

# Labor Unions' Role in Reducing Occupational Health Inequities

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New York University  
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## Occupational health inequities

- ❑ Avoidable differences in work-related mental or physical illness or death
- ❑ Closely linked with social and/or economic disadvantage such as:
  - work arrangements (e.g., contingent work)
  - socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., age, sex, race, class)

Promoting productive workplaces through safety and health research **NIOSH**

### Occupational Health Equity



<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/programs/ohe/default.html>

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Work Organization, Job Insecurity, and Occupational Health Disparities

Discrimination, Harassment, Abuse and Bullying in The Workplace:  
Contribution of Workplace Injustice to Occupational Health Disparities

Education and Training for Underserved Populations

The Health of the Low-income Workforce: Integrating Public Health and  
Occupational Health Approaches

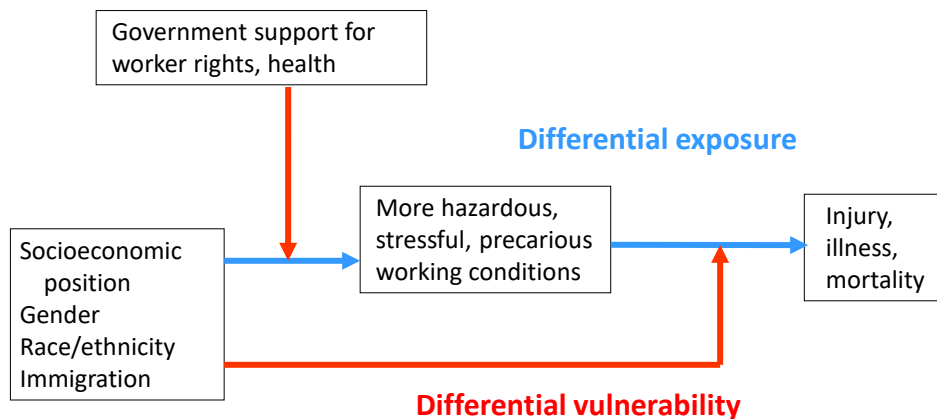
Effects of Social, Economic, and Labor Policies on Occupational Health  
Disparities

<http://www.aoecdata.org/conferences/healthdisparities/index.html>

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## Social stratification & health inequalities



Landsbergis PA, Grzywacz JG, LaMontagne AD. Work organization, job insecurity, and occupational health disparities. *Am J Ind Med.* 2014; 57: 495-515.

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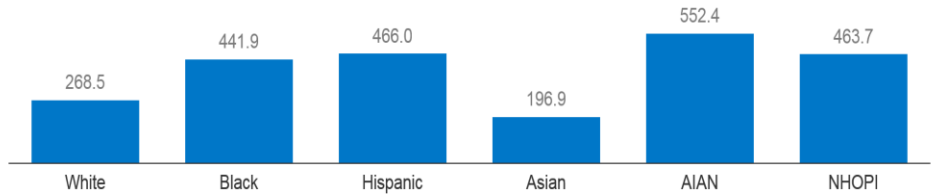
4

Figure 1  
**Cumulative COVID-19 Age-Adjusted Mortality Rates by Race/Ethnicity, 2020-2022**

Rates per 100,000 population

Click on the buttons below to see data for the different metrics:

Cases **Deaths**



NOTE: Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race but are categorized as Hispanic for this analysis; other groups are non-Hispanic. AIAN refers to American Indian or Alaska Native. NHOPI refers to Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. Death data as of August 3, 2022. Age-adjusted rates standardized to 2019 U.S. Census Bureau population estimates.

SOURCE: KFF Analysis of National Center for Health Statistics. Provisional COVID-19 Deaths by HHS Region, Race, and Age. Date accessed August 4, 2022. Available from <https://data.cdc.gov/d/tcp-uv5>. • PNG

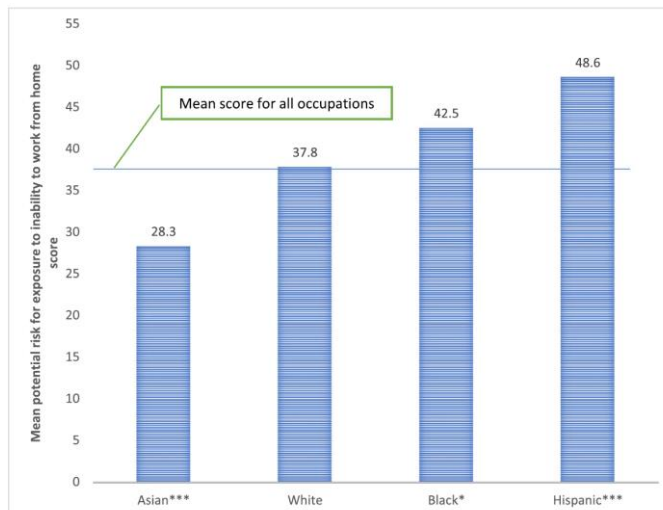


<https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/covid-19-cases-and-deaths-by-race-ethnicity-current-data-and-changes-over-time/>

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## Inability to work from home

