs Harm Reduction on Campus toolkit [here](#).

Harm reduction is an evidence-based, person-centered approach that aims to reduce the health and social harms related to specific behaviours. In comparison to traditional approaches, the focus becomes lessening the harms related to the behaviour, rather than simply reducing the occurrence of the behaviour itself.

Stigma

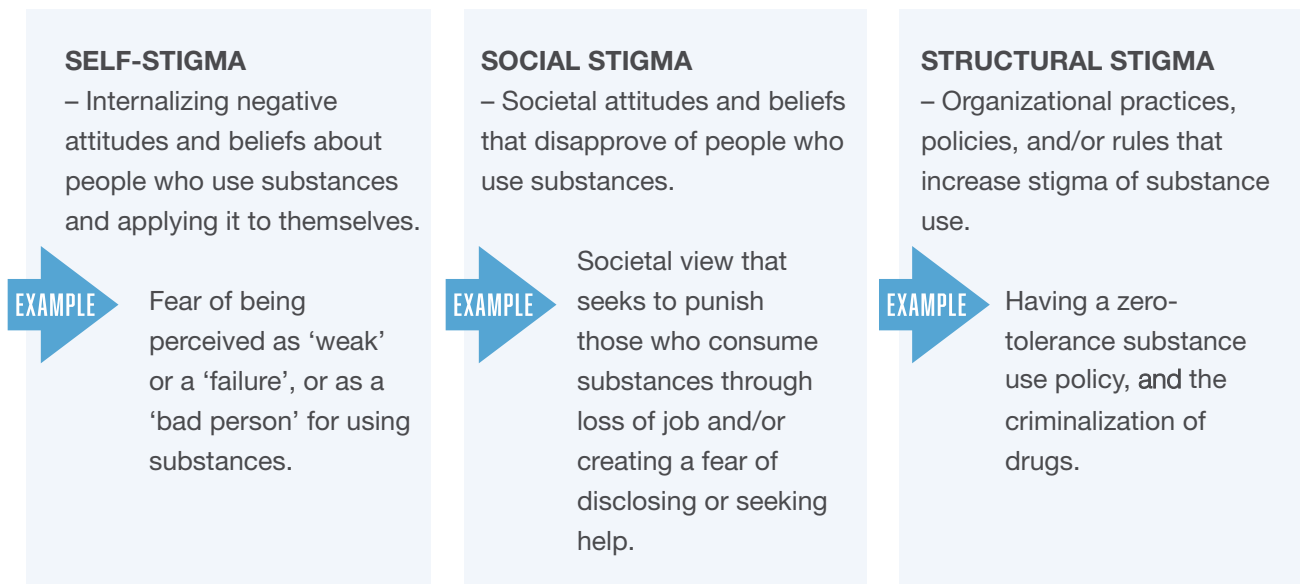
The stigma around substance use is a challenge. With the use of stigmatizing language* and discriminatory attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours, many individuals who need help with their substance use do not actively seek out support. Many apprentices, employers, and tradespeople indicate that stigma towards their chosen career is a barrier to considering and/or reaching out for support (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, 2023). Due to the stigmatized nature of substance use, it is commonly seen that men in the trades are not often expected to talk about their substance use, making it less likely they will reach out for help when needed (Government of Canada, 2023b). In other cases, substance use is normalized to the extent that harms are ignored or overlooked.

****Stigmatizing language is language that assigns stereotypes, judgement, and negative labels to a specific group of people. Examples of stigmatizing language regarding substance use includes words like “junkie”, “drunk”, “addict”, and “drug abuser”.***

Stigma can (Health Canada, 2024):

- Lead people to not seek out help for fear of being judged by friends, colleagues, and loved ones
- Lead people to hide their substance use from others and/or use alone
- Contribute to individuals who use drugs receiving lower quality of care when accessing services

Stigma exists at all three levels: (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, 2023; Draper, 2024):



The combination of self, societal, and structural attitudes and perceptions where stigma is prevalent towards those who use substances can play a role in affecting the way trades students approach reaching out for help and accepting help. To combat stigma, the attitudes and messages that students should encounter on campus should be ones that introduce and reinforce the understanding that using substances is not a weakness or moral failing and that asking for help is always okay.

Take our [More Feet on the Ground course](#) to learn how to recognize, respond, and refer students to support who are experiencing a mental health concern on campus.

Stigma reduction can contribute to more open dialogue around mental health and substance use support (between employer and apprentice as well as campus staff and student) and decrease more high-risk practices (i.e., using substances alone) (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, 2023). While some specific signs and symptoms may be dependent on the substance being used, these are some more general signs that someone involved in high-risk substance use may exhibit:

- Lower productivity
- Relationship changes (i.e., conflict with colleagues and classmates)
- Difficulty concentrating
- Decreased coordination, concentration, memory, and motor skills
- Changes in personality (e.g., isolation, loss of interest in activities, irritability)
- Decreased overall health

Spotlight

In British Columbia, **North Island College** has partnered with the [Walk With Me](#) project, which is focused on addressing stigma and reducing harms associated with drug use and toxic drug poisoning. Composed of community researchers, People with Lived Experience, Elder/Knowledge Keepers, artists, and outreach workers, these story walks engage student participants in learning about real-life experiences with drug use and drug poisoning from all perspectives of the community.

To raise awareness around mindful alcohol consumption, **Mohawk College** hosted “[Mario Kart DUI](#)”. Students tested their knowledge of alcohol and responsible drinking strategies with a quiz, receiving varying levels of impairment, such as drunk goggles, based on their scores. Students then competed in Mario Kart and other sobriety challenges, experiencing firsthand how alcohol impacts coordination and decision-making. The event emphasized the importance of making informed, responsible choices about alcohol consumption.

Recommendations

Explore a harm reduction approach to substance use

Lessen the harms related to substance use by meeting students where they are in a non-judgmental approach that decreases stigma and invites dialogue. Providing take-home naloxone kits, peer support programs, counselling that takes a [motivational interviewing](#) approach, and self-help resources that provide information on personal management of substance use are just a few examples of harm reduction strategies.

Reduce the use of stigmatizing language

By using [person-first language](#) (e.g., saying ‘person who uses substances’ instead of ‘addict’), the campus community can become an environment free of inaccurate and disempowering language around substance use. Shifting language promotes wellbeing and creates a welcoming space where students are not judged nor discriminated against for seeking help with substance use.

Increase student protection for substance use disclosure

Ensure policies and processes don’t use stigmatizing language (e.g., drug abuser, junkie, addict, user) and that accommodations can be made for students with substance use issues that don’t negatively impact their academics, apprenticeships, or personal life.

Embed prevention, management, and treatment of substance use into orientation programming and events

Integrate substance use education into existing supports and services and embed it in trades students’ orientation week to support their health and wellbeing. Education can include components of mental health and wellbeing, stress management, and substance use. Provide naloxone kits in health and wellness departments on campus and provide trades students with the opportunity to take one with them to their home or apprenticeship.

