



Safety News

Dedicated to ensuring the safest and healthiest working environment for our members

Spring 2026 | Issue 36

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Message from Jennifer Massey

Health, Safety, and Environmental Administrator



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Safety is not a slogan. It is a commitment we make to one another every time we step onto a job, enter a facility, lead a crew meeting, or check in on a coworker who does not seem like themselves. In the United Association,

safety goes beyond rules, procedures, and compliance. It includes how we protect the body, care for the mind, and build environments where every member feels seen, respected, and empowered to speak up.

This issue reflects that broader vision. We begin with a memorial tribute to Noel Brandon, one of our VitalCog instructors, whose work and leadership helped move important conversations about mental health and suicide prevention forward. You will also find articles on hydration, nutrition, exercise, emotional intelligence, and energy-based hazard recognition using the Energy Wheel. These topics are connected by

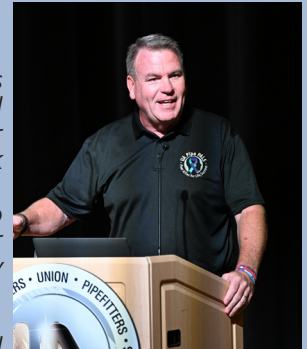
a common thread: People perform best and stay safest when they are supported as whole human beings.

Construction continues to face serious mental health challenges. In our article on suicide in construction, we cite 2021 statistics from the Center of Construction Research and Training (CPWR) that show the death by suicide

A Message from General President Mark McManus

Brothers and Sisters,

Across the United Association, safety is not just a requirement; it is a shared commitment to protect one another as brothers and sisters. When we look out for each other's body, mind, and well-being, and turn awareness into action on every jobsite, we honor one another and ensure that every member goes home safely.



We carry that responsibility forward by speaking up when something is not right, by supporting those who may be struggling, and by building a culture where strength is measured not only by the work we perform, but by the care we show one another. This is how we lead, how we build trust, and how we secure a stronger, safer future for every member of the United Association.

We especially remember our Brother Noel Donald Brandon. His leadership, dedication, and work in mental health awareness showed us what it means to truly look out for one another. His courage to have the hard conversations and his commitment to the well-being of his fellow members continue to inspire us all to act with compassion.

Mark your calendars for the UA/MCAA Mental Health Summit! Let's keep the conversation going and continue building a safer, stronger workplace together.

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Our Vision

The United Association and its local unions will apply its best practices and resources to build the most educated and safest workforce in all sectors of the piping industry.

rate for workers in construction is still the highest across all industries. Nearly 20% of industrial suicides were in construction, even though our industry represents only about 7.4% of the workforce. More recent CPWR reporting shows some improvement from 2023 to 2024, but the burden remains far too high.

That is why this newsletter is intentionally practical. In addition to raising awareness, we are pushing for action in all facets of safety. Drink water before you feel thirsty. Fuel your body like the industrial athlete you are. Notice when stress is changing the way a teammate communicates. Slow down enough to identify hazards that instinct alone may miss. And when someone is struggling, ask directly, listen without judgment, and help connect them to support.

Join us from Sunday, October 18 to Wednesday, October 21, 2026, in Washington, D.C., to keep building momentum at the **UA/MCAA Mental Health Summit**. More information to come.

Thank you for the high standard of work you set every day. Together, let's keep building a union culture where awareness becomes action, and every member goes home safely in body, mind, and spirit.

2152 OSHA 502: Update for Construction Industry Outreach Trainers

April 6-9	10:00 am - 4:30 pm	Online (Zoom)
July 20-23	10:00 am - 4:30 pm	Online (Zoom)
September 21-24	10:00 am - 4:30 pm	Online (Zoom)
December 14-17	10:00 am - 4:30 pm	Online (Zoom)

2171 Introduction to Peer Support Skills and Mental Health Literacy

June 2-4	8:00 am - 5:00 pm	Anchorage, AK
September 15-17	8:00 am - 5:00 pm	Dorchester, MA
October 13-15	8:00 am - 5:00 pm	Jacksonville, FL