March-April 2020 Current Population Survey and O\*Net data

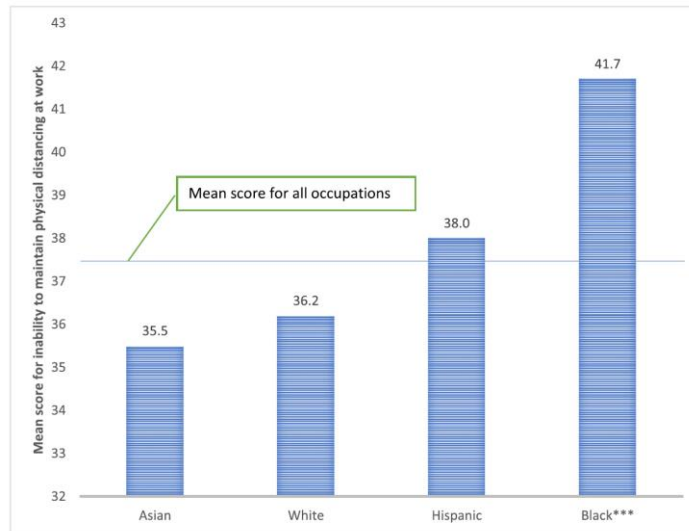


Asfaw A. Racial Disparity in Potential Occupational Exposure to COVID-19. Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-021-01110-8>

6

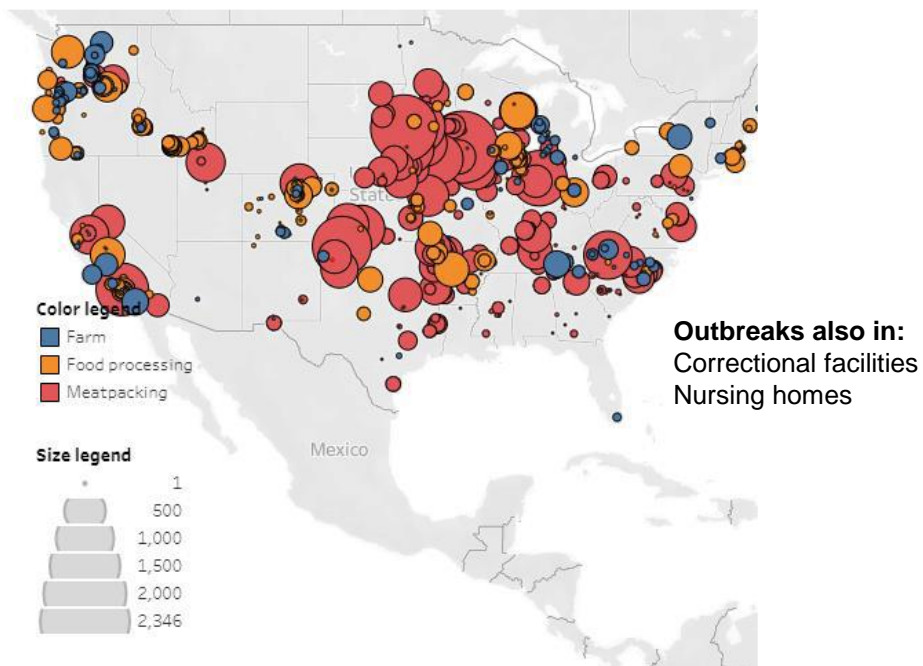
# Inability to maintain physical distancing at work

March-April 2020 Current Population Survey and O\*Net data



Asfaw A. Racial Disparity in Potential Occupational Exposure to COVID-19. *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-021-01110-8>

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Spieler EA. Occupational Safety and Health, Essential Workers, and the COVID-19 Pandemic in the U.S. - Report to the International Labour Organization, 2022