Nature of Apprenticeships

Students in the skilled trades navigate a unique pathway throughout their post-secondary journey. Apprenticeship programs combine traditional classroom teachings with on-the-job hands-on experience. These apprenticeships can be demanding yet rewarding as they provide students with real-life experience and practice in their chosen trade, allowing them to successfully become certified. Consequently, students can face many challenges and barriers that are unique to apprenticeships. When an apprentice has an unpleasant experience during their apprenticeship, there is a chance that this persuades them to leave the trades altogether, making it imperative that post-secondary campuses have adequate tools and resources to support trades students (Government of Ontario, 2021).

Balancing Academics with Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships can be an exciting time for trade students as they move through their program. The opportunity to get hands-on experience and theoretical learning is a chance for students to develop the skills and knowledge of their specific trade. Nonetheless, it can be challenging for students to balance the demands of their apprenticeship, classes, and personal life. Maintaining a work-life balance that allows students to thrive in both their personal and academic life is crucial to their success, health, and wellbeing.

Having 8-to-12-week blocks for theoretical learning makes a student's time on campus very compressed. It's challenging for students to fit in mental health counselling and support services, especially when these services aren't available beyond typical business hours and students aren't able to modify their academic schedules. Without having dedicated time to seek out support and balancing the pressures of work, school, and their personal life, students can often feel the burden of stress, anxiety, and burnout accumulating.

It's important to note that not every student will have the same work-life balance issues. Gender, culture, age, race, marital status, socioeconomic status, family, and other factors all play a role in one's work-life balance (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety [CCOHS], 2023).

The effects of having versus lacking a work-life balance looks like (CCOHS, 2023):

HAVING A WORK-LIFE BALANCE

- Reduction of stress and anxiety
- Enhanced wellbeing and apprenticeship satisfaction
- Improved academic performance
- Strong sense of self-efficacy
- Better overall health

LACKING A WORK-LIFE BALANCE

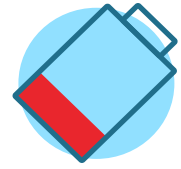
- Chronic fatigue
- Depressive and anxiety symptoms
- Headaches
- Overall decreased health
- Decreased performance and productivity
- Burnout

Effectively having a work-life balance could look like:

- ✓ Developing time management skills (e.g., making to-do lists, setting goals, setting reminders)
- ✓ Investing in self-compassion (e.g., spending time on a hobby, with loved ones, or animals)
- ✓ Establishing clear boundaries (e.g., laying out working hours and breaks)
- ✓ Acknowledgement of [The National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#)
- ✓ Communicating openly
- ✓ Efficiently prioritizing tasks based on importance and/or urgency

Burnout is a significant risk factor for apprentices struggling to maintain a healthy work-life balance and can be a hazard in certain apprenticeships where students may have to make quick decisions, calculations, or handle heavy and dangerous machinery. With exposure to these hazards, we must recognize the signs and symptoms, many of which overlap with not having a work-life balance, such as exhaustion, anxiety, headaches, fatigue, and more. Causes of burnout in apprentices could be:

- Lack of support
- High workload
- Negative work environment
- Inadequate training
- Poor work-life balance
- Unrealistic expectations



For more information on burnout, visit CICMH's Burnout Recovery infosheet [here](#).

Spotlight

Mohawk College hosts events throughout the year pertaining to [time management](#), [stress](#), [burnout](#), and [resiliency](#). These courses are not trades-specific but cover important topics that are commonly seen within the trades.

In British Columbia, **North Island College** has launched a [pilot project](#) involving a dedicated mental health liaison to whom apprentices can reach out for resources and support as they move through their apprenticeship and enter the workforce. The project also aims to train current apprentices to become future mentors for the next cohort of apprentices.

Safety

Many, but not all, skilled trades can be physically demanding. Whether that be because it involves heavy machinery, ladders, kneeling, standing on your feet for hours on end, and/or lifting and carrying heavy materials, the body is expending a lot of energy at any given time. Due to the amount of physical exertion required, it is no surprise that chronic pain and musculoskeletal pain/injuries are quite common. With most apprenticeships consisting of a couple of thousand hours of work throughout their program, post-secondary trades students are consistently being subjected to physically demanding environments. A study of masonry apprentices showed that almost 80% displayed signs of musculoskeletal injury symptoms, mostly in their lower back and wrists/hands (Anton et al., 2020). This type of injury is not only damaging to the individual but it also puts them at risk of further injury and is linked to fatigue and decreased concentration (Arias et al., 2022). Musculoskeletal pain is known to be associated with workplace accidents, as those who experience this type of pain attempt to reduce their movement in those areas to not agitate it, which can sometimes lead to unsteadiness and increase the risk for falls (Arias et al., 2022).

Many pain-related factors affect the mental health of individuals. People living with chronic pain are at a heightened risk of suicide, depression, substance use issues, and anxiety (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2020). Sleep problems due to chronic pain can increase stress levels and contribute to depression, a known predictor of suicide (APA, 2020; Racine, 2018; Themelis et al., 2023). As a result, an overlap of anxiety, depression, and chronic pain is commonly seen (Harvard Medical School, 2021).

Spotlight

Many colleges, such as [Northern College](#), [Georgian College](#), [Mohawk College](#), [Durham College](#), [Sault College](#), and [St. Clair College](#), offer safety training and equipment as a part of their pre-apprenticeship programs.

At **McMaster University**, Human Resources Services provides employees with [Safety Toolbox Talks](#), which provide staff with information on health and safety in their space.

Financials

Juggling finances while in post-secondary can be incredibly stressful. While trades students are paid for their time during the jobsite portion of their apprenticeship, their payment pauses for the in-class portion. During this time, many apprentices apply for Employment Insurance (EI) but sometimes the paperwork is a barrier itself, as students do not receive payments in a timely manner or struggle with navigating the EI application process.

Simultaneously, apprentices must account for transportation costs and are typically required to purchase their own tools, equipment, books, and more on top of existing apprenticeship registration fees (Government of Ontario, 2021). Another financial expense for some apprentices is access to flexible and affordable childcare, especially when apprenticeships require earlier work starts and later finishes that fall outside of typical childcare hours (Government of Ontario, 2021). Apprentices are more likely to often or always feel stressed by not earning enough money to cover their bills and these expenses, on top of the rising cost of living in Ontario, can produce significant financial stress for apprentices, which has been linked to numerous physical and mental outcomes, including anxiety and depression, loss of sleep, headaches, high blood pressure, poorer overall health, and more (Government of Canada, 2019).

Spotlight

Georgian College offers a [Trades Financial Process course](#) (worth 3 credits) that, in essence, is a financial toolkit designed around being an entrepreneurial tradesperson and what that could look like financially.

