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Purpose Statement

This webinar will explore the key stress factors affecting workers and offer actionable solutions for agencies to improve working conditions. Presenters will discuss how agencies can address the root causes of stress, develop effective mental health programs, and implement strategies to enhance morale and build trust among frontline employees.
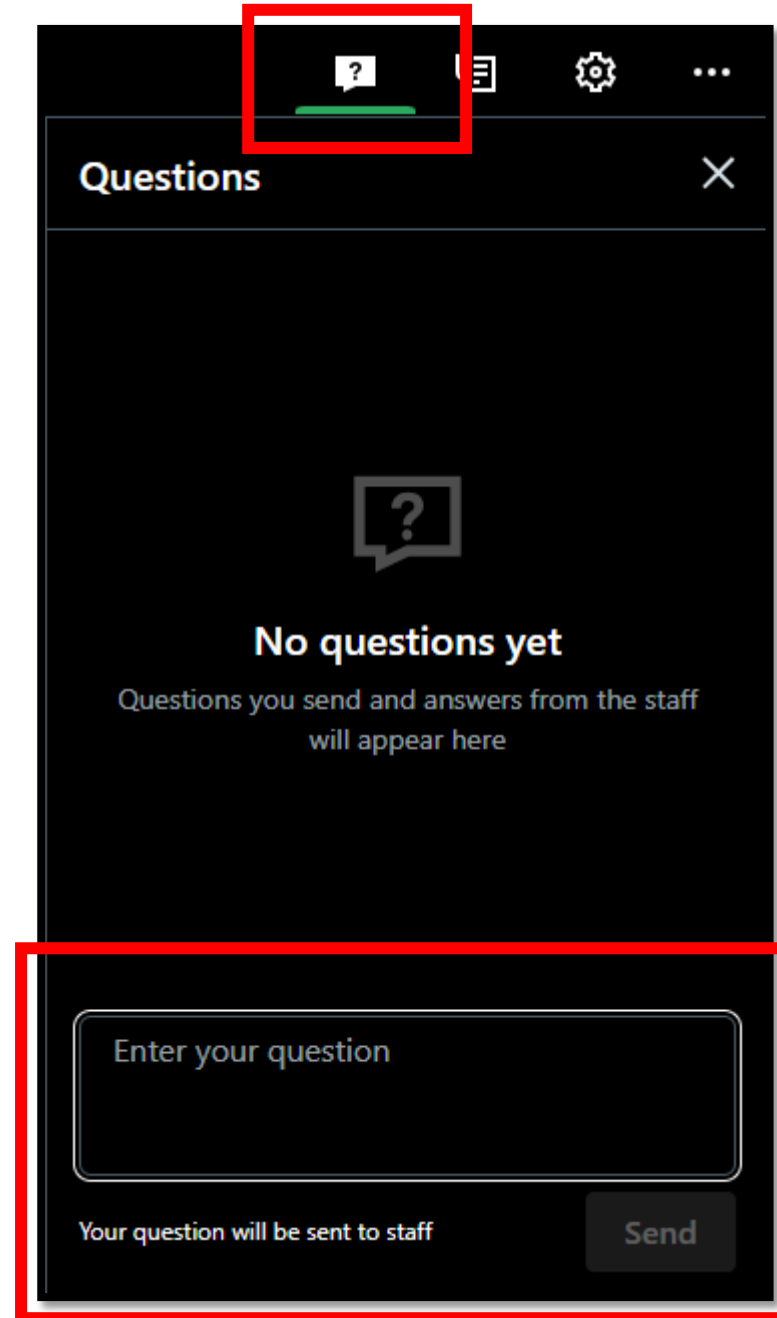
Learning Objectives

At the end of this webinar, you will be able to:

(1) Identify root causes impacting frontline workers' mental health

(2) Employ strategies to better support workers' wellness and increase retention

Questions and Answers

- Please type your questions into your webinar control panel

- We will read your questions out loud, and answer as many as time allows

Today's presenters

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Agenda

- Introductions
  - Software and Moderator
  - Panelists
- Presentations
  - Research overview – Sandy Brennan, Foursquare ITP
  - Root causes and insights from frontline workers – Andrea Lubin, Rutgers
  - Recommended responses and tools for practitioners – Lori Zeller, Foursquare ITP
- Q&A

Note on Sensitive Content

The topics we discuss today are sensitive and may be triggering for some participants. We encourage you to take the necessary steps for your emotional safety. If you feel like you need a break, please feel free to do so at any time.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

NATIONAL ACADEMIES
Sciences
Engineering
Medicine

Research Objectives

The objective of <u>Report 245</u> was to develop a comprehensive guidebook and interactive products that would assist transit agencies and other stakeholders in exploring or implementing approaches to identify and mitigate the factors that cause negative impacts on mental health, wellness, and resilience for transit system workers.

The research addressed the contributing factors to a transit employee's mental health by:

- Documenting the stressors experienced by transit system workers during pre-and peri-pandemic times;
- Documenting the impacts of those stressors at the individual and organizational levels;
- Documenting any differences seen by race, ethnicity, gender, age, and occupation;
- Identifying protective factors and actions that would help proactively develop, promote, and sustain a culture that supports the mental health, well-being, and resilience of transit workers (methods, models, and programs);
- Evaluating the impacts of existing programs, policies, and practices, including labor-management relations and work organization, to address mental health issues;
- Documenting the role of supervisory support in helping employees to manage exposure to stressors; and
- Recommending best practices for transit systems to support the mental health of transit employees (including programs, outreach, education, and bargaining).

