

EARN Webinar:

Substance Use Disorder at Work: Building Recovery-Ready and Safety-Ready Workplaces

September 23, 2026

Featured Speakers

Julie Hocker

Assistant Secretary of Labor for Disability
Employment Policy
U.S. Department of Labor



Julie Hocker is the U.S. Assistant Secretary of Labor for Disability Employment Policy, leading the Office of Disability Employment Policy with a mandate to expand opportunity, strengthen accountability, improve workplace safety, and deliver results for Americans with disabilities and mental health conditions. Assistant Secretary Hocker has a strong record of national leadership in workforce development, disability policy, and public-private collaboration. Before joining the Department of Labor, she worked as a consulting executive, modernizing vocational rehabilitation, Medicaid, and developmental disability programs. From 2018 to 2021, Assistant Secretary Hocker served as the U.S. Commissioner on Disabilities at the Department of Health and Human Services, overseeing federal programs on developmental disabilities, independent living, brain injury, and limb loss differences.

Chris Trahan Cain, CIH

Executive Director

CPWR – The Center for Construction
Research and Training



Chris Trahan Cain is CPWR's Executive Director. In partnership with and on behalf of government agencies, construction and non-construction unions, as well as the construction safety and health community at large, she leads CPWR's construction research, training, and service programs. She also serves as the director of safety and health for North America's Building Trades Unions (NABTU)—also known as the Building and Construction Trades Department of the AFL-CIO. NABTU's 14 national and international unions collectively represent over 3.2 million workers. She is the chair of NABTU's Overdose and Suicide Prevention Task Force and Safety and Health Committees, working with the Trades, their employers, and other industry partners to improve working conditions for the nation's construction workers.

Dr. John S. Gaal,
CPS, CWP, CHW-C, LAP-C

Director

Worker Wellness Program

Missouri Works Initiative



Dr. John S. Gaal has served as the director for the Missouri AFL-CIO's Missouri Works Initiative's Worker Wellness Program since March 2021. In addition, John volunteers as the chief learning officer of the Saint Louis Building Trades Wellness Coalition and chief research officer of the Construction's Acute Suicide Postvention Response project. As a labor representative, he continues to serve on the Postvention Committee of the Missouri Suicide Prevention Network and as a member of the International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plan's Mental Health Expert Panel. John completed a union apprenticeship in carpentry over 40 years ago and has since earned an associate's degree in construction management, a bachelor's degree in architecture, master's degree in international business, and a doctorate in organizational leadership. He also completed post-doctoral projects at Harvard University (Trade Union Leadership: 2009) and University of Florida (Marketing & Management: 2014). John was honored with two Fulbright (Specialist) Scholarships in Labor and Industrial Relations (Tokyo, Japan: 2010 and Toronto, Canada: 2015). He has published numerous articles in peer-reviewed and professional journals on issues related to various aspects of workforce development and worker wellness. Since 2018, John has completed a variety of mental health certifications and, in 2023, earned his Labor Assistance Professional certification. At the end of January 2019, after 40 years of service, John retired as the director of Training and Workforce Development for the St. Louis-Kansas City Carpenters Regional Council. Dr. Gaal has been married for 42 years, has four children, and has served as an adjunct professor at Webster University for more than 30 years.

Ashley Bryant, LPC

Extension Associate

Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and
Disability



Ashley Bryant is an extension associate at the Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability. Dr. Bryant supports EARN's research and content development on workplace mental health and accessibility. Dr. Bryant is passionate about workplace access, and she has a wealth of experience working as a rehabilitation counselor to ensure people with disabilities are included in the workforce. She served as a corporate consultant and trainer for Dellanni Consulting and a Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist III for the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services prior to joining the Yang-Tan Institute. Dr. Bryant is a licensed mental health counselor. Her dissertation research involved exploring the role of family cohesion in influencing the vocational identity status of emerging adults with autism spectrum disorder.

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