2172 Advanced Skills in Suicide Prevention Training, Peer Support Skills, and Mental Health Literacy

April 21-23	8:00 am - 5:00 pm	Meridian, ID
June 16-18	8:00 am - 5:00 pm	Chicago, IL
July 21-23	8:00 am - 5:00 pm	Anchorage, AK
November 10-12	8:00 am - 5:00 pm	Dorchester, MA
December 8-10	8:00 am - 5:00 pm	Jacksonville, FL

2173 Substance Abuse and Addiction in the Workplace

May 11-14	8:00 am - 5:00 pm	Online (Zoom)
September 14-17	8:00 am - 5:00 pm	Online (Zoom)
November 9-12	8:00 am - 5:00 pm	Online (Zoom)

TRAINING



2148 OSHA 511: Occupational Safety and Health Standards for General Industry

June 22-26	10:00 am - 4:30 pm	Online (Zoom)
September 14-18	10:00 am - 4:30 pm	Online (Zoom)

2149 OSHA 501: Trainer Course in Occupational Safety and Health Standards for General Industry

October 19-23	10:00 am - 4:30 pm	Ann Arbor, MI
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2150 OSHA 510: Occupational Safety and Health Standards for the Construction Industry

May 11-15	10:00 am - 4:30 pm	Online (Zoom)
July 13-17	10:00 am - 4:30 pm	Online (Zoom)
September 28 - October 2	10:00 am - 4:30 pm	Online (Zoom)
November 16-20	10:00 am - 4:30 pm	Online (Zoom)

2151 OSHA 500: Trainer Course in Occupational Safety and Health Standards for Construction

June 15-19	8:00 am - 5:00 pm	Ann Arbor, MI
October 12-16	8:00 am - 5:00 pm	Ann Arbor, MI
December 7-11	8:00 am - 5:00 pm	Ann Arbor, MI

IN MEMORY OF NOEL DONALD BRANDON



This issue is dedicated to the memory of **Noel Donald Brandon**, one of our VitalCog instructors, a United Association brother, and a man whose work touched lives far beyond the classroom.

Noel passed away in a tragic accident on **January 1, 2026**, at the age of **31**. He was born on **August 7, 1994**, in Renton, Washington, and is remembered by family and friends as a devoted father, beloved son, loyal brother, adored uncle, and a man who carried both heart and humor into every room he entered.

Noel found his calling in HVAC refrigeration and began his journey with **Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 32 in Seattle, WA, in March 2016**. He joined **MacDonald Miller Company** in April of that year and completed his apprenticeship in **November 2021**. Like many great tradespeople, Noel did not stop at mastering the craft. He grew into a teacher, mentor, and trainer known for his patience and natural ability to help others learn. Along with sharing information, Noel filled others with confidence.

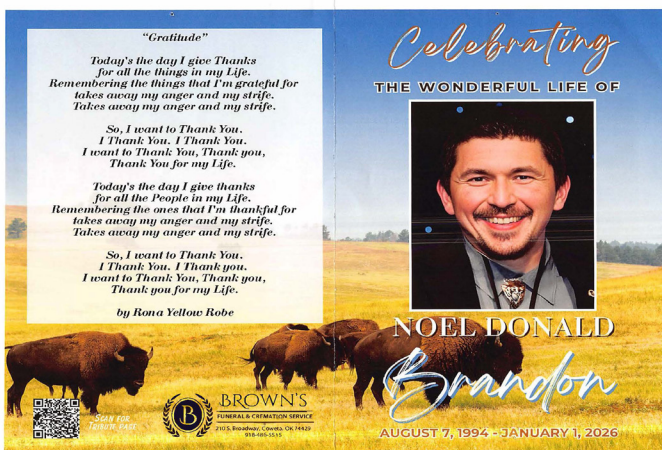
What makes his story especially meaningful at this time is his leadership in mental health awareness. Noel's work developing suicide prevention and awareness curriculum took courage. He believed that one conversation can change a life, and he was willing to meet others in difficult places to talk openly about pain and hope. He cared deeply for his coworkers

and understood that strength in our industry must include compassion.

In construction, it is easy to praise production, technical skill, and endurance because those things obviously matter to the bottom line. It is more difficult to change the work culture, and most often requires a person who opens doors by making it safer for others to speak honestly. Through training and action, Noel helped make that possible. He reminded us that looking out for one another is not extra—it is essential. His example is his legacy.