Surgeon General's Wellness in the Workplace

1. Our workplace is a significant part of our lives
2. Work affects our physical and mental well-being
3. The pandemic brought the relationship between work and well-being into clearer focus

https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/workplace-well-being/index.html

Research Stats

Review of Literature and Previous Research

80 References

Interviews of Agency and Union Staff

65+ Participants
4 Large Agencies
4 Medium Agencies
2 Small Agencies
2 Sets of Union Reps
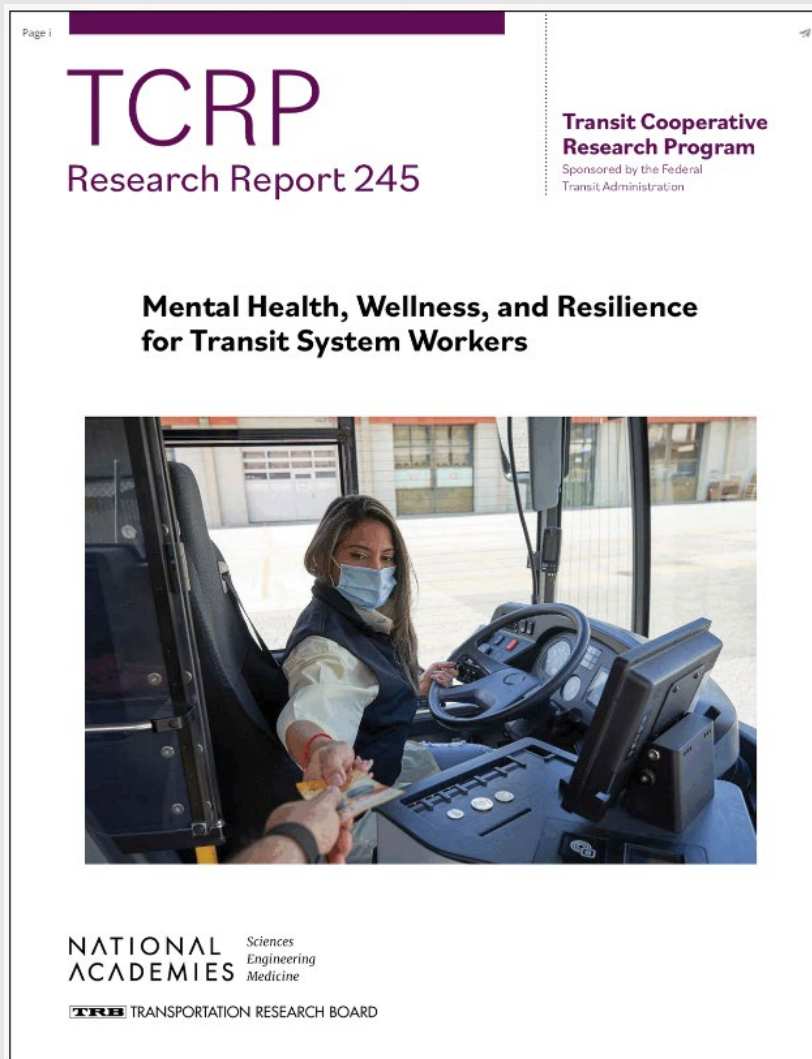
National Survey of Frontline Workers

700+ Responses

Frontline Worker Focus Groups

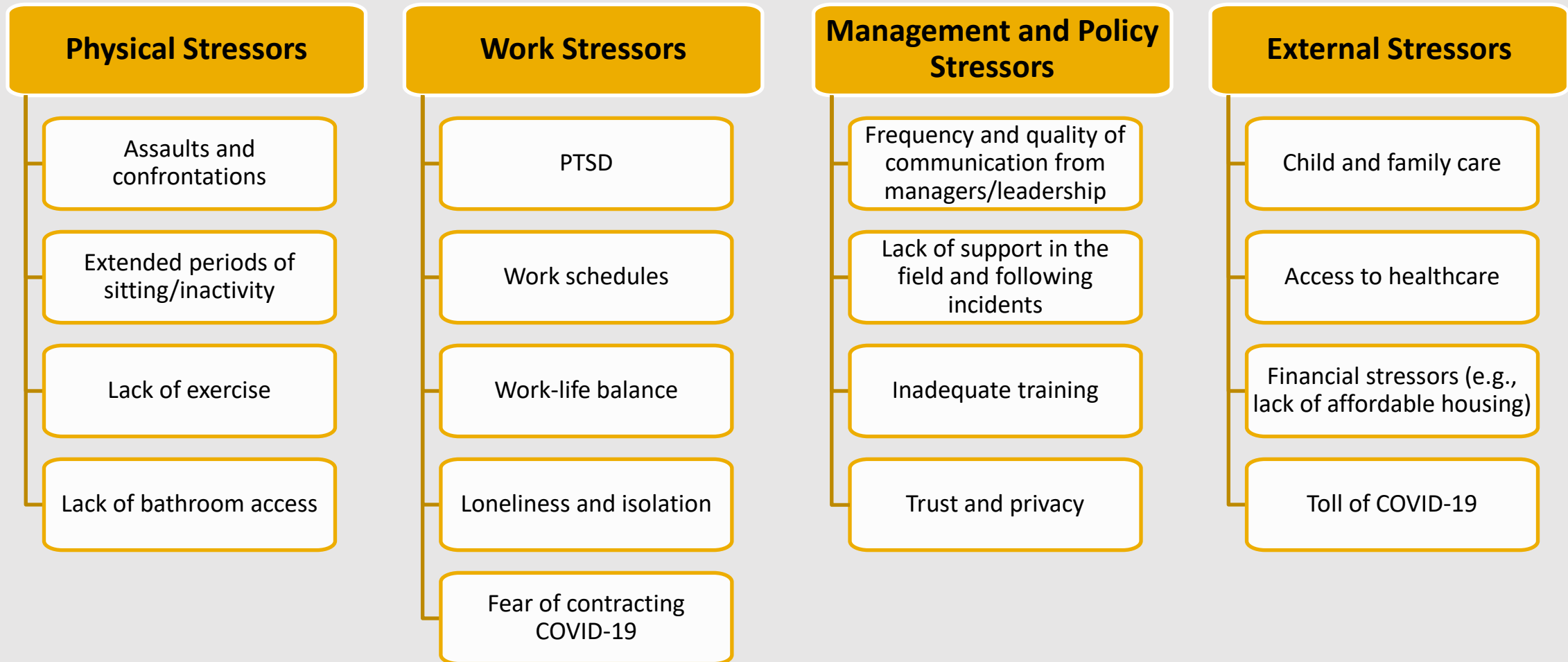2 Rounds
14 Participants
from 10 Agencies

