

WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION

# Building a Workforce That Works for Everyone

A Guide for Construction Leaders



# The business case for an inclusive workforce

Canada's construction industry is navigating a pivotal moment. An aging workforce, rising skill requirements and declining interest in trade careers among younger Canadians have created significant labour shortages. Even as the construction unemployment rate remains below the national average, the industry continues to lose experienced, highly skilled workers who are difficult to replace.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, women remain significantly underrepresented in construction, comprising just 13.6% of the Canadian construction workforce as of 2024.<sup>2</sup> Though there have been significant strides made across the industry in recent years, this is still well below their overall representation in the broader workforce.

Construction firms that build [genuinely inclusive workplaces gain a measurable edge](#) as they are more likely to outperform their peers financially by delivering stronger revenue and profitability outcomes over time.

The business case goes beyond recruitment. Inclusive practices can reduce risk exposures by potentially lowering harassment and discrimination claims, reducing workplace injury frequency, improving liability loss experience and lowering employers' liability exposures.

This guide outlines priority actions construction leaders can take to strengthen their workforce, reduce exposures and position their firms for sustainable growth.

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<sup>1</sup>Canadian Construction Association, "Fall 2025: Construction Quarterly Economic Insights," October 28, 2025.

<sup>2</sup>BuildForce Canada, "Reviewing Canada's Construction Sector in 2024 - Part 5: Building a Strong Workforce," September 4, 2025.

# Improve organizational culture from the top

Nearly a quarter of female construction workers report frequent sexual harassment and almost half cite these behaviours as a primary reason they left or are considering leaving the industry.<sup>3</sup> An inclusive culture is not just an HR initiative. It is a risk management strategy.

Harassment, discrimination and retaliation claims are among the most common and costly employment-related losses in construction. Clear behavioural expectations, supervisor training and consistent documentation reduce employment practices liability (EPL) exposure and strengthen your defense if a claim arises. Firms with these measures in place also see better underwriting outcomes.

- **Review and update your employee handbook** – Work with employment counsel and your insurance broker to ensure policies reflect current laws and inclusive language.
- **Establish multiple reporting channels, including anonymous options** – Workers must feel safe to report concerns before situations escalate.
- **Implement mandatory anti-harassment and violence prevention training** – Provide training for all employees, with additional training for supervisors on early intervention.
- **Engage a third-party HR management firm if needed** – If you do not have a dedicated HR function, outsourcing ensures consistent, compliant handling of complaints and documentation.



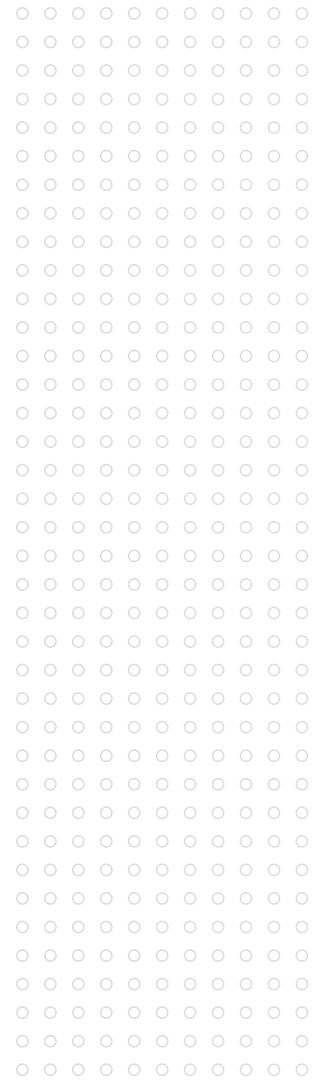
<sup>3</sup>Institute for Women's Policy Research, "A Future Worth Building: What Tradeswomen Say About the Change They Need in the Construction Industry," accessed December 2, 2025.

# Invest in comprehensive benefits

Construction workers in Canada face higher risks of injuries and have more long-term disability claims due to the physical nature of the work.<sup>4</sup> Providing short-term and long-term disability insurance is one way construction firms can support employees in a time of need.

Gaps in benefits can unintentionally drive workers' compensation claims when employees return to work too early or work through conditions that should be accommodated. A benefits consultant who understands construction can design packages that compete with office-based employers in your region.

- ❑ **Offer robust extended health and dental benefits** – Comprehensive coverage that goes beyond provincial plans demonstrates investment in worker wellbeing and helps compete for talent.
- ❑ **Add short-term and long-term disability coverage** – Policies should provide coverage and support to all workers through recovery from illness or injury.
- ❑ **Develop a written parental leave and light-duty policy** – A written policy protects pregnant workers and gives supervisors clear guidance, reducing ad hoc decisions that create legal exposure.
- ❑ **Explore flexible scheduling for eligible roles** – Adjusted start times can help workers balance childcare responsibilities without sacrificing productivity.



<sup>4</sup>Safety.inc., "Workplace Injuries in Canada: High-Risk Industries Injury Performance Report," April 14, 2025.

# Ensure safety equipment fits all workers

Only 31% of women in construction report that their PPE is specifically designed for women.<sup>5</sup> Improperly fitted gloves, oversized hard hats and ill-fitting harnesses create genuine hazards. Women are more likely than men to suffer ergonomic injuries, including musculoskeletal disorders and repetitive motion strains, which cost employers approximately US\$18 billion annually across industries.<sup>6</sup>

Preventable injuries from ill-fitting equipment lead to costly workers' compensation claims and lost productivity. Investing in properly sized PPE is one of the highest-return safety investments a firm can make.