In remembering Noel, we can recommit ourselves to his cause. We honor him when we check in on a brother or sister who seems withdrawn and take mental health seriously. We also honor him when we carry his work forward by using our voices to interrupt silence, shame, and isolation.

Let's remember Noel Donald Brandon for his service, his kindness, his teaching, and the lives he helped influence for the better. We miss you, brother.



From the 2021 report:

- The suicide death rate for workers in construction was **2.4 times higher** than the rate for all industries: **46.1 versus 19.5 per 100,000 workers**.
- **17.9% of suicides linked to a reported industry** were in construction, even though construction workers made up only **7.4% of the workforce** that year.
- Among men, the construction suicide rate was **50.5 per 100,000**, compared with **30.0 per 100,000** for all industries.

There are signs of progress, but the numbers remain devastatingly high. CPWR and NABTU's 2026 [REASON report](#) says deaths by suicide in construction decreased from 5.1 thousand in 2023 to 5.0 thousand in 2024, and the rate declined from 43.2 to 41.9 per 100,000 workers. That movement matters, but it also highlights how much work remains.

Behind these statistics are real people, real families, and real coworkers facing stressors familiar across our industry: long hours, physical pain, layoffs, travel, financial strain, isolation, substance misuse, relationship pressures, sleep disruption, and the persistent belief that silence signifies toughness. When these pressures stack up, members can feel trapped. That is why the most important response is human, immediate, and direct.

Ask the questions: Are you okay? Are you thinking about suicide?

These questions do not plant the idea; they open a door to help.

The construction workplace culture is changing, but only when we choose to act. What does action look like? Some examples include: checking in after a shift, making space during a toolbox talk, offering to sit with someone while they call 988, or noticing that a normally engaged coworker has become withdrawn, angry, numb, or reckless. Sometimes prevention looks dramatic; more often, it looks like patience, attention, and presence.

This must be the United Association standard of action. We do not wait until a crisis makes a problem visible. We build crews where speaking up is safe, where asking for help is respected, and where people know they matter before they ever say they are struggling. The CPWR website has a [resource page](#) to help organizations and individuals quickly access information on suicide prevention.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, call or text **988**. Help is available. Hope is real. And in the United Association, no one should have to fight alone.

HEALTH AT WORK



Suicide Prevention in Construction: The Conversation Continues

Mental health is a safety issue—a statement backed by both hard data and lived experience in the construction industry. CPWR, the Center for Construction Research and Training, reports that construction workers continue to carry a disproportionate burden of suicide.

Train Like an Athlete for a Long and Healthy Career

United Association members are industrial athletes. That term matters because it changes how we think about long-term health and performance on the job. Just as an athlete trains for output, endurance, precision, recovery, and longevity, so do we. Construction work demands strength, mobility, focus, balance, grip, coordination, and decision-making under pressure. We lift, climb, kneel, twist, weld, fit, carry, and solve problems in environments that test both the body and the mind.

Food is fuel for work and sports. United Association members cannot perform like athletes without the right fuel. Yet too many of us skip breakfast and grab an energy drink, or if you're like me, coffee, lots of coffee. Too often, we work through lunch and finish the day exhausted. Then do it again. While common, this cycle is neither healthy nor sustainable.

When we use the term industrial athlete, we recognize that the body is one of the most important tools on the job, and its maintenance starts with food. Meals do not have to be complicated to be effective. Focusing on real food and consistency for steady energy matters above perfection. A breakfast with protein and complex carbohydrates supports better stamina than starting the day on caffeine alone. Lunch that includes lean protein, fruit, and vegetables provides slow-burning fuel to help workers avoid the sharp midafternoon energy crash. Practical and simple snacks, such as fruit, nuts, yogurt, cheese, and sandwiches, and adequate hydration, all boost performance and prevent running on fumes.

Exercise matters too because conditioning protects careers. It doesn't mean that every worker needs a gym membership, but strength, mobility, and cardiovascular health all improve resilience. Stretching before a shift can prepare muscles and joints. Regular, self-directed exercises, such as walking, resistance training, mobility work, and simple recovery routines, can help reduce fatigue and support safer movement. Stronger workers are often better able to control loads, maintain posture, recover from awkward positions, and avoid the small strains that can lead to long-term injuries.