Final Product

Section 1:
Research Report

Section 2:
Resources & Toolkit

Key Findings – Stressors Encountered by Frontline Workers

Physical Stressors
- Assaults and confrontations
- Extended periods of sitting/inactivity
- Lack of exercise
- Lack of bathroom access

Work Stressors
- PTSD
- Work schedules
- Work-life balance
- Loneliness and isolation
- Fear of contracting COVID-19

Management and Policy Stressors
- Frequency and quality of communication from managers/leadership
- Lack of support in the field and following incidents
- Inadequate training
- Trust and privacy

External Stressors
- Child and family care
- Access to healthcare
- Financial stressors (e.g., lack of affordable housing)
- Toll of COVID-19

Interviews

Large Agencies
- MARTA, Atlanta, GA
- Metro Transit, Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN
- Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA), San Jose, CA
- Sun Tran, Tucson, AZ

Medium Agencies
- County of Hawai'i Mass Transit Agency (Hele-On), Hilo, HI
- IndyGo, Indianapolis, Indiana
- Metrolink, Los Angeles, CA
- Central Oklahoma Transportation and Parking Authority (EMBARK), Oklahoma City, OK
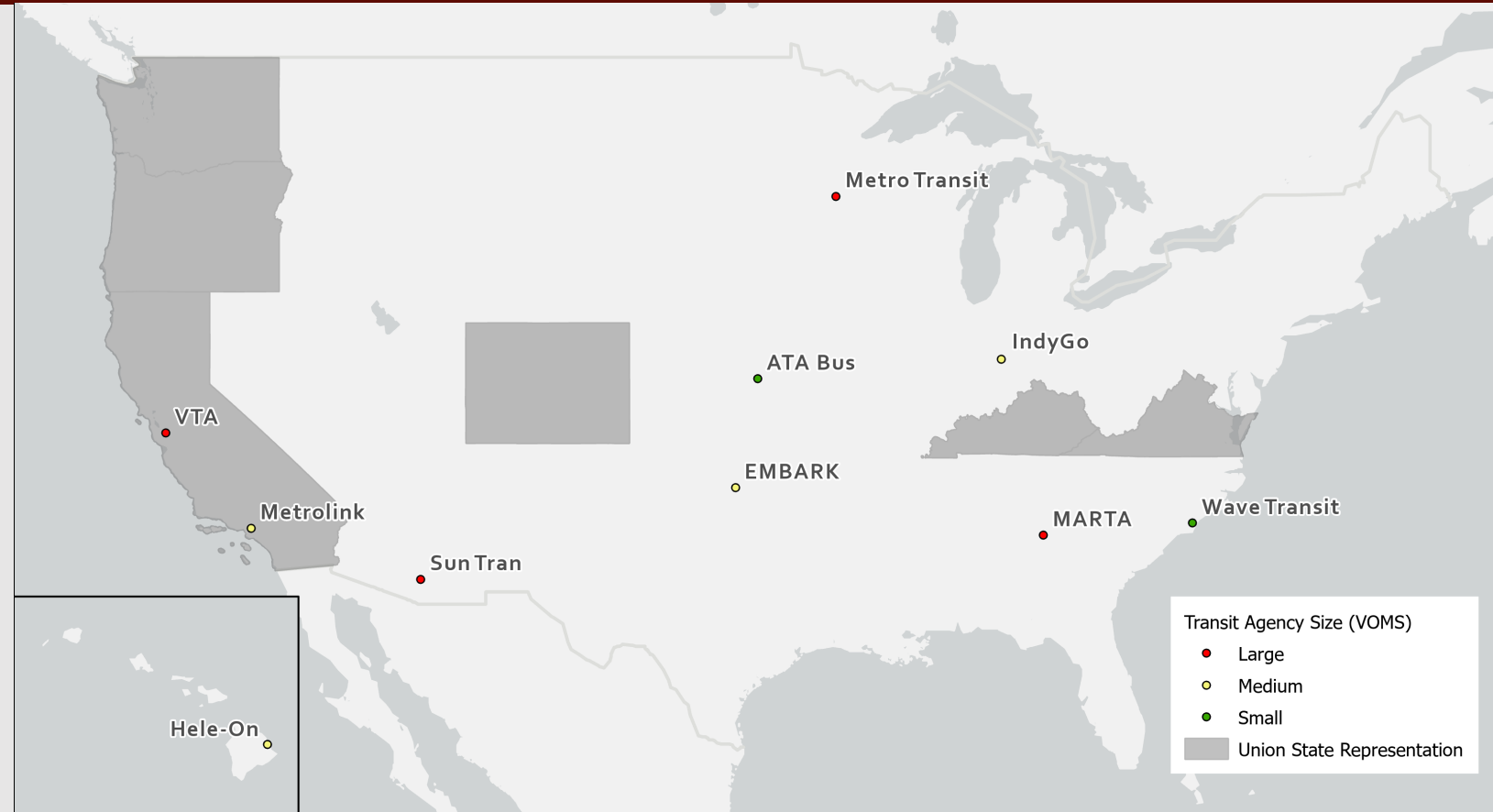
Small Agencies
- Flint Hills Area Transportation Agency (ATA Bus), Manhattan, KS
- Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority (Wave Transit), Wilmington, NC

