
First Meeting of the Men's Health Week 2018 Planning Group

Date: Wednesday 10th January 2018
Time: 11.00am - 1.45pm (including lunch)
Venue: Armagh Diocesan Pastoral Centre, Dundalk, Co. Louth
Minute Taker: Colin Fowler

Present:

Lorcan Brennan - Men's Development Network (MDN)
Edel Byrne - Irish Men's Sheds Association (IMSA)
Anne Corcoran - Samaritans Ireland
Benny Cullen - Sport Ireland
Jim Curran - Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU)
Alison Doake - South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT)
Anne Farrell - CIE Group
Colin Fowler - Men's Health Forum in Ireland (MHFI)
Karen Halligan - Amen
Frances Haughey - Closing the Gap Project: Health Inequalities
Sinéad Hughes - Southern Health and Social Care Trust (SHSCT)
David Keane - National Screening Service
Brian Laughlin - Belfast Men's Health Week Action Group
Michael McKenna - YouthAction NI Work with Young Men Team
Eunan McKinney - Alcohol Action Ireland
Kate Morgan - See Change
Finian Murray - Health Service Executive (HSE) Dublin North East
Clare O'Brien - 3Ts
Shauna O'Connor - See Change
Kevin O'Hagan - Irish Cancer Society (ICS)
Paul O'Kane - Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT)
Emer O'Leary - Get Ireland Walking
Brian Staunton - Sport Ireland
Rachael Treanor - National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)
Noreen Turley - National Screening Service

Apologies:

Julie Aiken - Samaritans Ireland
Jonathan Boyd - Focus: The Identity Trust
Enda Campbell - Irish Heart Foundation (IHF)
Carrie Davenport - Shoot Positive
Paula Devine - ARK
Karen Galway - Queen's University Belfast School of Nursing
Marita Hennessy - Researcher, NUI Galway
Debbie Hutchinson - Migraine Association of Ireland
Michael Lynch - Men's Action Network
Emma McCrudden - Northern Ireland Chest, Heart & Stroke (NICHS)
Derek McDonnell - Mojo
Geraldine McDonnell - Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT)
Michael McKeon - Dublin City University (DCU) School of Nursing
Patrick Monteague - Focus: The Identity Trust
Celine Moran - See Change
Shane O'Donnell - Men and Mental Health PhD Student, QUB

Andy O'Hara - Pavee Point Traveller Men's Health Project
Carla O'Neill - Marie Keating Foundation
Gillian Prue - Queen's University Belfast School of Nursing
Bernadette Rooney - HSE Health Promotion, Blanchardstown
Frank Ruddy - Men About The Town
Sandra Semple - Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHSCT)
Rosemary Scott - National Youth Council of Ireland

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 a brief overview of the agenda and 'housekeeping' arrangements.

Apologies were tendered from a broad range of organisations. As in previous years, this was due to the date not suiting everyone and, especially, to restrictions upon travelling outside of work catchment areas and limits placed upon travel expenses. 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. Many of them have committed to contributing 'remotely' via email and telephone follow-up calls. A number of other 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 location to suit everyone would be impossible. For the past number of 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 2018, and reflect upon our past experience of 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 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 2018, it will run from Monday 11th until Sunday 17th 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 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?

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 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 2018, and should be adopted once again. However, it was also agreed that everyone should go away and reflect on these, and send any feedback to Colin before the end of January 2018.

5. Theme for MHW 2018

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, while still sticking to the core set of overall aims for the week, which are:

- 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.

From 2005 - 2010, MHW focused upon a specific medical condition each year, and was driven solely by MHFI. 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.

To start discussion on the focus for 2018, Colin shared a theme that had been suggested to him recently:

'Lighten Up and Tighten Up.'

As requested at last year's meetings, this is a definite call to action but, at the same time, could refer to any number of things and would leave room for interpretation. For example ...

- Lighten Up: chill out; open your mind to new possibilities and opportunities; have a laugh; take a load off your mind; lose some weight; avoid too much sun exposure; wind your neck in; take it easy; cheer up; look on the bright side; see men as an asset rather than a challenge / problem to fix ...
- Tighten Up: do more physical activity; work out; develop self-discipline and will power; turn that fat into muscle; form a close group with others; support your friends / colleagues / team; drink less alcohol; get your organisation's systems and structures in place to welcome men; make the time to do something positive ...

This concept would, therefore, address both the mental and physical aspects of men's health. It could also be followed by something like '*Lighten Up and Tighten Up - Look Good. Feel Great.*' However, some members of the group felt that the words 'lighten' and 'tighten' may carry negative connotations for some men - especially in relation to their mental health.

It was, therefore, decided to explore what we're hoping to achieve before proposing a wording for the theme. The following issues were raised ...