This [tips and tricks page](#) by **Support Youth Ontario** offers money management tips for apprentice students. This can be used in conjunction with the **Government of Canada's** [Budget Planner](#).

At **Mohawk College**, the [Mo' Money Financial Literacy Resource Centre](#) helps students develop financial skills and provides them with resources and training to apply those skills.

Accessibility and Accommodation

While research conducted solely with apprentices is limited, findings denote apprehension to disclose disability to offices that support students with disabilities in post-secondary institutions, leading to feelings of isolation. They also show that lack of sufficient information about learning resources and accommodations prior to training is a barrier to successfully moving through their program (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, 2021).

In addition, with no clearly articulated pathway or streamlined process, many apprentices currently find the apprenticeship application system difficult and confusing to navigate (Government of Ontario, 2021). An apprentice survey led by the Government of Ontario (2021) indicated that simplifying the process is needed for a smoother transition into the skilled trades. For apprentices with disabilities, one main barrier they face is a lack of willingness from employers to hire and train them because of misconceptions regarding their job readiness, performance, and accessibility requirements (Government of Ontario, 2022). For Certification of Qualification (C of Q) and Technical Standards and Safety Authority (TSSA) exams, which are regulated by Skills Ontario, student accommodations are possible, but it requires pre-approval and is a lengthy process consisting of many steps that can make it taxing for both staff and student. Given that apprenticeship training culminates in the completion of the certification exam, introduction of the Red Seal standards from the outset and throughout apprenticeship training, along with a breakdown of exam content and weighting, can help apprentices focus on their studying (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, 2021).

Hands-on training is considered the universal approach to learning the skills needed for the trades, which touches on many different learning styles (i.e., visual, auditory, kinesthetic, multimodal, and reading/writing), but returning to the classroom can be a stressful shift for students. It can be difficult for students with



disabilities and for those who may not have a formal diagnosis of a disability but have a history of encountering academic challenges to learn material that is conveyed in a way that is not compatible with their learning style. With being on campus for short blocks (8-to-12 weeks), accommodation must be timely. Extra time for tasks entailing reading and writing, laptops with audio module software and wireless devices to communicate with apprentices with hearing impairments constitute some accommodations that are already provided in the workplace and can also be utilized in the academic setting (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, 2009).

As trade programs are regulated by Skilled Trades Ontario, students cannot drop or switch classes, like students in other academic programs are able to do. As mentioned earlier, having full academic schedules combined with external stressors (e.g., commutes, home life, studying) can produce a lot of stress and anxiety for students. These feelings can be exacerbated for students with learning disabilities and those who are undiagnosed. Packed schedules make it hard for students to reach out to services on campus to receive help, especially when they are inaccessible after business hours. The need to deliver services to apprentices during a time that works with their schedules and to provide time to practice skills, such as self-care and anxiety management strategies, outside of a testing environment is imperative (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, 2021).

For more information on stress and anxiety, check out CICMH's Stress and Anxiety infosheet [here](#) and Managing Stress and Loneliness course [here](#).

For more information, visit CICMH's Accessibility and Accommodations toolkit [here](#), which provides the campus community with a fulsome understanding of disability, accommodations, and accessibility, in order for them to provide support and referrals to students and design programming in the most accessible way.

Spotlight

[The Apprenticeship Success Centre](#) at **Algonquin College** provides accommodation and accessibility support for students in both pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs. The centre helps students with accommodations, tutoring, workshops, peer note-taking, learning strategies for time management, studying, note-taking, and assistive technology.

Mohawk College has a specific [accommodations site](#) for apprentices, providing information on the services they provide regarding accessibility and accommodation requests for classes, certificates, and more. The college also spotlights [success stories](#) of apprentices with disabilities in their school

newsletter and on their website. In addition, the college also strives to implement [Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\)](#) to achieve equitable, accessible, and inclusive learning environments.

At **George Brown College**, their Accessible Learning Services department has an [Accessibility Consultant](#) that works with apprenticeship students in supporting them with their accommodation needs to ensure timely access to services.

Recommendations

Implement a formal support system for trades students

Have a trades-specific support system, whether it's an apprentice specialist, trades mental health liaison, or mentor, whether it is another student, peer supporter, or an experienced journey person, who is there to act as a formal mentor and provide support and guidance throughout a student's apprenticeship in order to provide them with additional support and resolve potential issues.

Have community resources readily available

Ensure relevant community resources are available and that community organizations are promoted to students so apprentices can reach out to them outside of on-campus counselling hours. If available, reach out to organizations that specialize in working with tradespeople, or programs on campus they could benefit from (i.e. registered massage therapist (RMT) programs), to ensure the right services are available for trades students. Keep an accurate and evolving list of available community resources.

Utilize digital technology

Increase access and promotion of [e-health technology](#) to promote health and provide timely support for trades students. Utilize online platforms to inform students about resources and make getting support more accessible. Post-secondary staff may want to explore online discussion forums, virtual office hours, and social media to ensure students connect with the right support in a timely manner.

Early outreach to enhance awareness of Accessible Learning Services

Through early outreach, apprentices will become aware of the scope of services provided by accessibility service offices on their campus. Apprentices can learn about the process to register and set up accommodations as early as possible to support them in their studies.

Support staff should be aware of the unique challenges students can face in apprenticeships

Ensure support staff have relevant information and strategies to support the mental health and wellbeing of skilled trades students. This can include awareness of trades students' learning styles, hands-on approaches, their academic scheduling, and the unique challenges they may face that can affect their mental health and wellbeing. Support staff may also consider having slotted time for drop-in counselling appointments that are compatible with apprentice school schedules.

Develop relationships with local trades employers and community mental health organizations

Developing relationships within your town/city will improve trades students' access and pathways into an apprenticeship. Having a partnership would support placement opportunities for students and strengthen the campus-community connection.