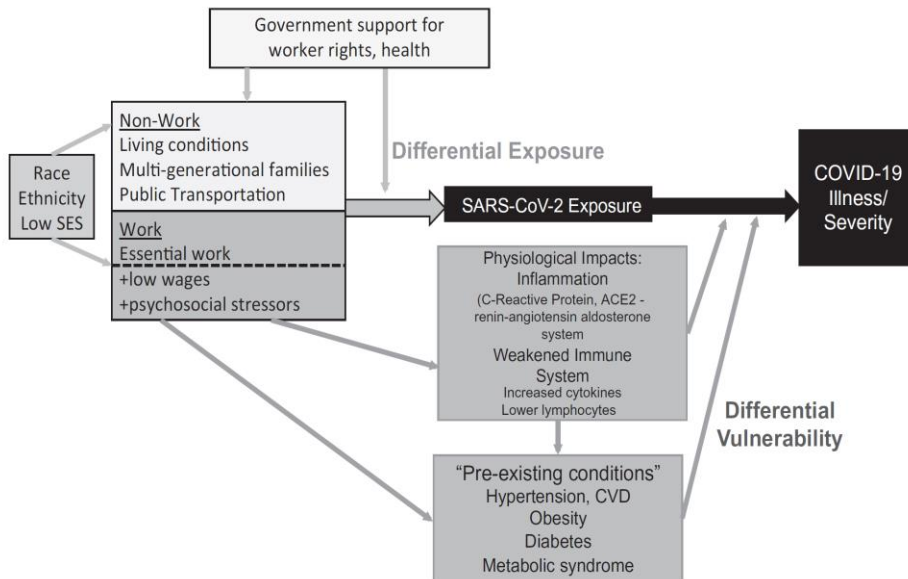
8

### Top 8 occupations in COVID-19 mortality risk (2020): Higher % Black, Hispanic workers than US labor force %

| Occupation                             | COVID-19 mortality, per 100,000, age 16-64 | % Black (12.6%) | % Hispanic or Latino (18.5%) |
|--|--|-----------------|------------------------------|
| Protective service                     | 60.3                                       | 20.9%           |                              |
| Food preparation                       | 57.5                                       | 13.9%           | 28.1%                        |
| Construction & extraction              | 57.3                                       |                 | 40.3%                        |
| Transportation                         | 56.0                                       | 20.3%           | 24.3%                        |
| Farming, fishing, forestry             | 54.8                                       |                 | 44.7%                        |
| Personal care & service                | 51.2                                       |                 |                              |
| Production                             | 44.8                                       | 15.0%           | 24.3%                        |
| Building/grounds cleaning, maintenance | 43.7                                       | 14.0%           | 40.4%                        |

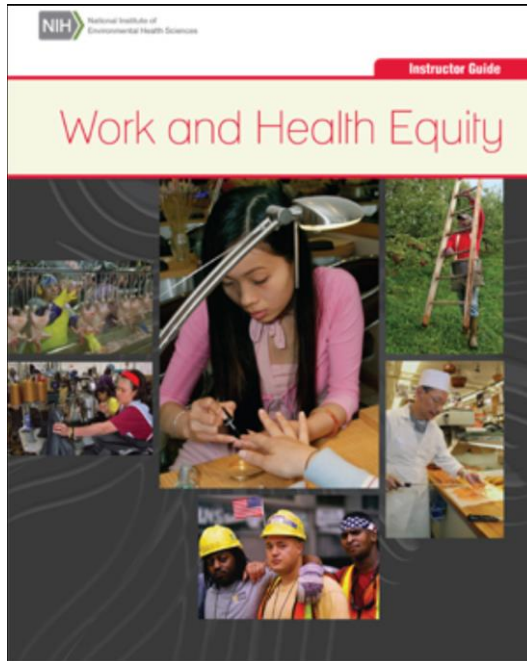
Billock RM, Steege AL, Miniño A. COVID-19 mortality by usual occupation and industry: 46 states and New York City, United States, 2020. National Vital Statistics Reports; vol 71 no 6. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2022. <https://dx.doi.org/10.15620/cdc:120292>

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Faghri P, Dobson M, Landsbergis P, Schnall PL. COVID-19 Pandemic: What has work got to do with it? *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 2021;63(4):e245-e249. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33560072/>

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**Section 1: Introduction to Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)**

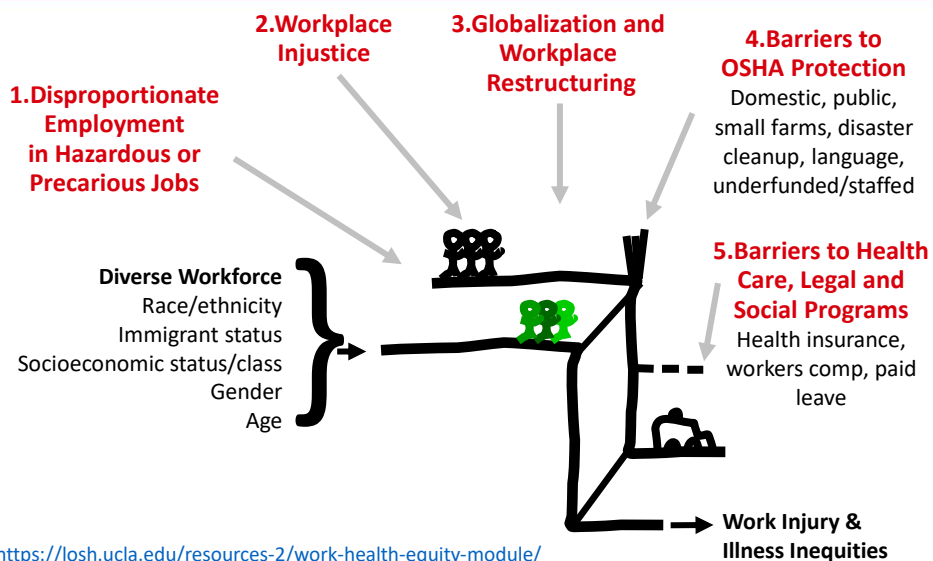
**Section 2: Social Determinants of Worker Health and Equity**

**Section 3: Ways to Better Working Conditions**

<https://losh.ucla.edu/resources-2/work-health-equity-module/>

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## How Occupational Health Inequities Occur



<https://losh.ucla.edu/resources-2/work-health-equity-module/>

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## COVID-19 impact on transport workers

- ❑ Norway, Sweden, Spain, UK, USA: transport workers had higher risk of exposure to SARSCoV-2 and **higher COVID-19 death rates**
- ❑ ITF 7 country study -- workers reported pandemic & associated lockdowns worsened existing hazards/stressors while introducing new harms:
  - delayed, inadequate, **insufficient PPE**, disinfectants, distancing
  - passenger **aggression** related to mask requirements
  - **anxiety**, fear of infection, stress, burnout, disrespect, social isolation
- ❑ Reduced transit service due to quarantines, lockdowns, budget shortfalls & worker illness absences → sometimes to **reduced wages, layoffs**