ATU Representatives from CA, CO, DC, KY, OR, VA, and WA

Key Takeaways from Interviews and Considerations for this Study

- Interviewees confirmed that many of the well-researched causes and stressors impacting transit workers' mental health and wellness remain barriers and challenges.

- The COVID-19 pandemic instilled a lot of fear and anxiety among frontline workers.

- More resources and a clear commitment from leadership are necessary for mental health, wellness, and resiliency practices to be successful and make a positive impact on frontline workers.

- Collaboration in the development and implementation of practices is critical to removing stigmas and gaining trust among employees, unions, and leadership.

ROOT CAUSES AND INSIGHTS FROM FRONTLINE WORKERS

Frontline Worker Virtual Focus Groups

Background

- Two 60-80 minute sessions
- Convened virtually on 11/14/22 & 5/3/23
- 14 total participants, primarily frontline employees from 10 transit agencies

Session Goals

- Gather qualitative data & insights on frontline worker mental health issues and stressors
- Inform finalization of the frontline transit worker online survey (*session #1*)

Key Topics Covered

- Identify workplace factors contributing to frontline worker stress and mental health issues
- Discuss workplace culture, resources & barriers related to frontline worker mental health
- Review possible strategies to improve frontline worker mental health

Sources of Mental Health Stressors – Findings

- Personnel shortages, including operators

- Work-life balance

- Personal safety

- Issues related to long runs

- On-time schedule demands

- Cost of living

- Ongoing concerns with COVID-19

Workplace Culture & Continuity of Mental Health Care/Support Findings

- Workplace culture

  - Message that workers should be capable of resolving issues independently

  - Limited managerial support during and post incidents

- Limited continuity of mental health care/support

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Workplace Resources for Mental Health & Wellness Support Findings

- Limited workplace mental health resources available

- Mixed feedback on frontline staff awareness for these resources

- Awareness generated at orientation; via internal work emails; fliers/bulletins posted on-site; HR correspondence; and peer word of mouth

- Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) were the most common resource example noted

Strategies to Improve Frontline Worker Mental Health & Wellness

☑ Develop a professional support team to offer onsite and post-incident support to frontline workers.

☑ Include a staff counselor or psychiatrist onsite to enhance access.

☑ Programs offering one-on-one and/or small group support can be particularly beneficial & may help reduce stigma related to seeking assistance.

☑ Implement a 'ride-along' program for supervisors to shadow frontline workers.

☑ Implement empathy & sensitivity training for supervisors so they can better support frontline workers experiencing mental health stressors and issues.

☑ Implement training for frontline workers on strategies for addressing issues with passengers exhibiting mental health symptoms.

☑ Increase availability of operator counseling & mentorship opportunities for frontline workers and supervisors.

Strategies to Protect Frontline Workers Against Threats of Harm

☑ Increase presence of security officers or personnel in the field to protect operators.

☑ Explore benefits of safety features, including physical barrier protections or enclosures between passengers and operators.

☑ Enforce existing agency policies related to passenger codes of conduct designed to protect frontline workers.

☑ Engage in an ongoing dialogue with local law enforcement and the prosecutor's office on strategies to enforce laws for handling inappropriate passenger behavior.

☑ Expand communication with the public on the role of frontline workers in meeting community mobility needs.

☑ Improve lighting at bus depots to better protect operators.

Frontline Worker Survey

- Conducted February - March 2023 nationwide

- The online survey received 777 complete responses from frontline transit workers

- Key survey goals:

  - Better understand factors affecting mental health & wellness of frontline U.S. transit workers