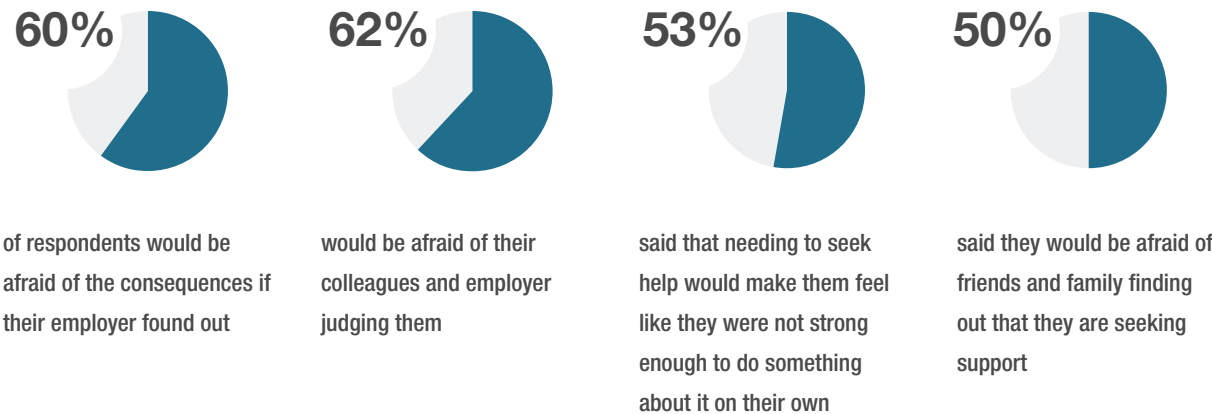
Stigmas and Stereotypes

There are many negative stereotypes and stigmas associated with the skilled trades sector and many can harm the perception of students who pursue this industry, contributing to the ongoing shortage of trade employees within the workforce. Over the years, this type of stereotyping has left lingering resentment and has historically divided students into two streams: university-bound and those left for the trades. Stigmas and stereotypes can be harmful to one’s mental health due to the stress and anxiety these stigmatized individuals may face, and in the workplace (i.e., apprenticeship) can make men, more specifically, less likely to reach out for mental health support (Bridges et al., 2020; Duckworth et al., 2024; Gatti, 2023; Howe et al., 2023).

Stigma can contribute to a decline in students’ mental health, including increased anxiety and depression, and lower self-esteem, leading to lower academic achievements, a lack of motivation, and difficulty forming positive relationships with friends and colleagues (Gatti, 2023). Parents, peers, teachers, and partners exhibit stigma about pursuing a career in the skilled trades leading to perceptions that the trades are ‘low grade’, ‘dirty jobs’, and ‘for those who lack brains’ (Government of Ontario, 2021).

Toxic Masculinity

A report by the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (2023) indicates that the most common perceived stigma that keeps skilled trades apprentices from accessing substance use supports is fear of the potential reaction from their workplace as:



A harmful view of tradespeople is that given the nature of their profession, they must be ‘tough’ and ‘strong’ and can’t show any ‘weakness’ because their future livelihood depends on this, which in some cases can be internalized. Internalizing these harmful perceptions makes an individual more vulnerable to negative health outcomes (e.g., workplace accidents and injuries), and perpetuates the personification of toxic masculinity (Howe et al., 2023).

Toxic masculinity is defined as both a set of attitudes and ways of behaving that are stereotypically associated with and/or expected of men (i.e., offensive and harmful beliefs and behaviours). In terms of toxic masculinity, toughness and strength are valued whereas mental health conditions and seeking out help are seen as personal weaknesses. This type of socialization encourages competition between men, creates conflict between men and women, and breeds homophobia (American Psychological Association, 2018). It is harmful at both the identity and relational levels as it imposes mentalities and behaviours that can negatively impact one’s self-esteem and limit interpersonal relationships and social ties (Government of Quebec, 2021).

There are three core parts to toxic masculinity (Parkhill & Ray, 2021):

Toughness: men need to be physically and emotionally strong

Antifemininity: men must reject all traditionally feminine behaviours, such as showing emotion or asking for help

Power: men need to obtain social and financial status to gain the respect of others

A study of men aged 18-25 found that the more that men conformed to masculine norms that fall under toxic masculinity (i.e., emotional control, self-reliance, and heterosexual representation), the less likely they were to exhibit help-seeking behaviour (Maher, 2022). One of the main risks for conforming to these toxic masculinity norms is suicide, indicating that conformity to these traits puts men at a higher risk of suicidal ideation (Maher, 2022).

Common toxic masculinity phrases that can be seen in the skilled trades includes:

- Telling classmates or colleagues to “man up”, “get over it”, or “stop being a baby” in hazardous situations
- Using the phrases “don’t be such a girl” “or “men don’t cry” when any emotions arise
- Justifying inappropriate behaviour with “boys will be boys”
- Using the words “tomboy” or “princess” to describe a woman in the trades

Toxic masculinity can prevent men from recognizing their own mental health and wellbeing needs and it can discourage them from seeking out support when it's needed. Creating an environment within the trades that allows men to shed these toxic masculinity behaviours, learn and lean into their emotional and relational skills, and change their behavioral patterns allows them to thrive both personally and professionally. Providing support and encouragement towards emotional expression and open discussion challenges toxic masculinity and provides space for engaging in help-seeking behaviours.

Education

Education is another big stigma revolving around skilled trades. There are many misconceptions about the type of education needed to become qualified within this sector as many skilled trades professions are incorrectly seen as for people who are low-skilled and lack long-term career prospects (Government of Ontario, 2021; Government of Ontario, 2022). Trades careers are largely seen as the 'alternative' career when individuals are not successful in the more 'professional' careers that are based on financial viability and exponential long-term growth opportunities, which are considered for the more traditional and hierarchical education (Howe et al., 2023).

Previous research has revealed that despite the high levels of training and complex skills required for the skilled trades, the presumption of the level of intelligence thought to be necessary for the trades has produced an identity crisis among students when considering the skilled trades as a viable career path (Gatti, 2023). While some students know these assumptions are not valid and take on a sense of trade pride (i.e., their pride is rooted in the perception of the trades being a 'divergent pursuit'), some students may internalize these social perceptions and experience conflicting feelings about their place in the skilled trades (Gatti, 2023).

MYTH	FACT
The skilled trades are for students who don't have the grades for any other programs and can't make it into university	The skilled trades require problem-solving skills, communication, critical thinking, and the ability to work with sophisticated systems and technology
The skilled trades don't pay well	The skilled trades are currently in demand in Ontario, with salaries potentially being higher than expected. As tradespeople gain more expertise and climb the ranks, you may reach a very well-compensated salary

MYTH	FACT
The skilled trades are just a job, not a long-term career	The skilled trades are a stable career option that has opportunities for growth and long-term career prospects
The skilled trades are just low-skilled, dirty, manual labour jobs	The skilled trades encompass a wide range of professions, many of which involve specialized training in precision, knowledge, and technical skills

These gravely dangerous misconceptions point to a lack of awareness and exposure to the skilled trades and the educational pathway. Many apprentices have reported that this misconception has led to being looked down upon by friends and family (Government of Ontario, 2022). Despite the amount of training needed, the complexity of work within the skilled trades, and the fact that skilled trades require higher levels of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) courses due to technological advances in our world, the perception of the trades being a less acceptable route of education remains strong (Gatti, 2023; Nadrowski, 2019).

Spotlight

A collaboration between **Cambrian College** and CMHA (Canadian Mental Health Association) Sudbury/Manitoulin has focused its efforts on Cambrian trades students. This [campus-community partnership](#) delivered workshops on mental health to Cambrian trade students, providing them with resources and tools to de-stigmatize mental health and substance use, and provide a pathway for support.