<https://www.itfglobal.org/en/news/essential-public-services-essential-workers-health-union-based-initiatives-protect-mental>

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**International Transport Workers Federation (ITF)**

<https://www.itfglobal.org/en/news/essential-public-services-essential-workers-health-union-based-initiatives-protect-mental>

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## Campaigns for hazard pay during the COVID-19 pandemic

SF Bay Area, CA, **Hazard Pay Coalition** (ATU Locals 265 & 192, TWU Local 250A)



- ❑ Some US transport worker unions demanded hazard pay as a concrete form of recognition of the hazards they faced and suffered from
- ❑ 3 Bay Area unions joined rider & community groups, to **prioritize worker, union, passenger and community concerns**

<https://labornotes.org/2022/01/bay-area-transit-workers-organize-hazard-pay-build-toward-contractcampaigns>;  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dws4etsXWKY&t=64s>; <https://www.voicesforpublictransportation.org/>

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## Bargaining over vaccine policies

ATU Local 1576, Everett, WA

- ❑ ATU **encourages vaccination**, opposes firing non-vaccinated workers
  - “pulling unvaccinated employees from service will exacerbate widespread [& common] driver fatigue problems and hours of service violations”
- ❑ ATU **fought vaccine misinformation**, pressured transit agencies to **make vaccination easier financially** & to create fair policies on vaccine-related timelines & employment separation.
- ❑ ATU Local 1576 negotiated an agreement with Community Transit (CT) on 11/5/2021 that included:
  - extension of time to receive the vaccine
  - retroactive pay for weekly testing
  - additional COVID leave
  - If unvaccinated members lost their job → receive 100% of “paid time off” & sick leave balances & have the chance to be recalled, with seniority, until 2024
  - \$3,000 retention bonus in 2022 for those members who stayed at work

<https://atu1576.org/news/ct-vaccine-mandate-update-2-oct-22-2021>; <https://atu1576.org/news/atu1576-ct-vaccine-jointcommunication>; <https://kingcounty.gov/en/legacy/elected/executive/constantine/news/release/2021/September/22-QLR-vaccine-mandate-agreement.aspx> (Brian Sherlock)

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## Improving job security & mental health of workers in jeepney sector thru a “just transition” (the Philippines)

- ❑ Informal “jeepney” workers: “silent pandemic” of mental health symptoms during COVID-19, due to lockdowns & thus loss of income
- ❑ Plus, **government’s vehicle modernization program** (fleets of jeepneys), **organized as corporations** not individual operators



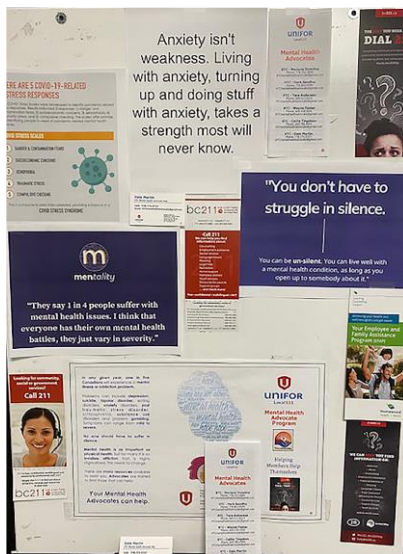
Board of Directors, Lahug Apas Transport Cooperative, during blessing of modernized Public Utility Jeepneys

- ❑ National Conf. Transport Worker Unions (NCTU-ITF) & Move As One Coalition:
  - immediate economic relief (including food) to workers
  - **organized 18 cooperatives in 9 key cities & provinces, with 4,392 members**
  - lobbied: service contracting (government subsidies) for jeepney associations

<https://www.ifglobal.org/en/resources/just-transition-urban-transport-workers-0>

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## Unifor worker referral assistance program & Mental Health Advocates (Canada)

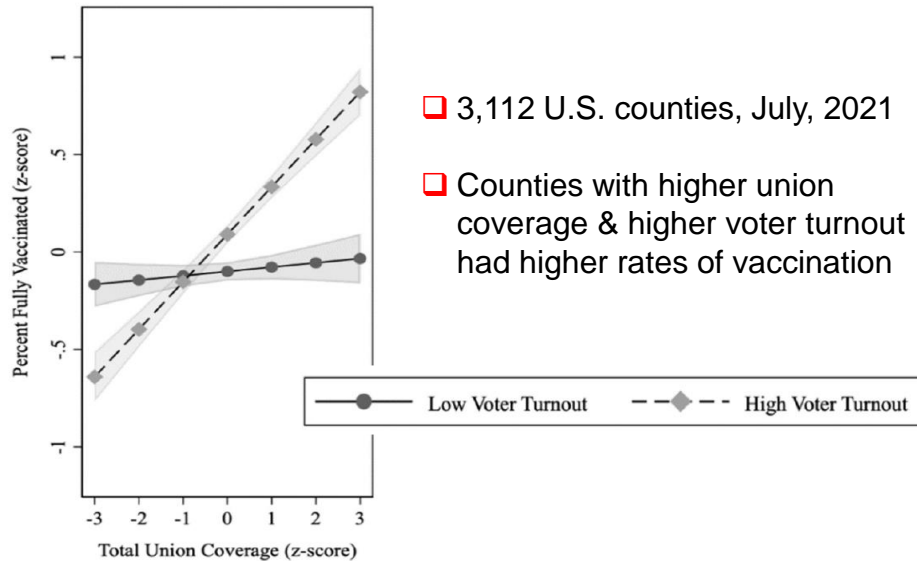


- ❑ Unifor mental health advocates (MHAs): **union members trained to be P/T referral agents** in their workplace or local union
- ❑ Liaisons to community resources, help members access services, protect confidentiality (UAP)
- ❑ Reduce disciplinary measures
- ❑ ← Publicize through bulletin boards & talks
- ❑ Stigma still an issue
- ❑ **“Mental Health Matters: A Resource Book for Union Representatives & Local Unions”** (2019): local union guide, contract language
- ❑ **“COVID-19: We’re in this together. Mental Health Resource Guide”** (2021)