Recovery is just as important. Sleep, hydration, and active recovery are not optional luxuries for high-performing crews, but are key to exertion readiness. A tired, dehydrated, under-fueled worker is more likely to rush, misjudge, forget, or miss something important. It's human physiology, not a character flaw.

Industrial athletes prepare for the workload and then recover from it. They understand that safety

and performance begin long before the task starts. Taking care of the body is a conversation our industry needs to continue having. Members who hydrate, eat with intention, stretch, train, and prioritize recovery are professionals investing in longer, more productive careers. That's commitment,

SAFETY AT WORK



Jobsite Hydration is a Safety Necessity

As spring moves into summer and external temperatures rise, hydration must be treated as a jobsite control, not a personal preference. Too often, workers think drinking water is a matter of comfort or discipline, but in truth, it is a frontline safety measure. Hydration affects cognition, reaction time, coordination, endurance, and decision-making on the job.

OSHA's heat guidance is clear: Employers should provide cool drinking water, rest, and access to shade or cooling areas because proper hydration is essential for preventing heat-related illness. OSHA notes that heat illness warning signs may include headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, heavy sweating, confusion, and collapse. CDC and NIOSH add that occupational heat stress is not just a "summer issue." It is driven by a combination of physical workload, environmental heat, and clothing or personal protective equipment (PPE), all of which can raise body heat and increase risk.

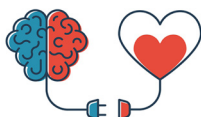
For United Association members, that risk is magnified by the nature of the work. We perform physically demanding tasks in enclosed mechanical spaces, on rooftops, in trenches, in process areas, boiler rooms, fabrication shops, and outdoor environments where heat can build quickly. Add welding gear, gloves, long sleeves, respirators, face shields, or chemical protective clothing, and the body must work even harder to cool itself. Heat stress is not typically a result of being careless—it happens in the normal course of business, where workers are exposed, busy, and behind on fluids.

That is why hydration needs to be part of pre-task planning. Crews should begin the day already hydrated, not try to catch up after symptoms begin. Supervisors should plan water access the same way they plan tools and material staging, and water breaks should be scheduled and considered normal parts of the shift. Newer workers and those returning after time away need time to acclimate because the body needs gradual exposure to adapt to hot conditions.

Both [OSHA](#) and [CDC](#) emphasize the value of a written heat plan that includes monitoring, training, work-rest schedules, emergency response, and acclimatization. Most importantly, crews must stop treating water breaks as a weakness. A worker who steps back, cools down, and rehydrates is making the safe choice. Conversely, workers who push through a headache, nausea, or dizziness are not showing toughness—they are putting themselves and others at risk of injury.

The heat safety messages for every jobsite are simple: Water. Rest. Shade. Check on each other. Watch for early signs. Speak up fast. In hot weather, hydration is not extra. It is part of the work.

Emotional Intelligence Is a Safety Skill



The phrase “emotional intelligence” might seem like it belongs in a leadership seminar rather than a safety newsletter. However, research and organizational practice have discovered that emotional intelligence belongs on every jobsite because it improves communication, judgment, intervention, and trust.

Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize what we are feeling, understand how those feelings affect behavior, and respond in ways that support better decisions and stronger relationships. It is also being able to read the room, notice when others are frustrated or withdrawn, and communicate in a way that calms tension instead of escalating it.

How does emotional intelligence influence safety? Incidents rarely happen under perfect conditions. They are more likely when crews are rushed, distracted, angry, embarrassed, exhausted, overconfident, or reluctant to ask questions. Technical competence and physical well-being are critical, but the emotional climate weighs in. If a worker fears being mocked for requesting clarification, hazards are more likely to go unchallenged. If a foreman corrects with humiliation instead of respect, people stop speaking honestly. If stress builds and nobody addresses it, performance begins to erode.

Emotionally intelligent crews communicate sooner and more effectively. They recognize that a disagreement is coming from fatigue or frustration, and that silence can mean confusion, not agreement. When people ask instead of assume, and challenge without attacking, they begin to create a foundation for more productive safety actions, including stop work authority, pre-job planning, and peer support.

For leaders, emotional intelligence is especially important. When supervisors set the tone every day by staying composed, listening carefully, and responding with respect, they make it easier for

workers to raise concerns before a problem becomes an incident. Likewise, when leaders dismiss emotion as a weakness, they lose valuable information about risk. Stress, distraction, and conflict are human factors that shape safety outcomes, and leaders need to manage them.

