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## First Meeting of the Men's Health Week 2016 Planning Group

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**Date:** Monday 18<sup>th</sup> January 2016  
**Time:** 11.00am - 1.30pm (including lunch)  
**Venue:** Armagh Diocesan Pastoral Centre, Dundalk, Co. Louth  
**Minute Taker:** Colin Fowler

**Present:**

Lorcan Brennan - Men's Development Network (MDN)  
Gráinne Brinkley - British Medical Association NI  
Anne Corcoran - Samaritans Ireland  
Niall Culkin - Mayo North East Leader  
Conor Cullen - Alcohol Action Ireland  
Alison Doake - South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT)  
Mark Dyer - Aware NI  
Niamh Farrell - Amen  
Helen Forristal - Marie Keating Foundation  
Colin Fowler - Men's Health Forum in Ireland (MHFI)  
Frances Haughey - Closing the Gap Project: Health Inequalities  
James Knox - Men's Advisory Project (MAP)  
Pamela Logan - Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU)  
Mick Mooney - Pavee Point Traveller Men's Health  
Finian Murray - Health Service Executive Dublin / North East  
John News - Sport NI  
Aoife Ní Shúilleabháin - Union of Students in Ireland (USI)  
Michael Noble - Mental Health Ireland  
Kevin O'Hagan - Irish Cancer Society  
Paul O'Kane - Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT)  
Finola O'Sullivan - Amen  
Deirdre Ryan - National Screening Service  
Peter Shaw - Belfast Community Sports Development Network (BCSDN)  
Brian Staunton - Irish Sports Council

**Apologies:**

Scott Ahearn - 3Ts  
Eva Beirne - Louth Men's Shed  
Michael Boyd - Irish Football Association (IFA)  
Andrew Castles - Safefood  
Derek Chambers - ReachOut Ireland  
Carrie Davenport - Shoot Positive  
Paula Devine - ARK  
Frances Dowds - Action Cancer  
Sandra Gordon - Man Alive, Cancer Focus NI  
Emmet Haughian - GAA  
Marita Hennessy - NUI Galway  
Fiona Kerr - 3fivetwo Training Academy  
Martin Lawlor - State of Mind Ireland  
Michael Lynch - Men's Action Network (MAN)  
Darach Murphy - Men Alone in No-mans-land (MAIN)  
Geraldine McDonnell - Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT)  
Michael McKenna - YouthAction NI Work with Young Men Team  
Michael McKeon - Dublin City University (DCU) School of Nursing

Alex McMeekin - Cruse Bereavement Care  
Gillian O'Brien - Headstrong  
Ailish O'Neill - National Youth Council of Ireland  
Colin Regan - GAA  
Ann Scanlon - Irish Heart Foundation  
Umberto (Scap) Scappaticci - Colin Men's Group  
Sandra Semple - Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHSCT)  
Barry Sheridan - Irish Men's Sheds Association  
Hazel Whelan and Dolores Kavanagh - See Change

## **AGENDA ITEMS ...**

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

Colin welcomed everyone to the meeting (especially those people who had to make a long journey to be here) and gave an overview of the agenda and 'housekeeping' arrangements.

Apologies were tendered from a broad range of organisations. This was due to the date not suiting everyone and, particularly, to restrictions upon their freedom to travel outside of their work catchment area / limits placed upon travel costs. These people do, however, still wish to be involved in the process of looking at what can be done to mark and celebrate Men's Health Week (MHW) this year. A few additional organisations still have to reply to confirm if they will be able to participate this year.

The first meeting of the all-island Planning Group for MHW is always held face-to-face. This is because members have felt that it helps them to build relationships with each other in a more natural way. However, finding a suitable location has always been problematic. In recent years, these gatherings have taken place in Dundalk - a mid-way point between Belfast and Dublin - as this is fairly inconvenient for almost everyone and, so, no one feels discriminated against!

One downside to meeting face-to-face is that it requires participants to commit a lot of time to travelling to these gatherings. Therefore, depending upon the preferences of the group, there is an option to hold subsequent meetings via video-link between Dublin and Belfast. Yet, while this obviously cuts down on the amount of travel time for many people, it can feel quite impersonal.

The partnership approach to planning MHW which has been adopted in the past few years has proved to be very beneficial. It is based upon the premise that many heads make better decisions. However, it is also hoped that each participant's own area of work will benefit from the contacts established in this and future meetings.