[https://www.unifor.org/sites/default/files/legacy/documents/document/covid\\_mental\\_health\\_guide\\_aug2021\\_en.pdf](https://www.unifor.org/sites/default/files/legacy/documents/document/covid_mental_health_guide_aug2021_en.pdf)

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## Unions & COVID-19 vaccinations



3,112 U.S. counties, July, 2021

Counties with higher union coverage & higher voter turnout had higher rates of vaccination

Vachon TE, Wallace M, Li A. Unions, democracy, and Trump: Deconstructing the COVID-19 vaccination crisis of 2021. Social Science Research 2023 Sep;115:102918. doi:10.1016/j.ssresearch.2023.102918

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## Responding to COVID-19 through collective bargaining

- ❑ **Oakland, CA, Teachers Union** negotiated **protections**: education, identification, resolution to prevent worker/student COVID-19 cases
- ❑ **United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA)** prevented teachers from having to take on additional administrative duties while working at home.
  - helped to ensure that no student would fail during school closures
- ❑ **U of Illinois Grad Employees Organization (GEO) Local 6297** negotiated 2 weeks **paid sick leave**, mental health teletherapy services, **coverage of COVID-19-related** out of network ER costs & pre-authorization of COVID-19-related tests & treatments at ER & urgent care
- ❑ **UUP, AFT** (representing SUNY faculty/professional staff) negotiated work from home 5 days a week, a 1-year automatic tenure clock stop for academics, 6-month stop for professionals, no-cost tele-medicine & tele-counseling appointments for [health insurance plan] enrollees".
- ❑ **New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) (Lisa Baum)**

<https://www.healthywork.org/resources/healthy-work-strategies/>

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## AFL-CIO and nation's major nursing unions urge federal court to order the Department of Labor to issue a permanent OSHA standard to protect health care workers against Covid-19

National Nurses United, January 05, 2022



<https://www.nationalnursesunited.org/press/afl-cio-and-nursing-unions-urge-federal-court-to-order-permanent-osa-standard>

21

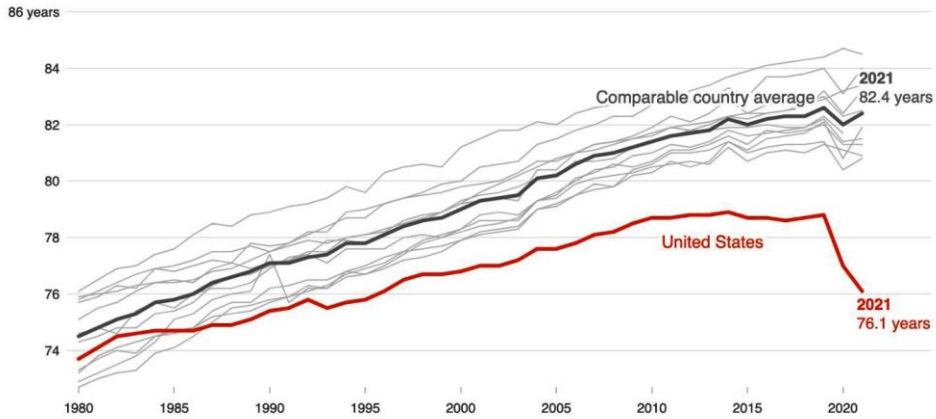
## Other Epidemics Contributing to Occupational Health Inequities

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## Health inequalities between countries

### Life expectancy continues to decline in the U.S. as it rebounds in other countries

Life expectancy around the world decreased in 2020 due to COVID-19. Most peer countries rebounded by 2021, while the U.S. continued to decline.



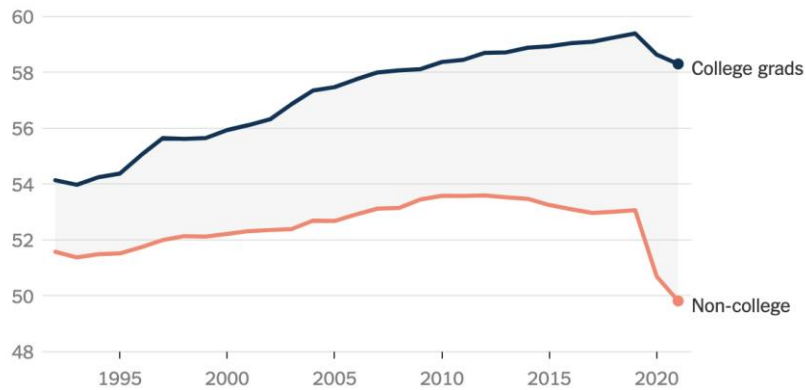
Ortaliza J, Ramirez G, Satheeskumar V, Amin K. How does U.S. life expectancy compare to other countries? <https://www.healthsystemtracker.org/chart-collection/u-s-life-expectancy-compare-countries/> 23