- ❑ **Audit your PPE inventory for sizing gaps** – Identify where women on your crew lack properly fitted options for gloves, harnesses, hard hats and high-visibility vests.
- ❑ **Partner with vendors offering female-specific PPE** – More manufacturers now produce equipment based on female anthropometric data, so sourcing has become easier.
- ❑ **Provide tools with appropriate weight and handle sizes** – Reducing strain at the tool level prevents cumulative injuries that drive long-term claims.
- ❑ **Invest in adjustable and modern equipment** – Telescoping features and ergonomic design benefit all workers, not just women, and reduce overall injury rates.

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<sup>5</sup>NCCER, "Policy and Practice: Women's Experiences and Advancement in Construction Workforce Development Report," April 23, 2025.

<sup>6</sup>National Safety Council, "Address Workplace Inequities to Reduce Musculoskeletal Disorders," July 2, 2024.

# Ensure pay equity and advancement opportunities

Construction has one of the narrowest gender pay gaps of any industry, with women earning approximately 95 cents on the dollar overall.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, women have not yet reached parity. Forward-thinking construction firms should work proactively to close the remaining gap.

Pay disparities based on gender create legal exposure under federal and provincial pay equity legislation. Regular audits and transparent criteria protect your firm and signal to current and prospective employees that advancement is based on performance.

- ❑ **Conduct regular pay equity audits** – Compare compensation for similar roles regardless of gender to identify and close gaps before they become claims.
- ❑ **Establish written, objective criteria for advancement** – Performance-based promotion standards reduce bias and protect against discrimination allegations.
- ❑ **Review promotion patterns for disparities** – Look at who is advancing and at what rate. If patterns emerge, investigate root causes.
- ❑ **Build mentorship programs pairing new and experienced workers** – Structured mentorship accelerates skill development and strengthens retention across your workforce.

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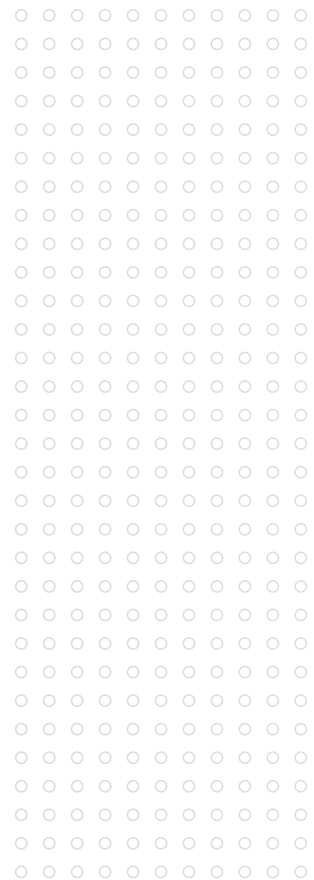


<sup>7</sup>The National Association of Women in Construction, “How Pay Transparency Helps Women Construction Workers,” accessed December 2, 2025.

# Develop your talent pipeline early

Expanding the talent pool beyond traditional recruitment channels strengthens construction firms from the inside out. Organizations that prioritize diverse hiring bring in varied perspectives, problem-solving approaches and professional networks — advantages that show up in project performance, client relationships and long-term resilience. Firms that invest in inclusive pipeline development today position themselves to compete more effectively as the industry evolves.

- **Partner with local trade schools and vocational programs** - Create internship opportunities and build relationships with the next generation of construction professionals.
- **Host or participate in career fairs regularly** - Visible presence in recruitment channels signals that your firm welcomes diverse talent.
- **Develop apprenticeship programs** - Bringing in talent early and investing in their development builds loyalty and reduces turnover costs.
- **Connect with organizations that support women in construction** - These groups can provide direct access to women already in or interested in construction careers.



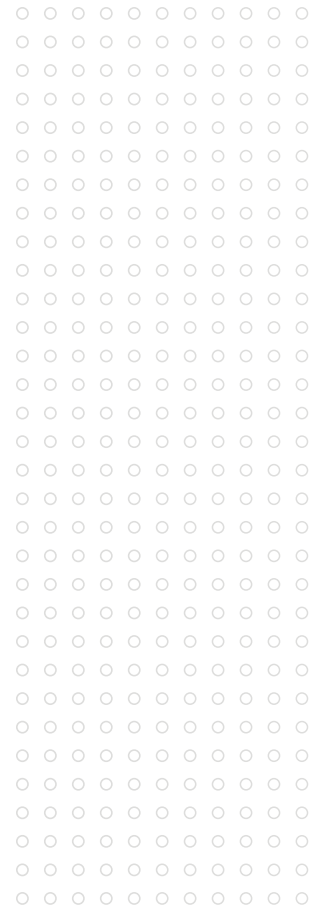
# Working with the right insurance and risk advisor

Labour shortages, evolving jobsite expectations and increasingly complex projects are reshaping construction risk. A construction-specialist broker brings more than product knowledge. They bring context: How jobsite conditions, equipment fit, culture and leadership behaviours interact with safety outcomes and employment practices risk.

An experienced broker can identify the quiet gaps that create outsized problems later, from employee handbooks that have not been updated in decades to inconsistent complaint documentation to benefits packages that unintentionally drive claims. They can also help your firm tell its story to underwriters in a way that reflects the quality of your operations and culture, positioning you for stronger insurance outcomes and long-term growth.

HUB's construction practice works with contractors of all sizes and specialties to align insurance, safety, risk management and benefits strategy. We help firms build the culture and infrastructure that attracts top talent, reduces claims and drives sustainable growth.

Talk to a HUB construction specialist today.



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