
Second Meeting of the Men's Health Week (MHW) 2024 Planning Group

Date: Thursday 25th January 2024
Time: 10.30am - 1.00pm [followed by lunch]
Mode: In person at the County Museum, Dundalk, Co. Louth
Minute Taker: Coli Fowler

Present:

Lise Alford - 3Ts
Pauric Brazil - Health Service Executive (CHO 7)
Lorcan Brennan - Men's Development Network
Jim Curran - Irish Pharmacy Union
Anne Farrell - CIE
Coli Fowler - Men's Health Forum in Ireland (MHFI)
Sharon Graham - Carer Support Service, South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust
Frances Haughey - Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
Conor Keane - Alcohol Action Ireland
Aidan McCabe - SHSCT (Newry and Mourne)
Johnny McClurg - Community Sports Network
Andrea McDermott - Men's Aid Ireland
Daniela Monza - Mental Health Ireland
Barry Murphy - Bodywhys
Finian Murray - Health Service Executive (National)
Caoimhe Rudden - Health Service Executive (CHO 1)
Dan Russell - Health Service Executive (CHO 7)
Stephen Quinn - GAA

Apologies:

Paul Anderson - Forever Fathers
Deirdre Bigley - HeadsUp
Alannah Brennan - Newry, Mourne and Down District Council
Michael Broderick - Clanrye Group
Ciaran Cafferkey - Sport Ireland
Lorraine Conneely - Irish Men's Sheds Association
Greg Clark - Health Service Executive (CHO 1)
Brid Collins - National Youth Council of Ireland
John Collins - Exchange House Ireland
Sharon Daly - Iarnród Éireann
Clare Deasy - Health Service Executive (CHO 4)
Paula Devine - ARK
Martin Dooley - Retired Engineering Trainer
Brian Doyle - HUGS@Home Project, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
Olive Fanning - Health Service Executive (CHO 5)
Helen Forristal - Marie Keating Foundation
Brien Frazer - South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust
Martin Gillick - Bus Éireann
Teresa Hennessy - HeadsUp Kildare
Marita Hennessy - INFANT Centre, University College Cork
Tracy James - Irish Heart Foundation
Ellen Jennings - Bodywhys
Chris Kerr - Men's Action Network
Eoin Kernan - Eating Disorders Campaigner

Mark Kernohan - Lifeline
Ellie Leonard - Western Health and Social Care Trust
Michael McKenna - YouthAction NI
Rebecca McLaughlin - Irish Men's Sheds Association
Liam Maher - SISK Building Contractors
Kathryn Meade - National Screening Service
Fra Mohan - Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
Sonia Montgomery - Western Health and Social Care Trust
Anne Marie Murphy - Health Service Executive (CHO 2)
Colette Murphy - Union of Students in Ireland
James O'Hagan - LGBT Ireland
Kevin O'Hagan - Irish Cancer Society
Paul O'Kane - Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
Derek Pepper - SHINE
Tracey Powell - Southern Health and Social Care Trust
Pam Smyth - Carer Support Service, South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust
Nigel Tate - Flower Hill Counselling
Brona Turley - Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
Bill Vaughan - Mental Health Ireland
Ollie Walsh - Health Service Executive (CHO 5)

AGENDA ITEMS ...

1. Welcome

Coli welcomed everyone and thanked them for making the time to meet face-to-face this morning. He also thanked Bernadine, from the 'Outcomers' project, for helping us to find an alternative venue at short notice when their building became unavailable.

In 'the olden days', meetings 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. At the outset, these meetings rotated between Dublin and Belfast, but they later relocated to Dundalk - since it is a town on the North / South arterial route. During COVID, this plan rapidly changed to a reliance upon 'Zoom' meetings. However, as COVID restrictions lifted, many people liked the idea of holding at least some of the gatherings in-person once again.

Coli highlighted that the purpose of this meeting was to:

- refine the MHW 2024 theme;
- generate ideas for the call to action and key messages that we would like to convey;
- explore possible concepts for the graphics;
- look at promotional and resource materials;
- scope potential 'Ambassadors' for the week; and
- share any initial plans or ideas for activities / events / happenings during MHW 2024.