23

## Less Decent Work means worse health

### The mortality gap between Americans with and without four-year degrees is widening

Average years of life remaining for 25-year-old Americans

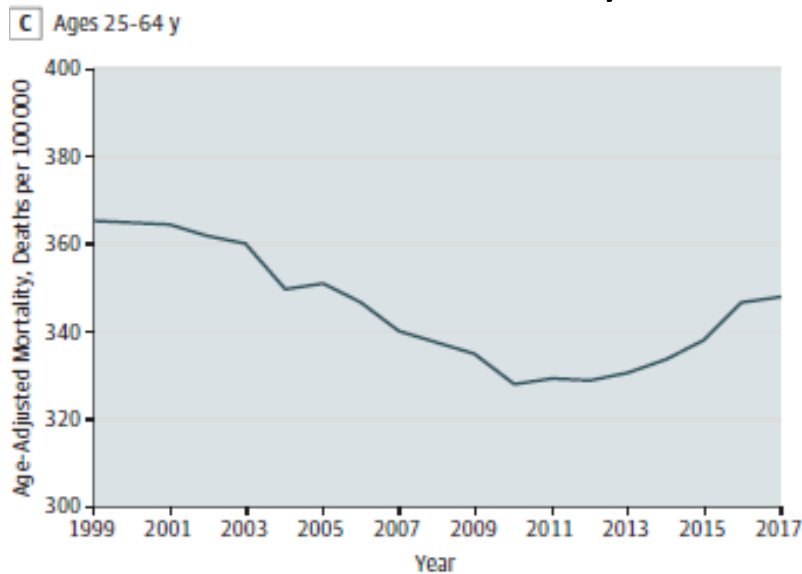


Source: Anne Case and Angus Deaton, Princeton University - By The New York Times

Case A, Deaton A. Without a College Degree, Life in America Is Staggeringly Shorter. NY Times, October 3, 2023.<sup>24</sup>

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## U.S. All-cause mortality rates



Woolf SH, Schoomaker H. Life Expectancy and Mortality Rates in the United States, 1959-2017. JAMA. 2019;322(20):1996-2016. 25

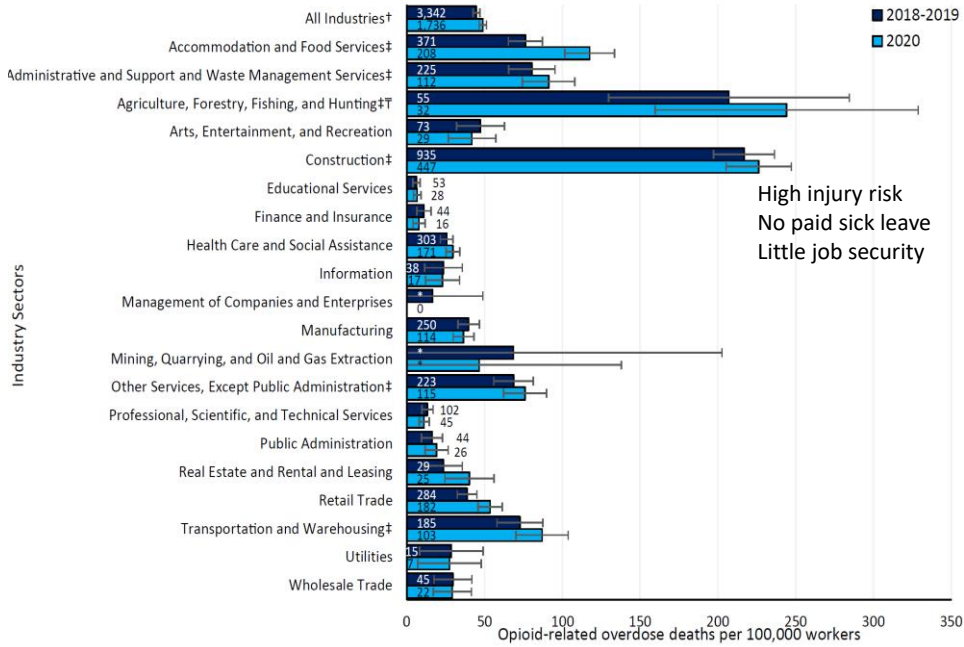
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## Increases in U.S. mortality rates, ages 25-64, 1999-2017

- By 2014, midlife mortality increasing in all racial/ethnic groups
- Caused by:
  - drug overdoses
    - 750,000+ dead from prescription & illegal opioids (1999-2021)
  - alcohol-related disease
  - suicides
  - chronic diseases
    - HTN, diabetes, CVD, COPD

Woolf SH, Schoomaker H. Life Expectancy and Mortality Rates in the United States, 1959-2017. JAMA. 2019;322(20):1996-2016. 26

