
Health Minister Leo Varadkar and Irish Rugby Legend Tony Ward Call for a ‘New Script’ for Men’s Health in Ireland

Today, Minister for Health Leo Varadkar will join with Irish Rugby legend Tony Ward to begin the final countdown to Men’s Health Week in Ireland. To kick-start the week, Minister Varadkar has invited Tony - this year’s ‘face’ of Men’s Health Week - to Government Buildings for a health check-up. Together, they are calling upon everyone in Ireland to create culture change in relation to men’s health. Tony knows the importance of this message only too well following his own personal battle with prostate cancer *[please see attached photograph]*.



But, why should we focus upon men’s health? Well, the reasons are both clear and stark ...

- Men in Ireland die, on average, almost four and a half years younger than women do.
- Males have higher death rates than women for all of the leading causes of death and at all ages.
- Poor lifestyles are responsible for a high proportion of chronic diseases.
- Late presentation to health services leads to a large number of problems becoming untreatable ...

This high level of premature mortality amongst men in Ireland has far-reaching repercussions - far beyond the life satisfaction of men themselves. It affects not only industry and commerce, but also impacts upon the social and financial positions of families. However, this is not a lost cause. Much can be done to improve this situation. That is why Men’s Health Week this year focuses upon the theme of *‘Creating Culture Change - it’s time for a new script’*.

Men’s Health Week always begins on the Monday before Father’s Day and ends on Father’s Day itself. This year, it will run from Monday 15th until Sunday 21st June 2015. It is celebrated in most European countries, as well as in the USA, Australia, New Zealand and a number of other places worldwide. Locally, it is coordinated by the Men’s Health Forum in Ireland (MHFI).

To celebrate this week, MHFI has printed a new, free, 32 page Man Manual titled *‘Challenges and Choices’*. This booklet poses a series of simple, practical challenges to Irish men in an effort to radically improve their health. The health messages are presented in a humorous, straightforward, step-by-step, and commonsense way, and the opening pages begin with:

“WARNING ... Reading this manual can seriously improve your health!”

There has been a huge demand for the Manual from men across Ireland and, since its release three weeks ago, almost all of the 10,000 copies available have been snapped-up.

Minister Varadkar comments:

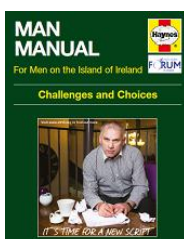
"Men's health in Ireland isn't always the best. My Department's Healthy Ireland initiative is doing a lot of work to raise awareness in this area, but there's a long way to go. That's why this Men's Health Week is such a great idea. It shows that men can make significant improvements to their health by taking a few simple steps, and receiving encouragement and opportunities to succeed. The advice is jargon-free, and offers lots of support. I'm delighted that the HSE is supporting this initiative."

Cate Hartigan, Head of Health Promotion and Improvement in the HSE, reflects:

“Interest in men’s health is certainly increasing, and not only amongst policy makers and service providers. Men, themselves, are rising to the challenge, and seeking information to help them to make positive choices. The HSE is delighted to assist the Men’s Health Forum in Ireland to support this movement and to make Men’s Health Week 2015 the time to create a new culture in Ireland.”

In relation to his role in Men’s Health Week 2015, sporting hero Tony Ward comments:

“Men’s Health Week gives everyone an opportunity to do something positive and practical to improve the health of men and boys in Ireland. I know, from personal experience, that men certainly need to pay more attention to their health and to act quickly when they suspect something may be wrong. However, we live in a culture which expects men to keep their chin up and to soldier on through difficult times. This needs to change. It’s definitely time for a new script.”



ENDS - followed by Editor's Notes

Editor's Notes:

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- The core aims of Men's Health Week each year are to:
 - Heighten awareness of preventable health problems for males of all ages.
 - Support men and boys to engage in healthier lifestyle choices / activities.
 - Encourage the early detection and treatment of health difficulties in males.
- Each year, individual countries focus upon a specific theme. The theme for 2015 in Ireland is: *'Creating Culture Change - it's time for a new script'*.
- The Men's Health Forum in Ireland (www.mhfi.org) is a charity which works on an all-Ireland basis to enhance the health of men and boys. It is a voluntary network of individuals and organisations, men and women, which seeks to identify the key concerns relating to male health and to increase understanding of these issues. Every year, the Forum coordinates Men's Health Week activity on the island of Ireland.
- Men's Health Week 2015 in Ireland has been planned by a broad range of partners who contributed to an inter-agency, all-island Planning Group.
- The celebration of Men's Health Week has been supported by the Health Service Executive's Health Promotion and Improvement Department and National Office for Suicide Prevention in the Republic of Ireland, and by the Public Health Agency in Northern Ireland.
- Key information on Men's Health Week on the island of Ireland is available online ...
 - Full overview of Men's Health Week 2015: www.mhfi.org/mhw/mhw-2015.html
 - Briefing paper which answers all the most common questions: www.mhfi.org/mhw2015toolbox.pdf

PRESS RELEASE: For use on Friday 12th June 2015 and later

- Men's Health Week posters and images: www.mhfi.org/mhw/mhw-image-pack.html
- Practical suggestions for organisations on how they can get involved: www.mhfi.org/mhw2015celebrateit.pdf
- Latest developments: www.facebook.com/MensHealthWeek and www.twitter.com/MensHealthIRL
- Former international rugby player Tony Ward is acting as the 'face' of Men's Health Week 2015 in Ireland. He is starring in a nationwide poster campaign, and appears on the cover of the free, 32 page 'Challenges and Choices' Man Manual which is being given to men across the island of Ireland.
- Tony - now a sports journalist (Irish Independent), rugby coach, rugby commentator (RTE) and Ambassador for the Heartbeat Trust (raising awareness of heart failure and associated prevention strategies) - is a man who has faced a personal battle against prostate cancer and, in recent years, has been prepared to share his story publicly with others in order to create a culture change in how men look after their health.
- Tony was an Irish Rugby Union and soccer player during the 1970s and 1980s. He played rugby as a Fly-Half for, amongst others, Munster, Leinster, Ireland, the British and Irish Lions, and the Barbarians. He was selected as the 1979 European Rugby Player of the Year, and was the first ever recipient of this title. In 1978, Tony played a key role in Munster's legendary victory over New Zealand at Thomond Park - when he scored two drop goals and a conversion in a 12-0 victory. To date, Munster is the only Irish team ever to beat the All-Blacks. He also won 19 caps for Ireland between 1978 and 1987, and made his international debut against Scotland at Lansdowne Road aged 23. He helped Ireland win 12-9 and, during the 1978 Five Nations Championship, scored 38 points - a record for a debutant. Tony also played football for both Shamrock Rovers and Limerick United. In his last season with Rovers in 1974/75, he scored six league goals. In 1981, he played for Limerick United in the UEFA Cup and, in 1982, helped them to win the FAI Cup.
- The 'Challenges and Choices' Man Manual issues ten simple and practical challenges to men. After each challenge, there is a reason why it is important to think about this issue. It then offers three choices for action (Do Nothing, DIY, Find an Expert), and explains the consequences of each option.
- Production of the 'Challenges and Choices' manual was funded by the Health Service Executive in the Republic of Ireland and the Public Health Agency in Northern Ireland.
- A low resolution PDF preview copy of the 'Challenges and Choices' Man Manual can be accessed online at: www.mhfi.org/challenges2015.pdf

