
First Meeting of the Men's Health Week (MHW) 2023 Planning Group

Date: Wednesday 7th December 2022
Time: 2.00pm - 3.45pm
Mode: 'Zoom' Video Conference
Minute Taker: Colin Fowler

Present:

Jonny Ashe - Education Authority NI
Sinead Brannigan - Waterford Sports Partnership
Lorcan Brennan - Men's Development Network
Julie Bunch - Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
Andy Cooney - Health Promotion, Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital
Clare Corkey - Men's Advisory Project
Anne Farrell - CIE
Colin Fowler - Men's Health Forum in Ireland (MHFI)
Garry Glennon - Letterkenny Youth and Family Service
Hannah-Alice Loughlin - Alcohol Action Ireland
Liz McEvoy - Marie Keating Foundation
Dan McHugh - Clanrye Group
Liam Maher - SISK Building Contractors
Sonia Montgomery - Western Health and Social Care Trust
Bróna Mooney - School of Nursing, NUI Galway
Barry Murphy - Bodywhys
Finian Murray - Health Service Executive (HSE)
Paul O'Kane - Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
Dan Russell - HSE, CHO7
Matt Shields - ParkRun Ireland
George Smith - Carer Support Service, SEHSCT
Anne Thompson - Action Cancer
John (JT) Treanor - Irish Heart Foundation

Apologies:

Lise Alford - 3Ts
Paul Anderson - Forever Fathers
Kathrina Bentley - Men's Aid Ireland
Deirdre Bigley - HeadsUp
Rhonda Bond - Western Health and Social Care Trust
Keira Brett - Empower: Healthy Fingal
Annie Clarke - Southern Health and Social Care Trust
Jim Curran - Irish Pharmacy Union
Clare Deasy - Health Service Executive
Paula Devine - ARK
Brian Doyle - HUGS@Home Project, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
Brien Frazer - South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust
Robert Glusek - Sure Start South Armagh
Richard Gough - Clanrye Group
Michael Gregory - Northern Health and Social Care Trust
Frances Haughey - Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council

Marita Hennessy - INFANT Centre, University College Cork
Caroline Hughes - Action Cancer
Ellen Jennings - Bodywhys
Johnny McClurg - Community Sports Network
Emma McCrudden - Northern Ireland Chest, Heart and Stroke
Michael McKenna - YouthAction NI Work with Young Men Team
Rebecca McLaughlin - Irish Men's Sheds Association
Kathryn Meade - National Screening Service
Deirdre Ní Mhórdha - Migraine Association of Ireland
Kevin O'Driscoll - National Youth Council of Ireland
Tracey Powell - Southern Health and Social Care Trust
Stephen Quinn - GAA
Peter Shaw - Community Sports Network
Bill Vaughan - Mental Health Ireland

AGENDA ITEMS ...

1. Welcome and Overview

Colin welcomed everyone to the meeting (especially the 'new faces') and gave a brief overview of the practicalities of the session.

In 'the olden days', the first meeting of the all-island Planning Group for Men's Health Week (MHW) would always take place face-to-face, with plenty of opportunities for: chatting to each other informally over a cup of tea and lunch; building useful contacts and relationships; and teasing out issues in depth. COVID put paid to this for a while, and we were forced to rely on 'Zoom' to build the programme and maintain relationships from a distance. However, as COVID restrictions are now lifted, we have the opportunity to return to holding at least some of the future meetings face-to-face. This possibility was scheduled for discussion at the end of the agenda.

Once again, there has been a huge amount of interest shown in planning Men's Health Week for the coming year. However, it was noted that many of the regular members of the Planning Group in the past have now either retired from their jobs or moved to pastures new. They were thanked for their fantastic contributions over the years.

Apologies were tendered from a broad range of organisations who were unable to make today's date, as well as from others who have committed to contributing remotely via email and telephone follow-up calls, but who can't attend future gatherings.

The meeting was reminded that membership of the Planning Group is open to anyone who wishes to contribute, and that the wide reaching partnership approach to planning MHW adopted in recent years has proved to be very beneficial. It is based upon the premise that many heads generate better outcomes than few. Everyone is welcome to invite other organisations to attend future meetings and/or to input electronically.

Colin highlighted that the purpose of today's meeting was to: get to know each other; gain a shared understanding of what MHW is; reaffirm the core value base of the week; reflect upon any learning from previous MHWs; and to scope possibilities for the MHW 2023 theme.

2. Round of Introductions

Finian invited everyone to introduce themselves - by way of helping to get to know each other and to understand the work that each person is involved in. Individuals were asked to:

- Give their name.
- Say which organisation they represent and what it does.
- Briefly outline their interest in men's work.