Colin reminded everyone that the Planning Group is an open forum which welcomes the input of anyone who is willing to participate, and that there will, inevitably, be times when it is impossible for group members to attend meetings or contribute fully to ongoing e-discussions. Therefore, a pragmatic approach will be adopted.

Colin highlighted that the main purpose of today's meeting was to build group relationships, clarify what MHW is, explore how the theme for MHW 2016 could be developed, and reflect upon our past experience in the planning process.

## 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 any experience / knowledge / interest in men's work that they already have.

## 3. Overview of MHFI and MHW

Finian gave a short PowerPoint presentation on what the Men's Health Forum in Ireland (MHFI) is / does, the aims of International Men's Health Week (MHW) each year, and the previous themes that have been adopted.

International Men's Health Week (MHW) always begins on the Monday before Father's Day and ends on Father's Day itself. During 2016, it will run from Monday 13<sup>th</sup> until Sunday 19<sup>th</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 core aims of MHW 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 and activities.
- Encourage the early detection and treatment of health difficulties in males.

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

In the early years, the MHW theme in Ireland mirrored the theme in other countries. 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. In Ireland, these themes now tend to be broad and generic - to allow maximum 'buy-in' and participation from the widest possible range of organisations and individuals. It is, however, more important to celebrate and promote the core aims of MHW rather than to stick rigidly to the specific theme.

MHW gives everyone (health professionals, service providers, sporting bodies, community groups, employers, policy makers, the media, churches, individuals ...) an opportunity to encourage men and boys to take better care of their health and to seek help or treatment at an early stage.

See [www.mhfi.org](http://www.mhfi.org) (Men's Health Forum in Ireland) and [www.mhfi.org/mhw/about-mhw.html](http://www.mhfi.org/mhw/about-mhw.html) (Men's Health Week) for more information.

#### 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. The following agreements were made:

- 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 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, 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.

There was agreement that these values are still valid for MHW 2016, and should be adopted. However, it was also pointed out that, with a bit of creative and innovative thinking, we might be able to get increased media coverage for 'good news' stories.

## 5. Theme for MHW 2016

The overall theme for MHW 2016 in Ireland is: *'Men United - for health and wellbeing'*. However, participants were also asked to think about possible messages and/or calls to action. A number of ideas were generated (some were submitted before the meeting began) and included:

Do it together	Do it for you
Do something different	Just do it
Check it out	Just check it
Together is better	Together we can do it
Let's do this	Yes we can
Shoulder-to-shoulder	You're not alone
Check your balls	What's the story?
End the silence	What's the score?
What's the result?	Are you winning?
Are we winning?	

It was agreed that *'Are we winning?'* would be the best option as it is:

- A play on words associated with the 'Summer of Sport'.
- About the fortunes of men as a group rather than individual men.
- Has a peer support / buddying-up / we're all in this together feel to it.
- Is a familiar and well used expression among men in Ireland.
- Poses a crucial question for policy makers, service providers, practitioners and men themselves. Thus, it is the starting point for discussing / taking action to improve men's health.

It was felt that the key calls to action should be:

- Offer a 'reason' for men to get together and do something as a group.
- Start a discussion about 'are we winning?' with your colleagues / men you know.
- Raise awareness of the week via posters, websites, social media, newsletters, word-of-mouth etc.
- Organise an event / activity / health check / mailshot / new publication to mark the week, and let others know about it.
- Publicise your own work with men in the media.
- Launch a new longer-term initiative to support men's health and wellbeing ...

Discussion ensued about how this theme and message could be presented and represented. It was felt that:

- Those groups who have a specific interest in the soccer / sports-related associations of the week could utilise a play on words to get their message out e.g. 'tackling men's health issues' or 'kicking the habit' or 'playing for extra time' or 'that's off-side' or 'keep your eye on the ball' etc. This sporting terminology might make the messages more relevant to their target audience.
- 'Are we winning?' is a great launching point to highlight facts / figures which require action to be taken, as well as showcasing examples of what is working well with men.
- The visual publicity materials that are developed should, as far as possible, show a diverse range of men and boys.

In terms of developing a poster, MHFI has already written to both Martin O'Neill and Michael O'Neill (the two national soccer team managers) to ask for their support for MHW via participation in a photo-shoot. Ideally, this would be an image of them shaking hands and facing the camera. No response has been received yet.

