

---

## First Meeting of the Men's Health Week 2017 Planning Group

---

**Date:** Monday 30<sup>th</sup> January 2017  
**Time:** 11.00am - 1.45pm (including lunch)  
**Venue:** Armagh Diocesan Pastoral Centre, Dundalk, Co. Louth  
**Minute Taker:** Colin Fowler

**Present:**

Julie Aiken - Samaritans Ireland  
Lorcan Brennan - Men's Development Network (MDN)  
Edel Byrne - Irish Men's Sheds Association (IMSA)  
Leslie Cochrane - Men About The Town (MATT)  
Anne Corcoran - Samaritans Ireland  
Conor Cullen - Alcohol Action Ireland  
Jim Curran - Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU)  
Ronan Flynn, GAA Community and Health Department  
Helen Forristal - Marie Keating Foundation  
Colin Fowler - Men's Health Forum in Ireland (MHFI)  
Frances Haughey - Closing the Gap Project: Health Inequalities  
Debbie Hutchinson - Migraine Association of Ireland  
Patrick Kavanagh - Men About The Town (MATT)  
Triona Keane - Irish Heart Foundation (IHF)  
Michael McKeon, Dublin City University (DCU) School of Nursing  
Michael McTigue - Counsellor  
Patrick Monteague - Focus: The Identity Trust  
Finian Murray - Health Service Executive Dublin / North East  
Kevin O'Hagan - Irish Cancer Society (ICS)  
Paul O'Kane - Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT)  
Emer O'Leary - Get Ireland Walking initiative with IMSA  
Brian Staunton - Sport Ireland  
Rachael Treanor - National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)  
Aidan Tumilty - Men About The Town (MATT)

**Apologies:**

Derek Chambers - ReachOut Ireland  
Carrie Davenport - Shoot Positive  
Paula Devine - ARK  
Alison Doake - South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT)  
Anne Farrell - CIE  
Anne Flannery - The Larkin Centre  
Niamh Farrell - Amen  
Sandra Gordon - Cancer Focus NI  
Michael Gregory - Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT)  
Elaine Hardy - South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT)  
Elizabeth Hendron - British Medical Association (BMA) NI  
Marita Hennessy - Researcher, NUI Galway  
Sinéad Hughes - Southern Health and Social Care Trust (SHSCT)  
Lucy Jago - Migraine Association of Ireland  
Peter Jones - Waterford Sports Partnership / Men on the Move  
Naoise Kavanagh, ReachOut Ireland  
David Keane - National Screening Service

Mark Kelly - North West Regional College Students' Union  
Andrew King - Focus: The Identity Trust  
Derek McDonnell - Mojo  
Geraldine McDonnell - Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT)  
Michael McKenna - YouthAction NI Work with Young Men Team  
Mick Mooney - Pavee Point Traveller Men's Health  
Sorcha O'Neill - See Change  
Cian Power - USI Welfare Office  
Bernadette Rooney - HSE Health Promotion, Blanchardstown  
Frank Ruddy - Men About The Town (MATT)  
Sandra Semple - Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHSCT)  
Niamh Stephenson - Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI)

## **AGENDA ITEMS ...**

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

Colin welcomed everyone to the meeting (particularly 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, especially, to restrictions upon the freedom to travel outside of work catchment areas and limits placed upon travel. 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 number of organisations still have to reply to confirm if they will be able to participate.

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 location to suit everyone would be impossible. 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. Depending upon the preferences of the group, there is an option to hold subsequent meetings via video-link between Dublin and Belfast. It was agreed that this would be determined at the end of today's meeting.

A wide reaching partnership approach to planning MHW has been adopted in recent years and this has proved to be very beneficial. It is based upon the premise that many heads generate more creative, innovative and value-for-money solutions. However, it is also hoped that each participant's own area of work will benefit from the contacts established in these encounters.

Colin highlighted that the purpose of today's meeting was to build group relationships, clarify what MHW is, reaffirm the core value base of the week, explore a possible theme for 2017, and reflect upon our past experience of the planning process.

### **2. Round of Introductions**

Michael (McKeon) 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 gave a short PowerPoint presentation on what the Men's Health Forum in Ireland (MHFI) is and the previous themes that have been adopted during International Men's Health Week (MHW) each year. Colin agreed to attach this presentation when circulating the minutes of the meeting.

MHW always begins on the Monday before Father's Day and ends on Father's Day itself. During 2017, it will run from Monday 12<sup>th</sup> until Sunday 18<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
- 2016 - Men United: for Health and Wellbeing

From 2005 - 2010, MHW focused upon a specific medical condition each year. 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. However, anything which celebrates and promotes the core aims of MHW is welcome - even if this does not fit rigidly with the designated theme.

### **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:

- 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 'big picture' values and positive approach are still valid for MHW 2017, and should be adopted once again. However, it was also pointed out by Kevin that we need to be able to communicate these values to men on-the-ground using much clearer and plainer language.