Recommendations

Reduce stigma to increase accessibility and utilization of support services

There should be a focus on breaking down conformity barriers that impede men in the skilled trades from recognizing and seeking out mental health support. More awareness and support campaigns within the skilled trades departments, whether that be through workshops, promotional booths, or events, and creating space for conversation free of judgement and full of respect and trust will be advantageous in tackling this barrier and making support more accessible for trades students.

Students need to know how to access support quickly upon arrival to the program

Whether it's at the beginning of the semester, during orientation week, or both, skilled trades students should be presented with the correct tools and knowledge on how to access the support they need throughout their academic career.

Embedding mental health and wellbeing workshops into orientation

Consider the addition of mental health and wellbeing programs and workshops during orientation for all skilled trades students. Topics could include stress management, substance use, stigma, depression, anxiety, and more. The workshops would ensure students are well-equipped with the information and resources they need to support themselves and their classmates. These types of awareness and prevention methods would improve help-seeking behaviour and normalize conversations around mental health.

Staff-student relationship building

Strengthen relationships between students and staff. Getting instructor buy-in to promote awareness (e.g., posters, in syllabi) and becoming a familiar face to trades students on campus at events and promotional booths builds a level of trust and respect.



Equity Considerations

In all aspects of campus life, it is important to consider R-EDIAA (Reconciliation – Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Anti-Racism, and Accessibility) in practices, programming, and policies. With the recent demand for skilled trade workers in the province, it's important to understand the unique needs of trades students based on the intersections of their identity. This section will explore the current landscape of queer, Indigenous, and women skilled trades students and R-EDIAA considerations that promote equitable access to services and programming. To learn more, visit CICMH's Anti-Oppressive Practice toolkit [here](#).

2SLGBTQIA+ Experiences

Queerphobia is defined as hatred towards members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ (2-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer and/or questioning, intersex, asexual and other additional sexual orientations and gender identities) community, including homophobia, transphobia, and biphobia. Toxic masculinity, discussed earlier in this toolkit, tends to encourage negative attitudes, behaviours, and beliefs towards queer individuals as it implies that non-conforming gender identities and same-gender attraction falls outside of what has been traditionally defined as 'real men'. On post-secondary campuses, more 2SLGBTQIA+ students report experiencing victimization (i.e., threats, assault, stalking, non-consensual touches) with physical assault and unwanted touching nearly double in comparison to rates of cisgender heterosexual students (Woodford et al., 2019). 2SLGBTQIA+ students also report having less of a sense of belonging and safety on campus, which negatively impacts their academic performance and produces higher rates of depression, attempted suicides, anxiety, and substance use (Woodford et al., 2019). For more information on supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ students, visit CICMH's Supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ Students on Campus toolkit [here](#).

There is a significant underrepresentation of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals in the skilled trades. A study released by the SRDC identifies that 0.5% of tradespeople identify as gay, 0.6% as lesbian, and 0.2% as bisexual (Appiah et al., 2023)^o. 2SLGBTQIA+ tradespeople often face elevated levels of stress because of harassment and microaggressions, and they feel unsafe revealing their true selves, resulting in poor mental and physical health outcomes and statistically significant lower life satisfaction (Appiah et al., 2023). Many 2SLGBTQIA+ apprentices cite a lack of supportive networks to lean on and uncertainty in finding a safe apprenticeship, posing a significant barrier to those who want to pursue a career in the trades (Appiah et al., 2023).

^oIt should be noted that this may be an underrepresentation as some people may not have felt safe or comfortable disclosing this information.

“I stayed closeted as an apprentice because I wanted to make sure that I solidified my role within the company...I think that some...stay closeted their entire experience, whether they’re a journey person or not. They don’t feel comfortable being out at work because there are incidents that occur where they’re being harassed to the point of being forced to leave the trade permanently.” – 2SLGBTQIA+ tradesperson

Once securing apprenticeships, 2SLGBTQIA+ apprentices are at risk of experiencing (Appiah et al., 2023; Howe et al., 2023):

- Homo-, bi-, and/or trans-phobic language
- A lack of access to personal protective equipment (PPE) for different genders and body types
- Microaggressions and harassment
- A lack of gender-neutral washrooms
- Sexualization
- A lack of support
- Inadequate 2SLGBTQIA+ competency and safety among instructors and administrators

While it is acknowledged that there are many programs dedicated to addressing barriers equity-deserving apprentices face, some can unintentionally exclude 2SLGBTQIA+ apprentices through the language used, eligibility rules, and/or disclosure requirements (Appiah et al., 2023). This unintentional exclusion could push 2SLGBTQIA+ apprentices to either prematurely leave the trades or conceal their 2SLGBTQIA+ identity to protect their wellbeing and safety (Appiah et al., 2023).

Spotlight

[The Women Transitioning to Trades and Employment](#) program at **George Brown College** is a free pre-apprenticeship program specifically offered to women, gender-nonbinary, transgender, and 2-spirit peoples who are interested in pursuing a career in the trades with the goal of increasing the number of people from under-represented groups to enter and be successful in the trades.

At **Mohawk College**, [Women in Technology and Trades](#) (WiTT) is a group that increases opportunities and supports for women and gender-diverse people in technology and trades in all fields, through a rich networking and support community.

Indigenous Skilled Trades Students

Currently, there are efforts to better support Indigenous students on their educational pathway, especially in vocational training. Across Canada, efforts are being made to reduce barriers and improve educational access through various approaches that tackle the unique needs and contexts of Indigenous trade students (Cameron & Rexe, 2022). Reports indicate that for Indigenous students, navigating post-secondary can be an isolating and intimidating experience, promoting feelings of not belonging and a lack of support, which can produce negative academic performance and poorer overall mental health and wellbeing (Future of Canada Centre, 2023).

Indigenous apprentices make up around 6.3% of all Canadian apprentices, but evidence indicates that Indigenous apprentices have higher discontinuation of apprenticeships, lower completion rates, and have a more challenging time moving through their apprenticeships due to disproportionate barriers, such as (Cameron & Rexe, 2022; Emily Arrowsmith, 2019):

- Financial and administrative barriers
- Limited transportation
- Experiences of discrimination
- Lack of mentors close to community
- Lack of support
- Unwelcoming institutions and workplaces
- Lack of cultural awareness from apprenticeship employers

“The stronger one person gets, the stronger everyone grows. Like dominoes, the success of one is the success of all. When one person gets empowered, they empower their family, their community, and their Nation.” – Indigenous apprentice

A recent publication from the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (2024b) focused on supporting the retention of Indigenous people in the skilled trades. Through conversations with Knowledge Holders and Elders, recommendations on how skilled trades programming and training can be designed with Indigenous people in mind were as follows (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, 2024b):

- Having more Indigenous representation – increasing hiring opportunities for local Indigenous tradespeople
- Bringing in land-based teachings to training programs

- Dedicated support systems in place to help students achieve individual success
- Development/expansion of cultural awareness and sensitivity training for staff
- Ensuring accessible opportunities are in place
- Addressing barriers such as lack of mentorship, program supports, and accessibility services

Better understanding of Indigenous representation and outcomes will lead to a more diverse and inclusive environment within the skilled trades. See CICMH's findings from their Indigenous Needs Assessment [here](#), which identifies existing gaps in supporting Indigenous post-secondary student mental health and wellbeing.