3. Overview of MHW

Finian presented some background on what MHW (www.mhfi.org/mhw/about-mhw.html) is and how it has developed over time.

MHW always begins on the Monday before Father's Day and ends on Father's Day itself. During 2023 it will run from Monday 12th until Sunday 18^h June. It is celebrated in most European countries, as well as in the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and a number of other places worldwide.

The development timeline was ...

- 1994: A MHW Bill (for the USA) was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Clinton.
- 2002: At the Second World Congress on Men's Health (Vienna, Austria), representatives agreed to work together to launch International Men's Health Week.
- 2002 onwards: Individual groups throughout Ireland begin to organise local activities to mark this week.
- 2005: MHW is first celebrated in Ireland on an all-island basis (when the Men's Health Forum in Ireland - MHFI - took on the coordinating role).

Each year, MHW seeks 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.

However, all initiatives which celebrate MHW and highlight men's health and wellbeing needs (in whatever form) are encouraged.

The themes in previous years were:

- 2005 - Obesity
- 2006 - Mental Wellbeing
- 2007 - Long-term Conditions
- 2008 - Workplace Health
- 2009 - Access to Services
- 2010 - Physical Activity
- 2011 - These are Challenging Times. It's No Joke. Let's Talk.
- 2012 - What's Your First Instinct ... Fight? Flight? Find Out?
- 2013 - Action Men: Turning Words into Actions
- 2014 - Challenges, Choices and Celebrations: What's Your Aim?
- 2015 - Creating Culture Change - it's time for a new script
- 2016 - Men United: for Health and Wellbeing
- 2017 - It's All About HIM - how are you doing?
- 2018 - One Small Step for Man. One Giant Leap for Men's Health.

- 2019 - Men's Health Matters: Make the Time. Take the Time.
- 2020 - Restoring the Balance - be part of the solution
- 2021 - Making the Connections: Check In. Check Up. Check It Out.
- 2022 - MISSION:isPOSSIBLE - the action starts with you.

During this time, activities have included, for example, national awareness campaigns, conferences, health screening opportunities, dissemination of booklets and posters, widespread media coverage, health-focused competitions, creation of online resources, webinars, and the development of a men's fitness programme and online game.

4. Value Base Underpinning MHW

During the planning process for previous Men's Health Weeks, considerable discussion took place as to what the value base underpinning the week should include. Lorcan gave a brief overview of the agreements that were made, referencing the paper on these which was circulated before today's meeting:

- Health and wellbeing is about much more than physical health problems and/or treating illness. It is a holistic vision-led concept.
- It is important to focus on the positive aspects of men's lives, and to avoid the usual caricatures of unresponsive men who don't care about their health. Such deficit-based approaches often portray men as a problem to be solved, rather than an asset to themselves and everyone around them.
- Men can - to a degree - take responsibility for and influence some aspects of their health. However, their health and wellbeing is not only about what they do or how they act as individuals. It is also often affected by the environment in which they live, the jobs that they carry out, the pressures that they face in a world which emphasises gendered roles, the way that services engage with them ... These social determinants are very powerful influencers of men's health and wellbeing.
- We need to be careful not to blame men for their poor health or to focus solely upon their personal shortcomings. The key messages for MHW must also recognise the responsibilities of everyone who can have an impact on the health of men and boys, and highlight the breadth of organisational, political, structural, environmental, cultural, service provision, individual choice ... factors that can be influential.
- Where possible, we should use positive terms / phrases such as: listening to men, hearing men's voices, responding to need, creating opportunities, offering support, providing encouragement, seeking change, promoting positive action, respecting men's lives, self / organisational reflection and introspection, planning for the future, learning from men's experience, overcoming barriers, expanding options, promoting equality, offering choices, making the connections, working together, having new conversations, diverse needs, challenging the myths, partnership and cooperation ...
- While it is often easier to get media and public attention for a specific illness or negative issue (e.g. aggressive cancers or suicide or domestic violence) rather than a 'good news' story, MHW should seek to promote men's needs and issues in a positive light. This will, probably, mean that we will miss the high profile shock-horror media coverage that is generated by 'Men in Crisis' or 'Men Behaving Badly' headlines.

- In Ireland, we tend to think of a 'real man' as being one single model, and his characteristics are often perceived as: white, heterosexual, able-bodied, physically fit, muscular / large body frame, fairly young, into sport, can handle himself ... Whenever possible, MHW imagery and text needs to challenge this stereotype and to reflect the diversity of men's lives and personal traits.
- Hearing about / exposure to the real life experiences of local men can help to bring MHW to life.