## 5. Theme for MHW 2017

It was originally anticipated that MHW 2017 would focus upon challenging Ireland's strong sense of traditional masculinity and expectations of how a 'real man' should behave. This would, especially, look at how this can: impact negatively upon men's health, wellbeing and help-seeking behaviours; restrict the possibilities and opportunities for many men to break out of the mould; limit the scope of what they feel that they can say / do.

At the end of last week, MHFI met with a senior member of the HSE Communications Team, and they suggested that they might be interested in focusing upon this theme as a larger scale national campaign. However, to do this would require a long lead-in time and a securing a substantial budget. It was decided, therefore, to postpone this theme until 2018 - in the hope that this up-scaling might be possible.

To start discussion on a new focus for 2017, Colin suggested to the meeting that an alternative theme might be:

*'Healthy Ireland Men - it's all about HIM'*

This play on words would draw attention to the fact that the Republic of Ireland launched a new Men's Health Action Plan (titled 'Healthy Ireland - Men' or 'HI-M' ) in November 2016 (see: [www.mhfi.org/Hi-M.pdf](http://www.mhfi.org/Hi-M.pdf)), and would also give out a clear message that MHW is, categorically, a time to focus upon the health and wellbeing needs of men (i.e. HIM). This would remind people in the Republic of Ireland about the existence of the Action Plan, and might encourage Northerners to ask the question: 'why do we not have one?'

Animated discussion on this idea followed, and inputs included ...

- Last year's MHW was, perhaps, the most far reaching to date. Therefore, we need to have something which can build upon the learning from that experience.
- The aim of the theme is to create a common identity and strapline for everyone to rally around. However, this needs to be a broad enough concept for everyone to see that it is relevant to them.
- The purpose of the poster and publicity materials is to alert everyone to the fact that there is a week dedicated to men's health, and to let them know when it will happen. It seeks to put men's health on the public agenda. It is not, in itself, a campaign tool. The bulk of the campaign element needs to be taken on by partners in the Planning Group who are experts in their fields, and can target specific issues.
- Having a call to action on the posters last year (i.e. '*Are We Winning?*') posed an important question for policy makers, service providers, practitioners and men themselves, and helped to kick-start a wider discussion on improving men's health. This challenge element should be repeated in 2017.
- If we use '*it's all about HIM*' this would move us from passive acknowledgement of men's health needs each year to having an overt, direct and explicit focus upon this area.
- When we refer to 'HIM', it can give the impression that it's about other people, not 'ME'. Therefore, if we use this, it has to be handled carefully.

- Positive messages and language (e.g. 'Heroes of Hope') will draw people into the week rather than switch them off and give them an excuse to ignore it.
- MHW should be about celebrating men, looking after men's health, making positive choices, increasing awareness, offering support, self-help / management, new opportunities etc.
- Suggestions for themes and/or straplines included:
  - HIM and ME
  - How is he?
  - Men are winning?
  - Men behaving well (*an inversion of men behaving badly*)
  - Where are we now?
  - Are we there yet?
  - Let's hear it from (*or for*) the boys
  - Has your voice been heard?
  - It's good to talk
  - How is he?
  - How's your man?
  - How's Ireland doing? (re. policy, services, attitudes, men themselves etc.)
- Some people didn't like the use of the word 'all' in the phrase '*it's all about HIM*'.

After much discussion, it was agreed that the content of poster would look something like ...

Header:	Men's Health Week 2017
Dates:	Monday 12 <sup>th</sup> - Sunday 18 <sup>th</sup> June 2017
Main Theme:	It's about HIM <u>or</u> It's all about HIM
Image:	Group of men and boys sitting on a couch looking cosy
Call / Question:	How are YOU doing? ...

The couch image needs to ...

- Reflect diversity (e.g. age, disability, race).
- Be rooted in reality (e.g. set in a living room rather than in an abstract setting).
- Show a connection between the men and appear that they're enjoying each other's company (e.g. having a cup of tea, smiling, chatting).

On the MHW postcards, we could include some additional text after 'How are YOU doing?' This could include, for example, tick box options saying:

- Couldn't be better
- Grand enough
- Fair to middling
- Had better days
- Definitely need a bit of help

... or similar.

## 6. Learning from Previous Years

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

- There was a problem with the online events submission form last year (due to a website hacking incident). Colin will ensure that anyone who wishes to submit the details of an event will also know about, and have access to, a Word version of the form - to avoid a similar situation this year.
- MHFI hopes to do a re-print of the 'Challenges and Choices' Man Manual again this year. However, it is important to also have an electronic version of it available online. Colin will arrange for this, and make Planning Group members aware of the URL. This will especially be useful to Jim's network of pharmacies.
- The Man Manuals, posters and postcards were all disseminated very quickly after their release in 2016. First refusal will, once again, be given to Planning Group members. Therefore, everyone needs to let Colin know as quickly as possible how many copies they will require.

## 8. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Planning Group will be held in the same Dundalk venue (Diocesan Pastoral Centre) - as participants felt that it was very useful to talk face-to-face in these early stages of development rather than via video-conference. It is scheduled for the morning of **Monday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2017** (*PLEASE NOTE: Monday 13<sup>th</sup> March was not available in the Centre and we had to book our reserve date*).