  - Gather feedback on strategies to improve workplace mental health & resilience

Survey Results

97% of respondents reported experiencing negative workplace conditions

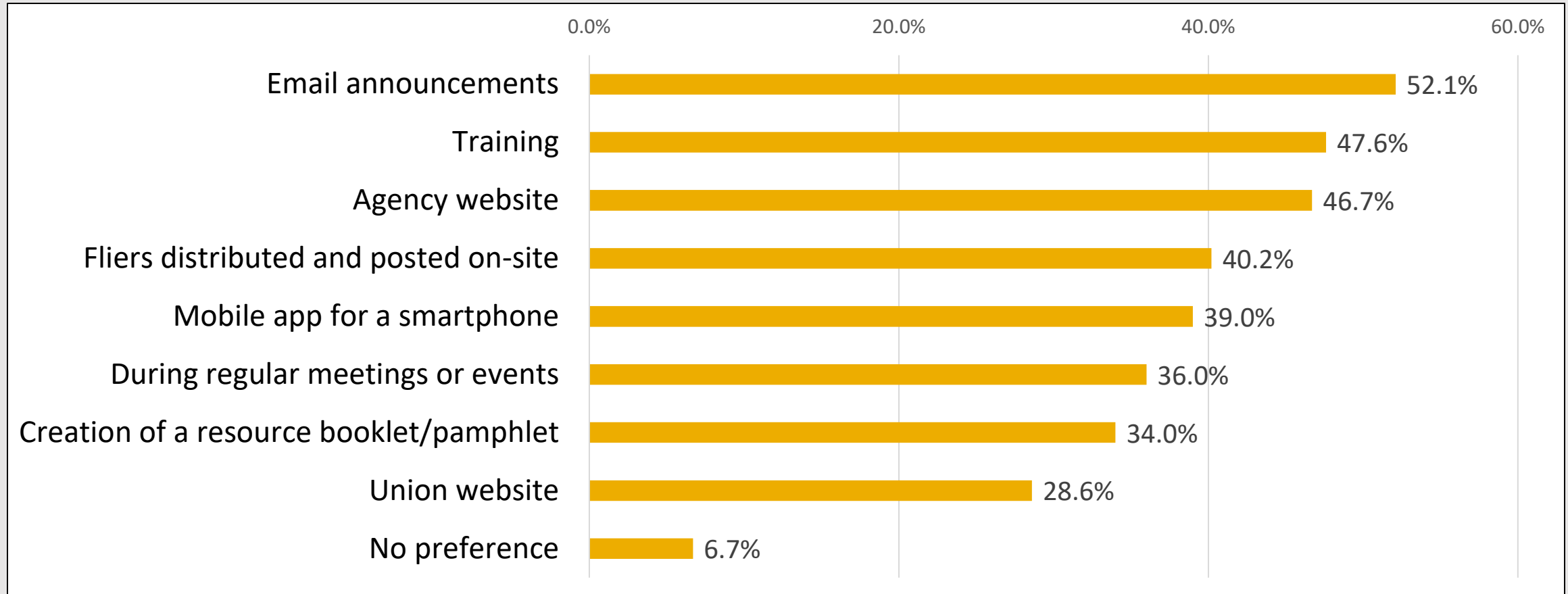|			
Understaffing is a major cause of stress	Exposure to drugs and substances	Verbal and physical threats or assaults	Elevated anxiety and depression
Mix of awareness of employer resources	Challenges in utilization of employer resources (lack of time, missed work/pay, privacy concerns)	Moderate satisfaction of resources	Preferences for 1-on-1 services

What mental health or wellness training, if any, would be helpful if offered by your agency?

Training for managers on empathy/compassion for frontline workers — 63.1%

Training on how to support my own mental health and wellness — 60.2%

Training on strategies for handling passengers with mental health or substance use issues — 58.0%

Training on how to communicate with passengers/deescalate problems — 55.5%

None of these would be helpful — 7.7%

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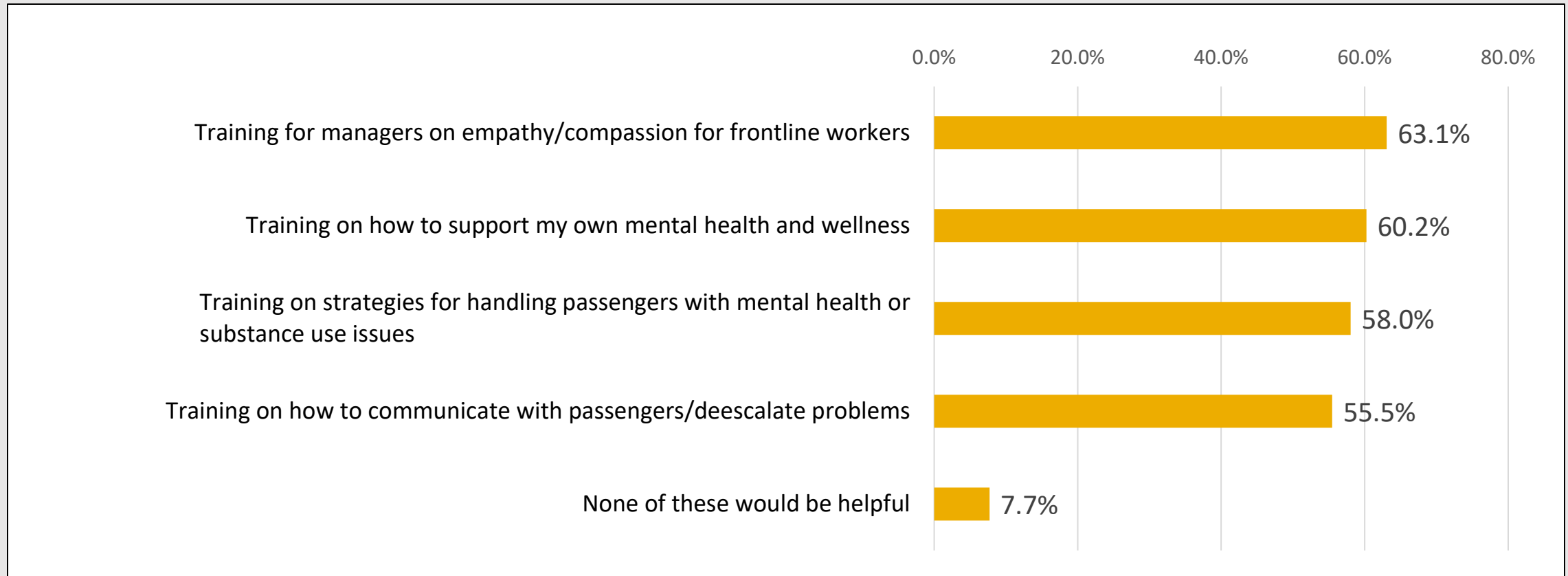
Policy Change Results by Transit Occupation