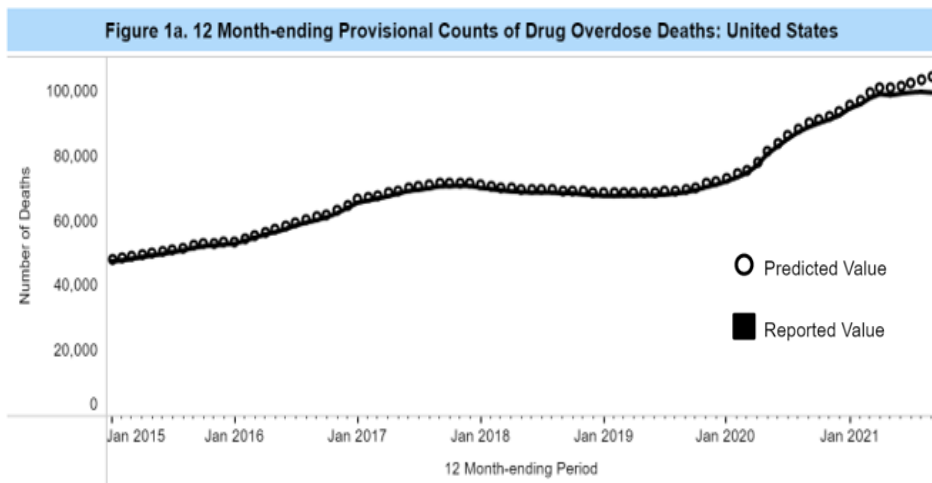
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Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Occupational Health Surveillance Program (2022); Opioid-related Overdose Deaths in Massachusetts by Industry and Occupation: 2018-2020.

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## ~100,000 Overdose Deaths, Sept. 2020-2021



Disruptions in clinical care, 12-step  
Financial stress, social isolation

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Source: CDC Overdose Dashboard

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# Labor Union's Role in Protecting the Workforce Against Other Current and Future Epidemics and Reducing Occupational Health Inequities

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## Increased labor organizing to address such conditions



**Autoworkers** win an end lower wages for new hires (tiers), a raise, job security, work-life balance, just transition to EVs



**UPS workers** win wage increases, A/C in trucks, >F/T jobs, end to forced overtime & end to lower wages for new hires



**Actors** win pay hikes, share of streaming \$, health/pension contributions, regulation of AI



**Screen writers** win a raise, share of streaming \$, minimum staffing, >job security, regulation of AI

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## Hotel housekeepers' union efforts to reduce health inequities

- ❑ Many immigrants, women, workers of color
- ❑ Participatory action research (1998+)
  - Inequities in injury rates
  - Workplace hazards
- ❑ Collective bargaining
  - Room quotas
  - Staffing, fair assignment of work
- ❑ Legislation
  - Panic buttons to prevent sexual harassment (NJ, Chicago)
- ❑ Regulation
  - CalOSHA Housekeepers Ergonomics Standard (7/1/18)



Lee PT, Krause N. J Public Health Policy 2002;23:268-285.  
 Buchanan S, Vossenas P, et al. Am J Ind Med 2010;53:116-125.  
<https://unitehere.org/>

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## Collective bargaining for the “common good”:

LA teachers' contract to reduce job stress & to help low income students (7/1/19-6/30/22)

- ❑ Reduction in class size
- ❑ Special Ed: access to caseload reports, caseload caps
- ❑ **>say on: budgets**, substitutes, at school district meetings
- ❑ Meet students' needs:
  - **Less standardized testing**, random police searches of students
  - >nurses, counselors, librarians, mental health professionals
  - **immigrant defense fund**
  - >green space
- ❑ Broad economic, racial & social justice agenda, including saving public education: helped to build community support for the strike

<https://healthywork.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/013-HWC-Website-Page-Content-Resources-Healthy-Work-Strategies-New-contract-LA-teachers-v1-092019-300res-CYMK.pdf>

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## Other labor efforts to achieve health & safety, reduce inequities

- ❑ **Laws & regulations** (national, US state)
  - OSHA (heat, violence, ergonomics)
  - Nurse staffing, mandatory overtime bans
  - Paid family leave, sick leave
  - Domestic workers (NY: 7/1/10): workers comp, O/T pay, day off/week
  - Fair workweek laws
  - Wage policies, worker protections, rights to organize

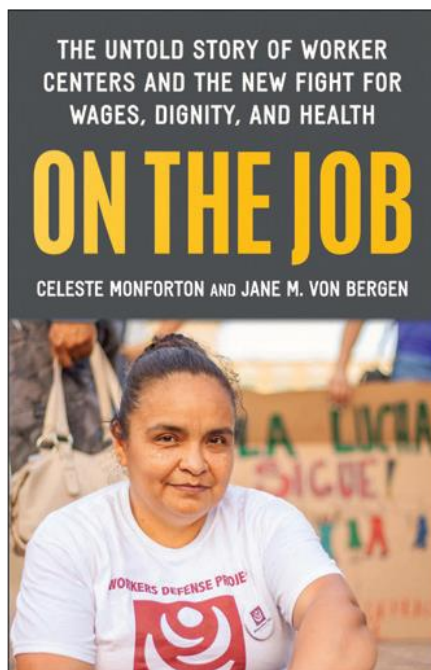
### **Working in Extreme Heat Is Dangerous. We Must Make It Safer**

Extreme heat is becoming more common in the U.S. The National Council for Occupational Safety and Health (COSH) is joining with workers, unions & safety advocates to call for a law that will require OSHA to create an interim heat stress standard within 1 year.