Emotional intelligence is a powerful ally in supporting mental health. Workers often show distress through their behavior before they speak about it. Irritability, withdrawal, agitation, hopeless comments, loss of focus, or sudden changes in routine can all signal that something deeper is happening. A teammate with emotional intelligence may be the first person to notice.

This does not mean every foreman must become a counselor, but by talking about emotional intelligence, crews can build new safety skills. The whole team can become more aware, more respectful, and more effective communicators.

The United Association supports treating emotional intelligence like any other protective measures and practices. By creating jobsites where people can bring concerns forward early, when something can still be done about them, we improve performance and the likelihood of intervention while strengthening our culture.

SEEING AND DOING MORE ABOUT HAZARDS BEFORE WORK BEGINS

Hazard recognition is one of the industry’s most important safety skills, yet research shows it is also one of our most limited. New insights on applying principles of emotional intelligence in combination with Hazard-Based Energy Recognition show promise for identifying more hazards and improving safety.

In previous newsletters, we have taken a deep dive on Energy-Based Hazard Recognition and its primary tool, the Energy Wheel—covering its scientific basis, energy categories, and their application in construction site pre-task planning. [This article](#) by subject matter expert Matthew R. Hollowell is an approachable and thorough overview of the topic.

For context in this article, the Energy Wheel specifies 10 hazardous energy sources and how they typically manifest themselves in the workplace. The wheel provides crews with a structured way to scan the work area, look beyond the most obvious choices, and consider more effective safety precautions. According to Hollowell’s research, before being introduced to the Energy Wheel, workers in pre-job safety briefings identify only about 45% of the hazards they actually face during the work period. The same research found

that using the Energy Wheel improved hazard recognition by approximately 30% because it prompts workers to search for hazards they might otherwise overlook.

That finding is changing how we think about pre-task planning. Because people naturally spot some hazards more easily than others, missed hazards are often not the result of laziness or complacency. The oversight could be due to a predictable human blind spot. For example, energy sources, such as gravity and motion tend to stand out, whereas people are more likely to miss mechanical, pressure, chemical, and other less visible energy sources.

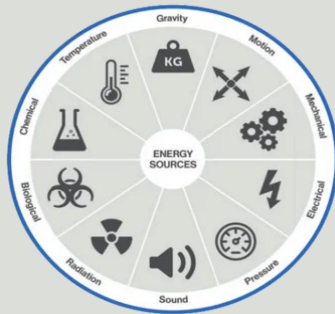
In practical terms, the Energy Wheel provides a mental checklist that helps crews ask insightful questions before work begins. Where is the stored energy? Where can motion begin unexpectedly? What pressure is trapped? What electrical source is present? What temperature, chemical, radiation, sound, gravity, motion, or biological exposure could harm a worker if control is lost? Thinking through these questions widens the conversation and improves the quality of the pre-task briefing.

Tapping into Emotional Intelligence

While the Energy Wheel discipline helps identify hazards from a more scientific, technical approach, safety also depends on the less tangible awareness or judgment that says something is not right before an incident occurs. This is where emotional intelligence fits into every safety conversation. [Daniel Goleman](#), whose book helped popularize the concept of emotional intelligence, emphasized that strong performance is not based on knowledge or technical ability alone. It also depends on self-awareness, self-control, motivation, empathy, and the ability to manage relationships effectively. On a jobsite, these are not just soft skills, they are invaluable safety skills.

Emotional intelligence helps workers recognize what is happening within themselves and among others. It allows a foreman to sense when a crew is rushed or frustrated. It helps a coworker notice when someone who is usually engaged has become withdrawn, distracted, irritable, or unusually quiet. It helps teams communicate more clearly, respond calmly under

ENERGY WHEEL



WHAT TYPES OF HAZARDOUS ENERGY ARE PRESENT?

pressure, and speak up before a small concern becomes a serious event. In that sense, emotional intelligence is directly tied to injury prevention.