Operators (compared to other roles) were significantly more likely to endorse the helpfulness of scheduling and field-work relevant policies:

- Access to restrooms during field work (61.2% vs. 22.4%, $x2=85.89$, $p < .001$)

- More recovery/break built into timetables (65.4% vs. 28.4%, $x2=79.22$, $p < .001$)

- Access to healthy foods during field work (55.3% vs. 38.8%, $x2=15.51$, $p < .001$)

- More in-field support (49.0% vs. 20.3%, $x2=20.16$, $p < .001$)

- Having a less variable work schedule (36.0% vs. 21.4%, $x2=14.01$, $p < .001$)

- Time off on weekend/evenings (38.6% vs. 24.4%, $x2=12.81$, $p < .001$)

RECOMMENDED RESPONSES AND TOOLS FOR PRACTITIONERS

Final Product

Section 1:
Research Report

Section 2:
Resources & Toolkit

RESEARCH REPORT: RECOMMENDED RESPONSES

Improve the physical safety of the workplace

- Physical barriers
- Enforce existing policies

Provide more training to empower employees for adverse conditions

- De-escalation training
- Incident response

Strengthen and enforce policies to protect frontline workers

- Clearly outline and enforce policies
- Passenger code of conducts

Provide more support in the field and ongoing support after incidents

- Offer specialized staff trained in incident response
- Ongoing support is also needed following incidents

Improve and diversify communication and marketing efforts of resources

- Use a variety of formats for marketing
- Offer a mix of times/locations for accessing services
- Build awareness through constant reminders (e.g., discuss regularly)

Provide peer support and mentoring

- Develop formal programs

Empathy training for managers

- Increase understanding and support for frontline workers

Evaluate quality and effectiveness of EAPs/UAPs

- Align services with employee needs
- Involve employees in selection / feedback on services
- Develop monitoring process to improve offerings

Adjust benefits and policies to support mental health and work-life balance

- Change practices around scheduling/ work assignments
- Increase flexibility of time-off

Address privacy concerns

- Consider 1-on-1 services
- Employ mental health pros
- Off-site or separated services

Build trust

- Reduce stigmas
- Collaborate to find solutions

Strengthen relationships among frontline workers

- Provide opportunities for socializing and connecting

RESOURCES & TOOLKIT

Considerations for Toolkit (Interview Findings)

- The toolkit should be accessible and easy to read.

- Resources presented in the toolkit should be scalable to agencies of different sizes and cognizant of how regional and cultural differences may play a role in how mental health is approached.

- Highlighting examples and best practices is useful for agencies to understand what their peers are doing.

- Step-by-step guides or checklists are approachable resources.

Case Studies

MARTA
Using technology to connect employees with support

VTA/ATU Local 265
Increased access to mental health services, trained professionals, and other benefits

MARTA
Incentives for wellness program participation

IndyGo
On-site health clinic services

IndyGo
Creative marketing

VTA/ATU 265
Critical Incident Support Teams

Metro Transit
Red Kite Project Resiliency Training

TriMet
Lactation van for nursing operators

VTA/ATU 265
Training and mentorship for retention and advancement

MTA Operator Restroom Workgroup

TWU Local 100
Union Assistance Program

MARTA Incentives for Wellness Program Participation

- **Challenges addressed:** Low utilization of existing mental health and wellness resources.
- **Goal:** Increase the use of existing resources and preventive care measures, to benefit employee health, attendance, and resilience, both in the short and long term.
- **MARTA provides employees and covered spouses with up to $250 per person, per year for their participation in the Wellness Rewards program.**
  - In coordination with the agency's health insurance provider.
  - Employees complete multi-step assessment of their health and then are assigned personalized steps to follow. Once they complete them, they receive their incentive.
  - Additional incentives for wellness follow-ups, exercise activities, and participation in other program activities.

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TriMet Lactation Van for Nursing Operators

- **Challenges addressed:** The workplace conditions of frontline transit workers do not accommodate parents and caregivers.

- **Goal:** Support nursing operators to pump while at work.

- **TriMet transformed a paratransit van into a mobile lactation unit that offers a secure, comfortable, and convenient place to pump while completing a driving shift.**
    - Van meets the operator during their scheduled break. Extraboard operators drive the vans to and from the relief locations.
    - Collaborative effort:
        - Paratransit department provided the van.
        - Maintenance personnel and the nonrevenue vehicle department undertook the sourcing of equipment, furniture, and other supplies.
        - The union, operations, and maintenance identified issues and addressed them together.

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VTA/ATU 265 Training and Mentorship for Retention and Advancement

- **Challenges addressed:** Frontline transit workers feel unprepared for their jobs and lack clear pathways for career growth.

- **Goals:** Help ease new employees into their job; improve retention, mental health, and wellness of frontline workers.

- **Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA), in collaboration with the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 265, established the Joint Workforce Investment (JWI) program to provide training, mentorship, and opportunities for upward mobility and continual growth.**
  - New operators are paired with veteran operators who serve as **mentors**. Mentors are trained via a course offered by a local university partner.
  - The JWI **curriculum** covers health, wellness and professional development. Learn to apply **stress management/health and wellness techniques** and how to manage on the job stress and make good judgments while alone.