Spotlight

The **University of Toronto Scarborough** has partnered with [Hammer Heads](#), a program that helps youth in under-resourced Toronto neighbourhoods and Indigenous communities learn a trade in the construction industry.

In northeastern Ontario, **Northern College** and [Keepers of the Circle](#) bring skilled trades to students. Through mobile trailers, this training program can be transported to remote Indigenous communities, giving individuals the opportunity to be introduced to the trades in their own environment.

For Indigenous women looking to get into the trades, **Canadore College** provides an opportunity in [general carpentry](#) that involves culturally inclusive strategies throughout training and placement.

In October 2024, **Algonquin College** hosted the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum for an [all-day event](#) discussing, learning, and collaborating on how to further support Indigenous apprentices pursuing a career in the skilled trades.

Being culturally inclusive ensures that the needs of people from diverse cultures are supported and that their unique contributions are valued. It is the practice of including members of all cultures in the design and delivery of policy, programming, and services.

Women Skilled Trades Students

While women's participation in the Canadian skilled trades workforce has increased over the years, they are still severely underrepresented. Most women in trades are seen in the service sector (e.g., hairstyling, esthetics, and food) and on average, in all sectors, earn less than their male counterparts (Amery & Dubois, 2021). The wage gap is the largest for racialized women, trans women, newcomer women, and women with disabilities (Pay Equity Office, 2023).

Women make up 4.8% of construction apprentice registrations, but only 2% complete their apprenticeship, indicating there are significant barriers to women entering and completing apprenticeships (Jin et al., 2020). Overall, women experience higher attrition rates in apprenticeship programs compared to men for numerous reasons, some of which include harassment, isolation, discrimination, and hostility (Curtis et al., 2022). For women apprentices, some aspects of apprenticeships contribute to psychological and physiological stressors such as ill-fitting PPE (including boots, safety glasses, gloves, coveralls, and harnesses), physical overcompensation, lack of hands-on training, and unavailable sanitary bathroom facilities (Curtis et al., 2022). Currently, program completion for women apprentices remains lower than pre-COVID-19 rates sitting at around 36% (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, 2024a).

Sexism and Sexual Assault

Sexual harassment can be understood as unwanted or unwelcome conduct and is deemed as being offensive, intimidating, degrading, and/or hostile (Bridges et al., 2022). Interviews with women trade students highlight their experience of sexual harassment with not only classmates but educators as well (Bridges et al., 2022). Whether it be comparisons of machinery parts to women's bodies or lack of response to sexualized talk between male classmates, this complicit agreement and failure to intervene reinforces the normalization of this behaviour. This normalization makes it extremely difficult for women to navigate the trade environment and establishes the gendering of power relations (Bridges et al., 2022).

The feeling of being powerless to speak up and advocate for oneself, for fear of being let go or not believed, is perpetuated by workplace culture (Curtis et al., 2022). While women in male-dominated industries are more exposed to sexual misconduct, they are also less likely to name the conduct as sexual harassment (Bridges et al., 2022). This behaviour has become normalized as something to 'just expect' when working in a male-dominated industry, and to either brush it off, laugh it off, or dismiss it (Bridges et al., 2022). In most cases, women understand and acknowledge that this behaviour is unacceptable and not okay, but the culture demands them to be accepting and not take offense (Bridges et al., 2022).

Reasons a woman may not speak up about harassment include but is not limited to (Bridges et al., 2022):

- Desire for inclusion
- Belief of this being accepted cultural behaviour
- Self-doubt
- Fear of not being believed
- Lack of awareness of the legality of the event
- Fear of response from classmates and/or colleagues

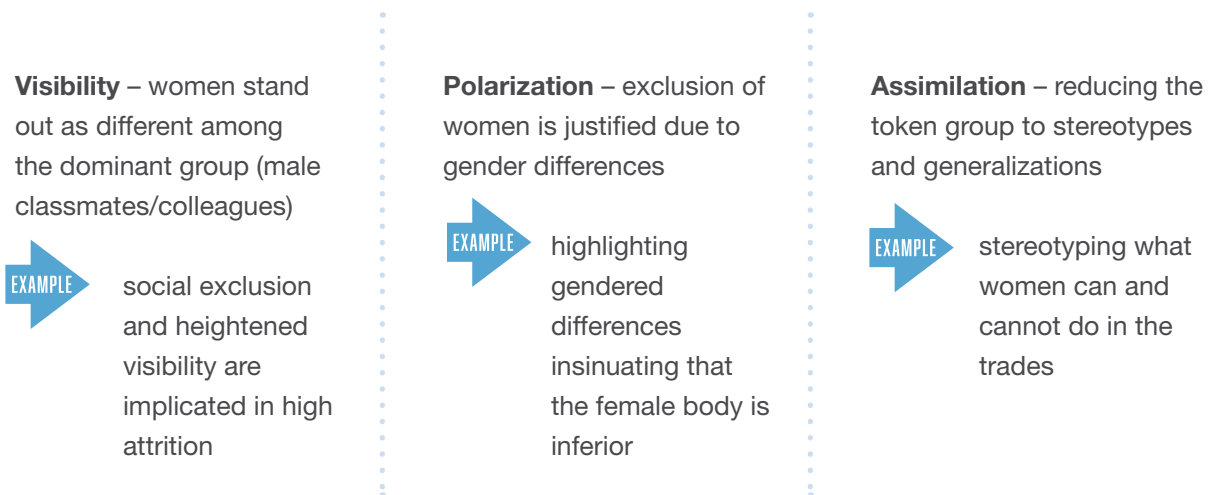
For more information, visit CICMH’s Sexual Violence Response on Campus toolkit [here](#).

Tokenism

Kanter’s theory of tokenism identifies the role organizational structures have in the difficulties minorities experience (Bridges et al., 2022). According to this theory, those who comprise less than 15% of a workplace and whose social identity is different from the dominant group are considered tokens (Kanter, 1977). This type of skewed ratio enables discrimination, marginalization, harassment, and social exclusion that is targeted at women who are in male-dominated industries* (Bridges et al., 2022).

**It should also be noted that tokenism also occurs with other groups such as 2SLGBTQIA+, people with disabilities, and ethnic minorities.*

Kanter (1977) suggests that the dominant group utilizes three perpetual phenomena to enact this type of segregation:



To counteract tokenism, some tradeswomen have employed the strategy of ‘becoming one of the boys’. While this strategy can help reduce visibility and social exclusion, it does not help to achieve the protection they desire, has the potential to increase hostility, and may come at the expense of other minority groups (Bridges et al., 2022).