It also connects to something every experienced tradesperson understands—gut instinct. Most workers have had a moment when something just did not feel right. It might have been an unclear plan, a rushed task, poor communication, something about the equipment, or the energy in the room that raised concern even before anyone could fully explain why. That instinct should never be ignored. In many cases, gut instinct is not random. It is the brain processing subtle warning signs based on experience, observation, and awareness. It is often the body and mind recognizing risk before the worker can fully articulate it.

Trusting that instinct can prevent injuries. When something feels off, it is the time to slow down, ask questions, reassess the work, and, if necessary, use stop-work authority. Emotional intelligence gives workers the self-awareness to recognize their own discomfort, the confidence to speak up, and the communication skills to raise the concern in a way that protects the crew. It also helps leaders receive those concerns without defensiveness and fosters a culture where people know they will be heard.

Taking Hazard Management to the Next Level

The [Safety Classification and Learning Model](#) was developed by a team affiliated with the Edison Energy Institute to consistently classify serious injury and fatality (SIF) incidents and observations. The model uses high-energy assessment and the presence or absence of direct controls to determine SIF potential. In other words, it is not enough to identify the energy source and its hazard; we need to know whether the right controls are in place, and if they are effective and reliable.

For the United Association, this approach has real value. Emotional intelligence helps workers sense when something is wrong. Gut instinct tells them to pause. The Energy Wheel provides a system to examine what may be wrong. Together, these tools make hazard recognition more teachable, more consistent, and less dependent on chance. They support pre-job meetings, sharper field observations, and stronger communication between experienced workers and newer members. Additionally, they help challenge assumptions that may have become automatic over time.

The goals are clear: look beyond what seems obvious. Pay attention to what feels wrong. Use a system. Slow down. Scan for energy sources. Confirm controls. Talk through the work until everyone can clearly see the risks. Better hazard recognition is all about productive pre-task planning that ensures every member goes home safely.

FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION

This issue began with remembrance and ends with a call for responsibility.

We remember Noel Brandon because legacies matter. We look at CPWR's suicide data because facts matter. We talk about hydration, nutrition, exercise, emotional intelligence, and hazard recognition because prevention resides in the daily habits of our crews. None of these topics stands alone—they reinforce one another.

- A worker who is physically depleted is more likely to miss a hazard.
- A worker who is emotionally overloaded is more likely to shut down or make a rushed decision.
- A crew that does not communicate well is less likely to catch blind spots.
- A culture that ignores mental health weakens every other part of safety.

Our United Association family has been working hard to raise awareness, and we will continue to honor it. The next step is to focus on integrating mental health more deeply into our safety conversations and practices. We need to incorporate hydration into our work plans and use the Energy Wheel during pre-job planning. Physical conditioning should influence the way we think about career longevity. Emotional intelligence can enhance leadership development. Every one of these actions is vital to the safety of our members.

Looking ahead to October, an exciting event is planned to build momentum in the construction industry's conversation about mental health. The [UA/MCAA Mental Health Summit](#) is set for Sunday, October 18, through Wednesday, October 21, 2026, at the **Grand Hyatt Washington, D.C.** The summit advances the industry-wide commitment to move from awareness to practical action on mental health and resilience. Watch for



more information from the General President's office about this limited-capacity event.

After reading this issue, we ask that you take at least one action. Check in on a coworker. Bring water to the next briefing. Talk to your crew about fueling the body as industrial athletes. Use the Energy Wheel to support hazard recognition at the next pre-task meeting. Ask one thoughtful question about direct controls.

Keep the conversation going, because that is how culture changes. One person at a time. One conversation at a time. One action at a time.

SAFETY AWARENESS DATES AND EVENTS FOR YOUR CALENDAR



- **April 20 - 24:** [National Work Zone Awareness Week](#)
- **April 28:** [Workers Memorial Day](#)
- **May: 4 - 8:** [National Safety Stand-Down to Prevent Falls in Construction](#)
- **May:** [Healthy Vision Month](#)
- **May:** [Mental Health Awareness Month](#)
- **June:** [National Safety Month](#)
- **August 10 - 16:** [Safe + Sound Week](#)



PIPE UP!
WITH THE GENERAL PRESIDENT

The podcast can be accessed at ua.org/pipeup, or scan the QR code.



If you or someone you know needs immediate help



988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - a free and confidential (U.S.) resource that connects individuals with skilled, trained counselors 24/7.
Call 988 or 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)

Use the online **Lifeline Crisis Chat**