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## **First Meeting of the Men's Health Week (MHW) 2024 Planning Group**

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**Date:** Monday 18<sup>th</sup> December 2023  
**Time:** 11.00am - 1.00pm  
**Mode:** 'Zoom' Video Conference  
**Minute Taker:** Colin Fowler

**Present:**

Lise Alford - 3Ts  
Paul Anderson - Forever Fathers  
Pauric Brazil - Health Service Executive (CHO 7)  
Alannah Brennan - Newry, Mourne and Down District Council  
Lorcan Brennan - Men's Development Network  
Michael Broderick - Clanrye Group  
Martin Connell - Southern Health and Social Care Trust  
Clare Corkey - Men's Advisory Project  
Clare Deasy - Health Service Executive (CHO 4)  
Anne Farrell - CIE  
Colin Fowler - Men's Health Forum in Ireland (MHFI)  
Garry Glennon - Letterkenny Youth and Family Service  
Stephen Gourley - AgeNI (Good Vibrations Project)  
Frances Haughey - Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council  
Áine Hollywood - Sport Ireland  
Tracy James - Irish Heart Foundation  
Conor Keane - Alcohol Action Ireland  
Eoin Kernan - Eating Disorders Campaigner  
Ellie Leonard - Western Health and Social Care Trust  
Johnny McClurg - Community Sports Network  
Rebecca McLaughlin - Irish Men's Sheds Association  
Kathryn Meade - National Screening Service  
Fra Mohan - Belfast Health and Social Care Trust  
Barry Murphy - Bodywhys  
Finian Murray - Health Service Executive (National)  
James O'Hagan - LGBT Ireland  
Kevin O'Hagan - Irish Cancer Society  
Paul O'Kane - Belfast Health and Social Care Trust  
Derek Pepper - SHINE  
Bill Vaughan - Mental Health Ireland

**Apologies:**

Kathrina Bentley - Men's Aid Ireland  
Deirdre Bigley - HeadsUp  
Julie Bunch - Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council  
Greg Clark - Health Service Executive (CHO 1)  
Brid Collins - National Youth Council of Ireland  
John Collins - Exchange House Ireland  
Anne Corcoran - Samaritans Ireland  
Jim Curran - Irish Pharmacy Union

Paula Devine - ARK  
Martin Dooley - Retired Engineering Trainer  
Helen Forristal - Marie Keating Foundation  
Brien Frazer - South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust  
Robert Glusek - Sure Start South Armagh  
Michael Gregory - Northern Health and Social Care Trust  
Marita Hennessy - INFANT Centre, University College Cork  
Caroline Hughes - Action Cancer  
Ellen Jennings - Bodywhys  
Áine Lyng - National Cancer Control Programme  
Aidan McCabe - SHSCT (Newry and Mourne)  
Joe McCusker - North Belfast Men's Shed  
Andrea McDermott - Men's Aid Ireland  
Liz McEvoy - Marie Keating Foundation  
Michael McKenna - YouthAction NI  
Liam Maher - SISK Building Contractors  
Sonia Montgomery - Western Health and Social Care Trust  
Tracey Powell - Southern Health and Social Care Trust  
Stephen Quinn - GAA  
Pam Smyth - Carer Support Service, South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust  
John (JT) Treanor - Irish Heart Foundation

## **AGENDA ITEMS ...**

### **1. Welcome and Overview**

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

Once again, there has been a huge amount of interest shown in planning Men's Health Week (MHW) for the coming year. However, it was also noted that quite a few of the regular contributors to 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 to future developments via email and telephone follow-up calls.

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.

Coli 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 2024 theme.

## 2. Round of Introductions

Lorcan 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](http://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 2024 it will run from Monday 10<sup>th</sup> until Sunday 16<sup>h</sup> 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 began to organise local activities to mark this week.
- 2005: MHW was 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.
- 2023 - The 'Picture of Health'.

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 determinants are very powerful influencers of men's health and wellbeing.
- We need to be careful not to blame men for their own 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, into sport, can handle himself ... Whenever possible, MHW imagery, written text and spoken word 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 2024 - 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 Coli as soon as possible.

## 5. Learning from Previous Years

Finian asked the meeting if there was anything from Men's Health Week 2023 - or previous MHWs - which we should continue, change, avoid or learn from. Comments included ...

- Having a big national campaign makes it easier to sell the message locally.
- It's important to have the information and resources available well before the week begins.
- MHW 'Ambassadors' - particularly ones who have a strong story to tell - are invaluable.
- It's good to have a core pool of social media posts available (for those people who don't have the time or inclination to create their own), as well as to offer a range of free social media graphics.
- Representing as much diversity as possible is key to being inclusive and letting everyone know that this is for them.
- Facebook and Twitter coverage works well, but it might be worth looking at other platforms too.
- Having a broad theme helps a wide range of organisations to see how they might get involved.
- The call to action needs to be simple, and to target policy makers and service providers as well as individual men.
- The theme and call to action shouldn't be too complicated.
- The 'Action Man' booklet is a fantastic practical resource, and can be used long after MHW has ended.
- Proposal: consider developing a generic 'Men's Health Charter' and inviting organisations to sign-up to it.

## 6. Theme for MHW 2024

Coli 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.

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 2024. A number of suggestions were made, and a number of others were sent to Coli after the meeting. These were:

- **Plan your Route | What's your Road Map? ...** Don't be a passenger, be the driver of your own health and wellbeing. However, know that you can't do it on your own, and that all leaders need to learn and develop their skills, as well as work with a clear vision.
- **We're all in it Together | All for One and One for All | Stronger Together ...** Use this to promote equality, diversity and inclusivity, and focus upon the universal health of every man rather than individual men.
- **Unity in Community | Connect 4 Health ...** Target the negative impact that loneliness and isolation can have on male health and wellbeing, by focusing upon: (i) connecting with others; and (ii) connecting with your health. Imagery of the 'Connect 4' game might be a useful tool here.
- **Check It Out ...** Promote health checks and screening as a gateway to engage men with their health, and explore other aspects of men's health. Promote holistic health, and highlight the links between actions and consequences e.g. alcohol consumption and cancer, or diet and diabetes, or sleep and mental health etc.
- **The Talking Starts Now ...** In boxing, the phrase *'the talking stops now'* is often used at the start of a fight. By playing upon boxing terminology, and having a diverse range of ordinary people in the 'ring', this could turn what is often seen as an aggressive and confrontational encounter on its head - with people coming from all corners to start to chat about their health and what really matters to them.
- **Worth The Risk? ...** Males are often associated with negative risk-taking behaviours. However, the Southern Area Men's Health Group recently ran a very successful and well attended event titled 'Worth The Risk?' which sought to understand the nature of male risk-taking and how everyone needs to take positive risks to improve their health and wellbeing.

- **Give it a Go ...** Some men get stuck in a rut and are reluctant to embrace change or break existing patterns. This theme could encourage everyone to try new things and widen their horizons / social networks / range of health promoting behaviours.
- **Know Your Numbers ...** Everyone - policy makers, health service providers and men themselves - need to know the key numbers associated with health. For some, this might be necessary to plan services but, in the case of men, this could be their blood pressure, cholesterol level, BMI, eye sight etc. Knowing these numbers could encourage practical action.

Coli 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(s) to assess the popularity of each option. This will mean that the next Planning Group meeting can start to fine tune what the agreed 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 Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> January 2024 in Dundalk. It will begin with tea / coffee /scones at 10.30am. Coli will secure a venue and circulate the details as soon as possible. A light lunch and refreshments will also be provided.