Stigma

It is traditionally expected that women in the trades will ‘toughen up’ and ‘fit in with the culture’ to quickly adapt to workplace norms. Despite an increase in women in trades, there is a perpetuating stigma that most skilled trades jobs should only be done by men and that they are too tough for women (Amery & Dubois, 2021). This perception that women do not ‘belong’ in the skilled trades is supported by data that demonstrates that women in trades are usually assigned lower-skilled tasks and are not presented with as many opportunities because they do not fit the ‘appearance’ of a tradesperson (Raza, 2023). Women (25%) are 10 times more likely to be discriminated against when finding an employer sponsor for their apprenticeship in comparison to men (2.5%) (Raza, 2023).

With the aging workforce quickly approaching, it is time to shatter the stereotypes and stigmas. There are no skills within the skilled trades (i.e., hand-eye coordination, balance, stamina, dexterity) that can be defined by gender. In a 2022 Canadian survey on awareness and views on women working in construction, gender bias remains strong as 64% of respondents said women face discrimination from employers and colleagues due to the idea that construction is a man’s job and that women do not fit into this type of ‘macho’ culture (BuildForce Canada, 2023).

Stigmas regarding ‘macho’ social norms, indicating that women cannot do certain jobs because of their body, is a potentially dangerous idea to push as this can sometimes pressure women to disregard safety measures and put themselves at risk to ‘prove’ themselves (Curtis et al., 2022). Psychological stressors such as these can compromise one’s skills and put a tradeswoman at even more risk of harm. The lack of security for women apprentices to feel both physically and psychologically safe is identified as a significant stressor and impacts their overall mental health and wellbeing (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, 2020).

Spotlight

The Government of Canada has launched the [Women in the Skilled Trades Initiative](#), which focuses on funding projects that recruit women apprentices in Red Seals trades (predominantly in manufacturing and construction sectors). Through this initiative, **Fanshawe College** launched ConnectHER, a national female-led mentorship program that works to support, retain, and recruit women in Red Seal trades. Another partnership funded by this initiative involves a collaboration between **Sheridan College**, **St. Clair College**, **Fanshawe College** and **Durham College**, in partnership with Unifor, to provide networking, education, and apprenticeship opportunities for women in the Red Seal skilled trades.

Through their [Engineering, Technology and Trades for Women \(ETT4W\) initiative](#), **Conestoga College** supports and uplifts women pursuing careers in engineering, technology, and trades. As part of the ETT4W initiative, they also offer a [Women in Skilled Trades \(WIST\) General Carpenter Pre-Apprenticeship](#), which is a tuition-free program.

Sheridan College hosted an inclusive [women in trades retreat](#), bringing together staff and students from Fanshawe College, Lambton College, Northern College, and Mohawk College to prepare Camp Ak-O-Mak for opening through various trade-related projects.

Through a partnership with [Women’s Enterprise Skills training of Windsor, Inc. \(WEST\)](#), St. Clair College provides free tuition and paid placements for women in [electrical, mechanical, and construction trades](#) to further develop technical skills and gain employment.

Support Ontario Youth offers a plethora of organizations that provide [networks and opportunities](#) for current and future women apprentices through mentorship, training, support, and more.

Recommendations

Professional development for staff and faculty

Create an environment of trust that encourages positive relationships between equity deserving groups in trades and the post-secondary staff they interact with by having mandatory diversity and inclusivity training that will equip staff and faculty with the knowledge, awareness, and skills to counteract sexism, harassment, and discrimination in the classroom and on campus.

Create space for a supportive network

Ensure the classroom and campus provide a resilient and inclusive environment that supports equity deserving groups in trades. This could include ensuring gender-inclusive gear and washrooms, toolbox talks on inclusion and diversity, online/virtual initiatives for support, culturally appropriate resources, and more. Shifting towards an inclusive and supportive network for all trades students will allow the campus to address behaviours, processes, and attitudes that allow for discrimination, harassment, and sexism to occur.

Encourage gender autonomy

By supporting the gender autonomy* of students, the post-secondary campus becomes a space that promotes equality in gender-segregated occupations (i.e., skilled trades) and invites in strategies and initiatives that can help support those who choose to go into atypical fields.

**Gender autonomy refers to the extent to which someone, regardless of their gender, can succeed in their chosen career path without cost or disadvantage resulting from that choice.*

Consider campus-community partnerships

Consider partnering with local non-profit community mental health organizations that work specifically with equity deserving groups to enhance services, support, and inclusivity on your campus. For more information on how to do this, visit CICMH’s Campus-Community Partnerships toolkit [here](#).

Coping Mechanisms

Students in the skilled trades can be subjected to high stress levels and pressures that they may not have encountered before. Stressors such as deadlines, apprenticeships, and poor time management/work-life balance can affect a trade student. And while there are healthy ways to cope with stress, there are also unhealthy coping mechanisms that can do more harm than good. While they do not eliminate or decrease the stressor(s), coping mechanisms are effective in reducing negative feelings, such as stress and anxiety.

A survey conducted by the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (2020) identified common coping strategies among apprentices as:

- Taking time for themselves
- Engaging in hobbies
- Spending time with family and friends
- Exercising
- Consuming substances
- Taking prescription medication
- Seeking counselling
- Smoking cigarettes

Of these coping strategies, taking time for themselves was the most reported (64%) and seeking counselling was the least reported (9%) (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, 2020).

Trades students can face multiple stressors throughout their academic journey, and during that time they can be harsh and self-critical towards themselves in times of need and uncertainty. With that, it's important to stress the importance of self-compassion to students – that we be kind and compassionate to ourselves when we're feeling inadequate or suffering rather than be harsh and critical. This adaptive tool can help students thrive in adverse situations and cope with stressors in a way that will not leave students exhausted and defeated.

Self-compassion is made up of three core elements:

Self-kindness – treating yourself with kindness during challenging times (i.e., positive self-talk)

Common humility – understanding that others are also experiencing similar hardships, that you are not alone.

Mindfulness – having a balanced and non-judgmental attitude when working through emotional experiences.

For more information on mindfulness, check out CICMH's Mindfulness and Meditation Techniques webinar [here](#).

Practicing self-compassion can lead to increased motivation and life satisfaction, and better mental and physical health and relationships. It can also lead to increased resilience needed to cope with stressful life events.

For more information, visit CICMH's Emotional Regulation infosheet [here](#).

Encouraging Help Seeking Behaviour

In the context of mental health, help-seeking behaviour can be defined as actively seeking out advice and/or supportive action in response to a problem or distressing experience (Bryant et al., 2021).