WELCOME TO JOINT WORKFORCE INVESTMENT

Contact JWI
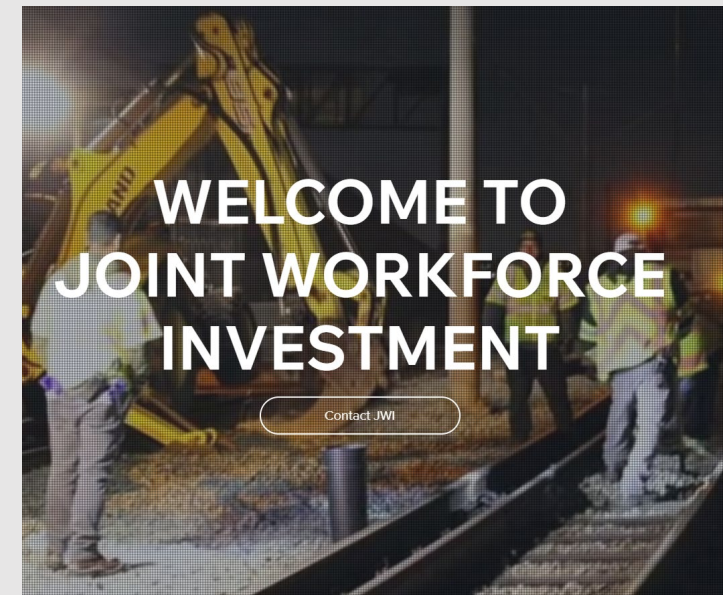
JWI Program – Results and Resources

- **Results:**
  - The mentorship program now has over 100 mentors for around 900 operators working at VTA.
  - Program success measured using four key metrics: attendance, retention, accident occurrences, and customer service complaints.
    - At the program's conception, the JWI established a control group, which has served as a baseline for the effectiveness of having a mentor.
    - Operator retention and attendance are significantly higher among JWI participants than the control group, and accident occurrences are less frequent.
- **More resources:**
  - JWI's website: https://www.jwiworks.com/
  - *Transit Apprenticeship Programs: Partnerships Driving Success.* APTA webinar from Nov 21.
    - Available at: https://learning.aptagateway.com/products/transit-apprenticeship-programs-partnerships-driving-success

Section 2: Toolkit

Program evaluation framework

- Provides guidance on using a **capability maturity matrix** for program evaluation.

Evaluating and Improving EAPs and UAPs

- Provides ~~~~~~~ guide th~~~~~~ and imp~~~~~~ EAPs an~~~~~~

How to Make the Case for Increased Benefits to Support Mental Health and Wellness

- Provides **example messages**, **related statistics**, and **guidance** on building a message.

Table 6.4. Worksheet: Accessing services in EAPs and UAPs.

Guiding Questions	Agency/Union Answer	Notes on Process/Metrics
Process Components		
Eligibility. Who can access assistance program resources?	Check all that apply: ☐ Staff (direct hires) ☐ Staff (contracted) ☐ Staff (direct hires) and spouses	

Example Messages and Related Statistics

- **Transit agencies will save money.** Mental health support can help reduce overall healthcare and disability costs. Statistics from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) suggest that people with depression have a 40% greater risk of developing cardiovascular and metabolic diseases (NAMI, n.d.). Moreover, people with a serious mental illness are nearly twice as likely to develop such conditions. Thus, supporting employees' mental health is critical to avoid these conditions and the associated costs of treatment.

- **Increased wellness and mental health offerings lead to increased retention.** A survey conducted by Mind Share Partners (2021) found that approximately 50% of full-time workers in the United States have had at least one mental health reason for leaving a job. These points suggest a greater need for employers to provide mental health support for their employees.

- **Mental health programs increase productivity.** According to the World Health Organization (WHO), anxiety and depression cost the global economy around $1 trillion per year in lost productivity (WHO, n.d.). WHO also estimates that every $1 spent on treating common mental health concerns is associated with a return of $4 in improved productivity and health. A study by Goetzel et al. (2018) demonstrated that about 86% of employees receiving depression treatment were found to have improved work performance.

Section 2: Toolkit

Increasing Training Offerings

- Offers **guidance** on creating empathy trainings (A), leadership ride-alongs (B), and intervention training (C).

Developing and Implementing Mentor and Peer Programs

- Provides **guidance** for the development of a mentorship program and lays out **types of programs**.

Select a Program Model

There are a variety of models for mentorship or peer programs, each with its own benefits and shortcomings. After goals are established, agencies and unions must determine which mentorship model will fit agency needs and goals. Different mentorship models include traditional, one-

Table 6.15. Training solutions for common challenges.

Challenge or Sentiment	Potential Training Solution
Operators at my agency feel like they are unprepared to handle incidents with passengers.	Training B Training C
Managers do not have the experience or knowledge to provide operators with guidance concerning incidents with passengers.	Training A Training B
Relations between managers and frontline workers are tense.	Training A Training B
Incidents involving mental health crises or aggressive passengers on our system are occurring frequently or with increasing frequency.	Training B Training C

far-reaching, allowing for more mentees with fewer mentors. Among frontline transit workers, this type of program can be especially helpful for bus drivers who operate similar routes or encounter common issues at the same stations or locations.