If the two managers are not able or willing to participate, we could create the illusion of their involvement by having two men - wearing Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland football shirts with O'Neill on the back - standing facing away from the camera, and doing a 'half-time team talk' with a group of men decked out in various international squad skips.

It was felt that a photo-shoot which captures the diversity of men in Ireland (all shapes, sizes, colours, ages, backgrounds, abilities etc.) would be a powerful image. It might also be useful to have a mix of both famous and ordinary men in this photo. It was suggested that if the group photo had such a mix of men it could be a bit like a 'Spot the Ball' competition or 'Where's Wally?' hunt.

Everyone was asked to think about any celebrities that they could get on-board. Suggestions included:

- Niall Breslin (Bressie) - Aoife to follow-up
- Mr Ireland - Niamh to follow-up
- John Connors - Mick to follow-up
- Tony Ward - Colin to follow-up
- Chris Donaghue - Helen to follow-up

Other suggestions (submitted by email) included: Niall Horan, Paul O'Connell, Calum Best, George Hook, Simon Zebo, Paul McGrath ... If anyone has any 'in-roads' to these (or additional famous) people, contact Colin.

To make things logistically easier, we could request 'head shots' of all these people for inclusion in a huge photo montage.

It was felt, however, that we should remember that although football appeals to many men, this is not, necessarily, true for every man!

## **6. Learning from Previous Years**

Finian asked the meeting if there was anything from previous Men's Health Weeks which we should continue, change, avoid or learn from ...

- It was felt that having something tangible to give to men - especially the 'Challenges and Choices' Man Manuals - worked well. MHFI has (hopefully) secured HSE and PHA funding to update and re-print 10,000 copies of the Man Manuals for 2016. Pamela from IPU will also look into the possibility of ring-fencing some Pharma company funding to do a print run for all of the pharmacies in the Republic of Ireland.
- Other 'giveaways' - such as branded pens or post-its - would be important resources to publicise the week. If funding can be found, these should be produced.
- The MHW 'postcards' also proved to be quite successful in 2015. However, it was pointed out that the increase in postage costs may impact upon how many of them are physically posted this year. One way or the other, they are still useful as a small promotional flyer to raise awareness of the week, and can be left in a myriad of places for men to browse / pickup. MHFI will ensure that these are printed for 2016.

- Although a bit 'old world', posters still have their place. MHFI will arrange for these to be printed. The IPU hope that they can get pharmacies across the Republic of Ireland to display these before and during MHW.
- The power of social media needs to be harnessed more, and we should agree a common hashtag for the week e.g. #AreWeWinning Aoife from USI suggested that we could also ask Twitter to sponsor this and, so, massively increase the reach of the campaign. She will follow-up how to go about doing this.
- In the days leading up to MHW and/or on each day of the week itself, we could have one key men's health fact to present online as a graphic / infograph. This could then be promoted by all Planning Group members (and anyone else that we can enlist) on the same day. This would increase the profile of this issue considerably. It was agreed that group members would think about what these core facts / issues should be before the next meeting. It was suggested that 'Thunderclap' ([www.thunderclap.it](http://www.thunderclap.it)) might be a means to push out this information more effectively.
- It was proposed that we should try to enlist the social media reach of famous faces in Ireland - as, if they re-tweet a message, it'll reach a huge audience. Everyone was asked for suggestions about who to approach.
- The media outlets across Ireland need plenty of notice and a long lead-in time / countdown period to prepare for MHW. Colin will do this briefing on behalf of the Planning Group.
- It is always good to have visible things during MHW that the media can latch on to e.g. launch of a report, Traveller men's event in Phoenix Park, health checks at the City Hall ... MHFI records and publicises events and activities on the MHW webpage. However, few groups submit the details before they happen and, therefore, the media don't pick them up and men don't know they are happening. We need to improve on this communication.
- Men's personal stories are always the most powerful and engaging way to grab public attention. It is important to identify a range of such people in advance.
- It would be great to have a MHW-related video / activity / flashmob etc. which could grab national attention and go viral. All ideas are very welcome!

## **Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Planning Group is scheduled for the morning of Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2016. This gathering will be held in the same Dundalk venue - as participants felt that it was very useful to talk face-to-face in these early stages of development rather than via video-conference.