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Associated General Contractors of Massachusetts takes measures to address opioid crisis

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Boston, MA The Associated General Contractors of Massachusetts (AGC MA), convened a summit in late January 2019 at the Westin Copley Hotel, to address the devastating impact of the opioid crisis on the commercial construction industry. The 170-plus representatives from construction management and general contracting firms, subcontractors, and the building trades, strategized ways the industry can unite to more effectively address the issue and seek help for affected employees.

The event featured a presentation by healthcare and healthcare provider experts Michael Botticelli of the Grayken Institute, Lisa Kelly-Croswell, Boston Medical Center, Ken Duckworth, BCBS MA & National Alliance for Mental Illness and Julianne Bride, Blue Cross Blue Shield of MA. They provided statistics on the societal, medical and economic impact of opioid use in Mass. and the challenges faced by both employers and their employees seeking help.

Among the statistics discussed from the Boston Medical Center's anonymous employee survey:

- 30.8% of employees surveyed confirmed having an immediate family member who had experience with an SUD
- 51.2% of employees felt uncomfortable speaking with a supervisor about mental health or substance use issues they were experiencing
- Top two reasons for not speaking to a manager: concerns about confidentiality and fear of missing out on possible career advancement

Although opioid prescription use has fallen, the annual cost of opioid addiction and treatment has risen into the millions for employers in lost time, job turnover and training and medical coverages. A Massachusetts Taxpayer Foundation survey revealed that opioids have kept an estimated 32,700 people from participating in the labor force in Massachusetts over the past seven years and 4.2% of total employed in the state reported pain reliever misuse. These individuals average an extra 18 more days off from work than those who do not misuse prescription pain medications.

A panel of construction employers and trade union officials shared their perspectives on implementing practical solutions as it applies to the commercial construction industry. Shaun Carvalho, Shawmut Design & Construction; Maureen Kirkpatrick, Turner Construction; David Argus,

Karas & Karas Glass; Frank Callahan, MA Building Trades Council and Jeff Werner, N.E. Regional Council of Carpenters Benefits Funds presented examples of best practices which include:

- Widespread awareness and training
- Bolstered wellness services and preventative programs
- New confidential and trusted resources
- A goal to eliminate any stigma that may suppress an employee or union member from seeking the help they deserve

Tim Irving, assistant regional administrator for the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) closed the presentation with The Agency's commitment to provide tools and resources to prevent work-related injuries, illnesses, and deaths with a new 24/7 Workplace Challenge ensuring workers not only go home safe but return the next day healthy and productive.

David Argus focused attendees squarely on the plight of the individuals, and their families who suffer daily from opioid addiction by reading a poem written by a recovered addict. Argus' point: Only through confidentiality, dignity and respect can the industry begin to prevent, treat and work towards recovery and mitigate the devastating impact on construction workers and their families.

"The commercial construction industry has been disproportionately impacted by the opioid crisis and this Summit was the first step in identifying actionable steps we can take as an industry and as employers," said Mike O'Brien, board chairman of the AGC of MA and business unit leader of Gilbane Massachusetts and Northern New England offices. "It's critical that we remove any perceived stigmas and provide the necessary resources to create safe, healthy and supportive work environments to all industry workers."

On January 31, 2019 AGC MA and a delegation of industry associations met with MA Health & Human Services secretary Mary Lou Sudders and DMH commissioner Dr. Monica Bharel, to report on the best practices revealed at the January 23 Summit and offer its collective support to the Baker Administration on the issue. In return, the Administration pledged its data, resources and assistance to the industry.

Summit partners included: Associated Subcontractors of Massachusetts (ASM), Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC), Building Trade Employers Association (BTEA), Construction Industries Association of MA (CIM), National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA) and the Utility Contractors Association of NE (UCANE) with a portion of the program sponsored by Travelers Insurance.

As a follow-up, AGC MA plans to implement an industry-wide, Job Site Opioid Stand-Down Day, coordinate access to resources for employers and employees through the AGC website, and launch an Opioid Awareness Program, made possible through a grant from the Massachusetts

Construction Advancement Program (MCAP).

All proceeds of the January 23, 2019 program will be donated to the Grayken Institute.

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