Lorcan proposed that we should, once again, adopt this approach for MHW 2023 - as these messages set a positive and strengths-based tone for the week. This was agreed by all present. However, everyone was also asked to read the Value Base paper again and to send any feedback or suggestions to Colin as soon as possible.

5. Learning from Previous Years

Lorcan asked the meeting if there was anything from Men's Health Week 2022 - or previous MHWs - which we should continue, change, avoid or learn from. Comments included ...

- It is crucial to have a short / sharp theme and call to action. We don't get a huge amount of space on the promotional materials to explain what the week is all about, so it's important to be focused and to grab everyone's attention quickly.
- Good, strong, clear graphics can make all the difference. If they are too busy or complicated or need explained, we have already lost the battle.
- We need to be careful not to over-think things too much - as this can cause paralysis, stagnation and inhibits action.
- Having a MHW 'Ambassador' (who has a grounded health-related story to tell) is very important. Paul Ferris and Dr Noel Richardson played this role in 2022, and managed to generate an amazing amount of high-level TV, radio and newsprint coverage. Dan Russell suggested Shane Lowry as a potential Ambassador for this year.
- While it is great to have well-known and high profile public faces for the week, the health stories of ordinary local men also need to be told. These can often have more resonance with men-on-the-ground.
- Agreeing a theme as early as possible helps to get it onto the agenda of the Health Trusts, other statutory bodies, and big national bodies who tend to need to schedule things well in advance.
- It's important to highlight all the dimensions of men's health (e.g. physical, mental, emotional, sexual, spiritual, social, relational) during the week.

6. Theme for MHW 2023

Colin reminded the meeting that MHW ...

- Offers everyone an annual occasion to encourage men and boys to take better care of their health and to seek help or treatment at an early stage.
- Is an ideal opportunity for collective and collaborative action.
- Targets males themselves, policy / decision-makers, service providers, public awareness and preconceptions.
- Focuses upon a specific theme each year - determined by individual countries.

In the early years, the MHW theme in Ireland tended to mirror the theme in other countries. However, from 2011 onwards, there has been a tendency for each country to choose a theme which is most relevant to its own circumstances and needs.

From 2005 - 2010, MHW in Ireland focused upon a specific medical condition each year, and mostly followed the lead of the Men's Health Forum in England and Wales. However, after this, it tended to adopt broad and generic themes which could facilitate 'buy-in' and participation from the widest possible range of organisations and individuals. This was, in large part, due to advice from the ever increasing range of partner organisations who volunteered to be part of the all-island Planning Group from 2010 onwards.

The purpose of the theme / strapline is simply to create a common identity for everyone to rally around. However, it needs to be a broad enough concept for everyone to see that it is relevant to them and their work - and to fit with the MHW value base.

It is also useful to have a call to action (e.g. last year it was *'the action starts with you'*) which poses a challenge for policy makers, service providers, practitioners and men themselves, and helps to kick-start a wider discussion on improving men's health.

Whatever theme is selected, it needs to be catchy, easy to explain, and easy to express visually.

Meeting participants were randomly allocated to 'Zoom Breakout Rooms', and were asked to do some 'blue skies thinking' on possible themes for MHW 2023. A number of suggestions were proposed ...

1. **Men Doing Things Together** [in order to break patterns of isolation and loneliness across the island of Ireland].
2. **Wellbeing Across Generations** [cross-generational learning, support, mentorship, leading by example, building relationships to combat social isolation].
3. **Try To Live Better** [focusing upon making positive choices and accessing support - such as social prescribing networks - to enable real change].
4. **Detect Your Own - don't wait until it is too late** [play around with the idea of becoming your own detective - who will look for clues / signs of ill health, track down possible solutions and act decisively to solve the problem].
5. **The Picture Of Health - what does it look like to you?** [invite men to set themselves a personal challenge which will help to make them 'a picture of health' - possibly track and record their before and after / journey via photos, videos or blogs up until International Men's Day].

Colin will circulate these broad suggestions to all members of the Planning Group network (including those who could not attend today's meeting), and run a poll to assess the popularity of each option. Hopefully, it will be possible to agree the general direction of travel with regards to a MHW 2023 theme before Christmas. This will mean that the next Planning Group meeting can start to fine tune what the theme might look like in practice.

7. Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Planning Group will be held face-to-face on Monday 16th January 2023 in Dundalk. It will begin at 10.30am. Colin will secure a venue and circulate the details as soon as possible. A light lunch and refreshments will be provided.