Scientific American, September 4, 2023

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/working-in-extreme-heat-is-dangerous-we-must-make-it-safer/>

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During COVID, “workers turned to worker centers to build community leadership and demand urgently needed safety protections and paid time off. They engaged in collective action; for example, a car caravan, supported by the Greater Minnesota Worker Center, with chants of “Keep me safe at work” and “Essential not disposable.” (2021)

Goldstein-Gelb M, Marin LS. Winning rights: the role of worker centers in protecting the most vulnerable workers. *Am J Public Health.* 2023;113(8):832–833.

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## Worker Centers

Restaurant Opportunities Centers (ROC) United: <http://www.rocunited.org/>

New York Healthy Nail Salons Coalition: <https://nycosh.org/initiatives/healthy-nail-salons/>

Make the Road New York: <https://maketheroadny.org/>

National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA):

<https://www.domesticworkers.org/>

CLEAN Car Wash Campaign: <http://www.cleancarwashcampaign.org/>

National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON): <http://www.ndlon.org/en/>

Laundry Workers Center: <https://laundryworkerscenter.org/>

Food Chain Workers Alliance: <http://foodchainworkers.org/>

National Staffing Workers Alliance:

<https://nationalstaffingworkersalliance.wordpress.com/>

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NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH  
LEADING THE FIGHT FOR SAFE AND HEALTHY WORKPLACES

ESPAÑOL

ABOUT US PRESS ROOM EVENTS CONTACT US

COSH CAMPAIGNS TAKE ACTION COSHCON RESOURCES DONATE

Leading the fight for safe and healthy working conditions for all workers.

GET INVOLVED

STOP Blocking the Siftex Rule

National COSH Leading the Fight for Safe and Healthy Workplaces!

Choose Your OSHA Inspection Representative  
Imagine this: Maria, a skilled worker, files an OSHA complaint regarding unsafe machinery at her workplace.  
**65+ WORKER & IMMIGRANT ORGANIZATIONS TELL OSHA:**  
Workers have a right to choose their OSHA inspection representative  
SEE THE LIST →

**COSHCON2023**  
REGISTRATION IS OPEN  
COSHCON2023 REGISTRATION OPEN  
December 6-8, 2023  
Maritime Conference Center | Baltimore, MD  
MORE HERE →

**COSHCON2023**  
KEYNOTE SPEAKER  
Secretary SU TO KEYNOTE COSHCON2023  
We are honored to have the Secretary of Labor join us at COSHCON2023  
REGISTER NOW →

<https://www.nationalcosh.org/>, <https://nycosh.org/>, Charlene Obernauer

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“creating a culture of recovery-supportive workplaces within New York State that actively develops resources for preventing substance use and addiction”

<https://for-ny.org/parse/>  
(Jonathan Rosen)

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COVID-19 PANDEMIC'S IMPACT ON WORKER MENTAL HEALTH  
AND SUBSTANCE USE, WORKPLACE SOLUTIONS

## Member Assistance Programs

- Train peers within the workplace, industry, or union
- Provide support and referrals to co-workers who are struggling
- Complimentary to the traditional Employee Assistance Program



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| 2023                      | Oxfam: “Where Hard Work Doesn’t Pay Off” Index   |
|---------------------------|--|
| <b>Wage Policies</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Minimum wage</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ inclusivity of this wage across vulnerable populations</li> <li>○ value of wage by PPP, comparison to national median income</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Unemployment supports</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ availability, access, coverage length, income replacement rate</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                      |
| <b>Worker Protections</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Equal pay</b></li> <li>• <b>Include historically excluded</b> (domestic workers, gig workers)</li> <li>• Protection from sexual harassment</li> <li>• Identity protections (sexual orientation, disability)</li> <li>• Healthcare availability</li> <li>• Paid leave (annual, parental, sick)</li> <li>• Childcare support</li> <li>• Work schedule protections</li> <li>• Pregnancy accommodations</li> </ul> |
| <b>Rights to Organize</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Right to organize</li> <li>• <b>Collective bargaining</b></li> <li>• Right to strike</li> <li>• Sectoral bargaining</li> <li>• Protection from retaliation</li> </ul>   |

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| Oxfam ranked 38 economic peer countries on 56 labor policies that support working families (2023) |  |                               |
|---|--|-------------------------------|
|   | Top 5 ranked countries   | United States ranking (of 38) |
| <b>Wage Policies</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belgium</li> <li>• France</li> <li>• Netherlands</li> <li>• South Korea</li> <li>• Spain</li> </ul> | # 36                          |
| <b>Worker Protections</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Germany</li> <li>• Finland</li> <li>• Norway</li> <li>• Austria</li> <li>• France</li> </ul>        | # 38                          |
| <b>Rights to Organize</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slovenia</li> <li>• Sweden</li> <li>• France</li> <li>• Portugal</li> <li>• Italy</li> </ul>        | # 32                          |

Oxfam America. Where Hard Work Doesn’t Pay Off, 2023.

<https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/research-publications/where-hard-work-doesnt-pay-off/>

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## Labor Unions' (and Worker Centers') Role in Reducing Occupational Health Inequities

- Lobbying for laws, regulations
- Workplace health and safety training
- Protection against bullying & harassment
- Legal support for workers
- Recovery Friendly Workplaces
- Research
- Increasing wages & benefits (unions)
- Collective bargaining (unions)

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