Other Resources

- **Transit Workforce Center (TWC)**
  - Resource center provides apprenticeship and mentorship resources
  - Webinars on related topics
  - Conferences and meetings – Making Connections 2024 (anticipated in 2026)
  - www.transitworkforce.org
- **American Public Transportation Association (APTA)**
  - Workforce Mini-Guides and Workforce Readiness Guide
  - Workforce Summit held earlier in 2024
  - www.apta.com/research-technical-resources/aptau/
- TCRP F-32: Enhancing Transit Organizational Culture to Improve Employee Psychological Health and Safety, Recruitment, and Retention (underway)

Q&A

Question for Participants #1

- **What stressors does your workforce encounter the most? (select up to 2)**
  - Physical stressors (e.g., assaults, confrontations, lack of bathroom access, lack of exercise)
  - Work stressors (e.g., scheduling, work-life balance, loneliness or isolation)
  - Management/policy stressors (e.g., lack of training, support in the field, support from management)
  - External stressors (e.g., financial hardships, child/elder care, housing)
  - Other

Question for Participants #2

- **What types of resources have helped your workforce address mental health and wellness? (select all that apply)**
  - Employee/union assistance programs
  - Wellness programs or incentives
  - Agency-provided health services
  - Intervention training and support
  - Updating operations policies
  - Increased/improved benefits
  - Mentoring and peer programs

Question for Participants #3

- **What types of resources <u>do you wish you had</u> to improve your workforce's mental health and wellness? (select all that apply)**
  - Employee/union assistance programs
  - Wellness programs or incentives
  - Agency-provided health services
  - Intervention training and support
  - Updating operations policies
  - Increased/improved benefits
  - Mentoring and peer programs

Questions?

Thank you for attending!

Today's presenters

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Upcoming events for you

December 17, 2024

TRB Webinar: Laboratory Methods and Specifications for Testing Tack Coat Materials

December 18, 2024

TRB Webinar: Resolving Ambiguities Between 3D Virtual Models and the Real World

https://www.nationalacademies.org/trb/events

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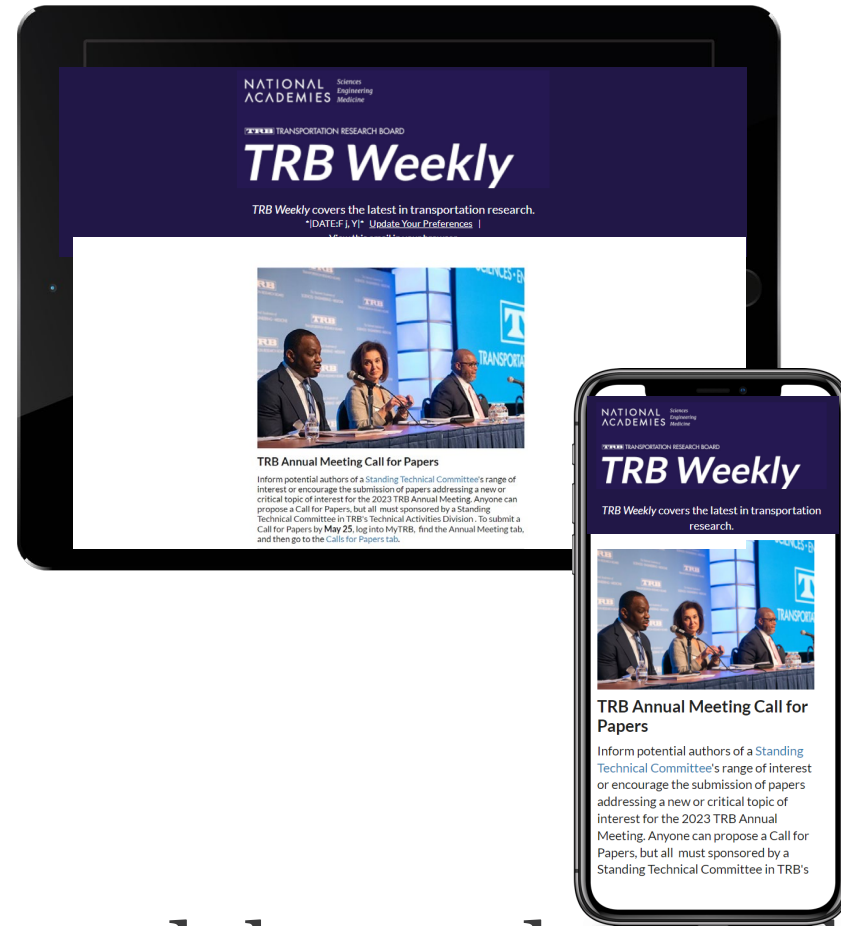
January 5 – 9, 2025
Washington, D.C.

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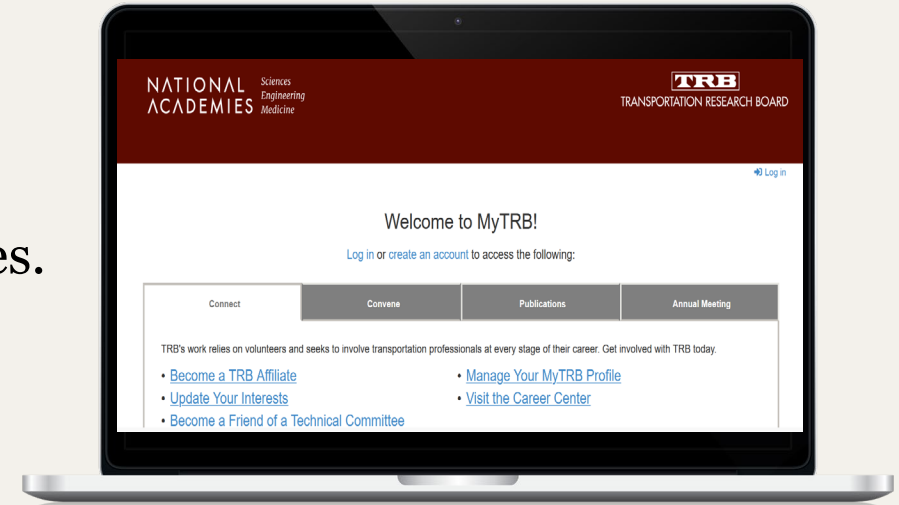
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