- MHW offers an opportunity and an occasion to start a national conversation about men's health and wellbeing. It is not about men in general.
- The purpose of a theme is simply to create a common identity and strapline for everyone to rally around.
- Whatever theme is chosen is less important than the overall aims of MHW (outlined earlier).
- We need to think about specific messages to promote during 2018. Suggestions included:
 - Self-care (Jim has some research which he will share with the group) / look after yourself
 - Take back ownership of your health
 - Act responsibly (both at an individual and an organisational level)
 - Empower men
 - Celebrate achievements
 - Promote independence
 - Be resilient / develop resilience / bounce back
 - Try something new / different
 - Take a chance / give it a go
 - Get back to basics
 - Look after yourself / others
 - Allow yourself to be vulnerable
 - Be strong / courageous / take control
 - Become a leader / pace-setter to other men
 - Reflect the many faces men have (e.g. stoic, joker, worker, tough, sad etc.)
 - Changing times / changing roles / changing responsibilities
 - What does it mean to be male in Ireland?
- The theme / strapline needs to be a broad enough concept for everyone to see that it is relevant to them, but they also need to feel comfortable with it.

- The theme / strapline is a central feature of the promotional materials for MHW. However, it is important to remember that the main 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. The health concerns that were tackled on different days during MHW last year played a key role in doing this.
- It is useful to have a call to action (e.g. last year it was *'how are you doing?'*) which poses a question for policy makers, service providers, practitioners and men themselves, and helps to kick-start a wider discussion on improving men's health.
- Positive messages and language draw people into the week rather than switching them off and giving them an excuse to ignore it.
- Every word(s) we use will, inevitably, be interpreted in different ways and have particular meaning for the person who hears it. While it is important to avoid causing offence or distress, we also need to be decisive and not become overly risk avoidant.
- Whatever theme is selected needs to be catchy, easy to express and easy to explain.

A range of suggestions for themes and/or straplines was proposed. Participants were also asked to submit additional ideas to Colin after today's meeting. It was agreed that these should then be put to a vote (organised by Colin via email). Options include:

1. Lighten up and tighten up
2. Lighten up and tighten up - look good, feel great
3. Be there for you
4. It's a man's role ...
5. Caring for me and caring for you
6. What a man!
7. Own your health
8. Try something new
9. Try something different
10. We want you to try something new
11. Are you brave enough to try something new?
12. It's in your hands
13. Take a chance - give it a go
14. Get back to basics
15. Look after yourself
16. Look out for yourself. Look out for others.
17. Pull down the mask
18. Take control
19. Be the pace-setter
20. Enter unknown territory
21. Get on the right track
22. Choose You. Choose Life.
23. Man talk
24. Make one small change
25. Make a change
26. Take one small step
27. Embrace change

28. Celebrate change - take the next step
29. One small step for man, one giant leap for men's health - take the next step
30. Create space for men
31. Take the first step
32. Are you ready? ...
33. Do one small thing
34. Embrace life - take a first step
35. Have a blank page with the words: 'Men's Health Matters. Discuss.'
36. MANAGEABLE - every **MAN** of any **AGE** is **ABLE** to make a change to his health.
What change will you make?

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 ...

- If funding could be found, it would be good to have a broader and more dynamic range of graphics available - especially for use on social media. Eunan and Brian S. later sent examples:



- The daily themes / social media campaign was a particularly positive aspect of MHW 2017. However, the content needs to be agreed 3-4 weeks in advance of MHW to ensure that it can be lined-up for publishing within partner organisations. It was agreed that we should broadly use the same topics as last year. However, the Sport and Physical Activity day should be swapped to Saturday - with the key message: *'Get out and have fun!'*
- Demand for the 'Challenges and Choices' Man Manual completely outstripped capacity last year. MHFI hopes to update and re-print it again this year with, hopefully, a larger number of copies. First refusal will, once again, be given to Planning Group members. Everyone needs to let Colin know as soon as possible how many copies they will require. As in previous years, it will also be available as an online PDF file, and Colin will make Planning Group members aware of the URL.
- Brian S. suggested highlighting the important role of sport in the Physical Activity section of the 'Challenges and Choices' Man Manual, and will send Colin some ideas for this. However, as MHFI does not own the copyright for either the content or the publishing of the Man Manual, it is impossible to make any substantive changes to it. However, suggestions for small insertions or more up-to-date contact links is possible.

- Although virtually all of the 10,000 postcards for MHW 2017 were disseminated, some people felt that a flyer might be a more useful tool. This change will be dependent upon the budget available.
- The mutually beneficial working partnerships which developed between members of the Planning Group last year were a positive side-effect of the face-to-face meetings in Dundalk.

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. A number of possible dates were suggested, but the only one that the centre could accommodate was the morning of **Tuesday 27th February 2018.**