Barriers to engaging in help-seeking behaviours on campus include (Karam, 2019):

- Lack of academic time off
- Waitlists
- Personal, perceived, and public stigma
- Lack of mental health service(s) promotion
- Self-perception of own mental health needs

Of the three types of stigmas (personal, perceived, and public), personal stigma is significantly associated with lower levels of help-seeking behaviour, along with having a lower emotional openness and being male (Karam, 2019). A student's perception of their own needs can be a barrier to understanding how serious their needs are, leading them to think that no one would understand their problems, both of which are negative factors in seeking help (Karam, 2019). Tying into the skilled trades and traditional masculine norms of being 'weak' or 'not strong enough' to resolve their problems by themselves, and the feelings of being embarrassed to express emotions, men more often exhibit low help-seeking behaviours (Bryant et al., 2021).

Research indicates that service advertisements for students who are off campus are especially important in increasing help-seeking behaviours (Karam, 2019). With trades students utilizing the block method and being on campus for short and condensed periods, they must know of the services ahead of time to efficiently seek out the help they need during their time on or off campus. Service promotion is necessary at the start of the academic year and throughout it to ensure that trade students receive the same amount of outreach as on-campus students (Karam, 2019).

Spotlight

At **Sault College**, during the first week of classes, a [dedicated counselor](#) meets with every apprentice block to provide information about mental health services available and how to access them. The counselor aims to reduce stigma by discussing some of the common reasons to access counselling, specific stressors they may face, and the importance of reaching out for help.

Mohawk College hosts [Get Ready for Training Night](#) information sessions for apprentices and their caregivers/family prior to attending classes. These sessions aim to assist students with connecting to services and preparing them for their studies.

Recommendations

Provide diverse opportunities for online help seeking

Students exhibiting lower levels of mental wellbeing are more likely to benefit from online help seeking programs, especially if they are tailored to students' wants and needs (e.g., anxiety, time management, work-life balance, depression, and stress). Changing delivery services to include online help seeking provides students with diverse options to promote help seeking behaviours.

Encourage and promote peer support groups

With trades students more inclined to seek out support from informal (i.e., peers) versus formal (i.e., counsellor) sources, peer support is a great avenue that encourages help seeking behaviours. Whether it be a buddy system program or peer helper network, both are set up to promote help seeking behaviour. To learn more about peer support, visit CICMH's Campus Peer Support toolkit [here](#).

Encourage the development of a 'care plan'

With incoming trade students, support and encourage them to develop a care plan. This type of plan will set out how and where they can seek help if they need it, who they have available to them for contacting in times of need (i.e., friends, hotlines, [Be Safe App](#)), and resources available to them as they move through their academic journey.

Bring awareness to stressors apprentices may face

Bringing more awareness to the specific stressors apprentices may face throughout their academic journey in the skilled trades would allow students the opportunity to challenge the stressor directly with coping mechanisms and help seeking behaviours they build upon through other services provided on campus.

Vary service promotion

Increasing service promotion through more visible advertising detailing services offered would facilitate help-seeking behaviour in students. This can be done through social media outlets, events, posters, and/or workshops. These efforts could include having trades-specific wellness liaisons who provide service outreach for trades students when they are on and off campus, and/or providing apprenticeship employers with a list of resources to provide apprentices in times of need.

Summary of Recommendations

Substance-Related Harms

- ✓ Explore a harm reduction approach to substance use
- ✓ Reduce the use of stigmatizing language
- ✓ Increase student protection for substance use disclosure
- ✓ Embed prevention, management, and treatment of substance use into orientation programming and events

Nature of Apprenticeships

- ✓ Implement a formal support system for trades students
- ✓ Have community resources readily available
- ✓ Utilize digital technology
- ✓ Early outreach to enhance awareness of Accessible Learning Services
- ✓ Support staff should be aware of the unique challenges students can face in apprenticeships
- ✓ Develop relationships with local trades employers and community mental health organizations

Stigmas and Stereotypes

- ✓ Reduce stigma to increase accessibility and utilization of support services
- ✓ Students need to know how to access support quickly upon arrival to the program
- ✓ Embedding mental health and wellbeing workshops into orientation
- ✓ Staff-student relationship building

Equity Considerations

- ✓ Professional development for staff and faculty
- ✓ Create space for a supportive network
- ✓ Encourage gender autonomy
- ✓ Consider campus-community partnerships

Coping Mechanisms

- ✓ Provide diverse opportunities for online help seeking
- ✓ Encourage and promote peer support groups
- ✓ Encourage the development of a 'care plan'
- ✓ Bring awareness to stressors apprentices may face
- ✓ Vary service promotion

External Resources

[More Feet on the Ground](#) is a free online course intended to be a one-stop shop for any campus professional or student leader looking to learn how to recognize, respond, and refer students to support who are experiencing mental health issues on campus.

CMHA (Canadian Mental Health Association) provides [Mental Health Works](#) workshops on workplace mental health. Topics include burnout, harm reduction, stress, psychological health and safety, and EDIA strategies.

[ConnexOntario](#) provides free and confidential health services information for those experiencing mental health, substance use, and/or gambling issues. The information provided includes where the service is located, how to access it, and wait times (if applicable).

The Government of Ontario provides [detailed findings](#) on breaking the stigma regarding skilled trades, along with identifying barriers and providing recommendations on how to improve access and create supportive pathways for skilled trades students.

The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction provides a [toolkit](#) on supporting skilled trades employees and apprentices with substance use in the workplace.

Provided in both French and English, a project funded by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities provides free [workbooks](#) that help prepare trades students to write the Certificate of Qualification Examination in Ontario. The workbooks are for trade students in the automotive, construction, carpentry, mechanic, and plumbing industries.

This [apprenticeship toolkit](#), developed by Mohawk College and Workforce Planning Hamilton, and funded by the Government of Ontario and the Government of Canada, details the academic pathway for the skilled trades and information to support students on their journey.

This [toolkit](#) from the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction focuses on stigmatizing language and is a primer on how to increase awareness of the stigma surrounding individuals who use substances, their support networks, and community service providers.

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) provides free [online courses and infosheets](#) available to tradespeople and their employers, covering numerous topics on mental health and wellbeing in the trades and the prevention, management, and treatment of substance use.

[Skill Plan](#) is a learning hub to help individuals succeed in the skilled trades. They offer video tutorials, practice activities, quizzes, and many other resources to help develop the skills needed in the skilled trades.

The Infrastructure Health and Safety Association (IHSA) has an [infosheet](#) on opioids in the trades, explaining the signs and symptoms and how to support a tradesperson using opioids.

Workplace Safety & Prevention Services offers a free [15-minute course](#) for anyone to take that discusses substance use in the trades, aiming to increase awareness about the impacts of stigma.

Developed by the Government of Canada, this [essential skills workbook for trades](#) provides practice on essential skills needed to be successful within the trades industry. This workbook can help students identify their strong and weak essential skills.

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