2. Round of introductions

Finian asked all the participants to give their name and the organisation that they work in, and to share a bit about their interest in men's health work. This was done to welcome and get to know new members.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 18th December 2023 were accepted as an accurate reflection of that gathering. They were proposed by Lorcan and seconded by Anne. There were no matters arising.

4. MHW 2024 Theme, Call to Action and Key Messages

Lorcan reminded the meeting that, after two polls, the clear winner for the over-arching theme for MHW 2024 (by a fairly substantial margin) was 'Know Your Numbers'. However, the next step is to add some substance to this broad idea, think about the call to action / strapline for 2024, and explore key messages which might be useful.

To kick-off the discussion, Coli gave some feedback that was tendered to him in advance of today by Planning Group members who could not attend this meeting. This included ...

- It would be useful to create a credit card size resource (similar to the HSE's Key Numbers Z-Card) for MHW 2024.
- Our theme for MHW 2024 links naturally to the 'Take 5' campaign.
- We could develop a 'Know Your Numbers' quiz to encourage interactive engagement.
- MHW is not just about individual men. We also need to highlight the key facts / numbers that policy makers and service providers should be aware of.
- This theme offers a great opportunity to promote helpline numbers / support services.
- We need to be aware that some metrics (e.g. using BMI as a 'target number') can be flawed, and can actually create pressure which contributes to some people's eating disorders.
- We could look into the possibility of encouraging building sites, businesses, libraries, community and voluntary sector centres, government buildings etc. to 'Fly the [MHW] Flag' in public places during MHW 2024.

The purpose of the MHW theme and call to action / strapline is simply to create a common identity for everyone to rally around. However, it needs to be broad enough for everyone to see that it is relevant to them. Indeed, ultimately, anything and everything which celebrates and promotes the core aims of MHW is welcome - even if this does not fit rigidly with the designated theme.

Experience, from previous years, highlights that it is useful to have a call to action (e.g. last year it was 'what's your picture of health?') which challenges policy makers, service providers, practitioners and men themselves and/or helps to kick-start a wider discussion on improving men's health. However, whatever call / strapline is selected, it needs to be catchy, easy to explain, and easy to express visually.

Lorcan broke the participants into four smaller groups and asked: if the overall theme is 'Know Your Numbers', what should the call to action / strapline for MHW 2024 be? The suggestions included ...

- How do you measure up?
- What's your numbers?
- You count
- Every man counts
- Multiply your chances
- Numbers never lie
- What's your number?

- Is it adding up?
- It's all about the maths
- What's behind the figures?
- Figure it out
- Your health counts
- Men's health counts
- Make them count
- Make health count
- Do the numbers add up?
- You're more than just a number
- What's your target?

There was also a suggestion that we might consider reversing the call and the theme, and run with: 'Men's Health Counts - Know Your Numbers'. However, as 145 votes have already been cast in two polls to determine the over-arching theme, it was felt that we should respect the will of those who voted.

Coli will circulate these suggestions to the whole planning group in the week beginning Monday 29th January 2024, and a vote(s) will be held to determine the most popular choice.

In terms of key messages for MHW 2024, it was felt that we should be ...

- Emphasising that this is a population-wide attempt to increase awareness of the key numbers that policy makers / service providers / men / important people in men's lives need to know. Sometimes, these will relate to medical issues (e.g. blood pressure, heart rate, cholesterol level), but they will also include key statistics on the state of men's health in Ireland, as well as the contact numbers for support services.
- Aware that although men might 'know their numbers', they also need to understand what they mean and how to take appropriate action to effect change. Health literacy is central to this.
- Cognisant that numbers, on their own, might be viewed simply as a symbol of men's health problems. However, they also need to be a catalyst for increased knowledge / learning, signposting to reliable sources of information and, ultimately, using this information to effect action and positive change (at personal, policy and service delivery levels).
- Mindful that some men can be very competitive with their peers around reducing / increasing their numbers. While this can drive them on to positive change, the key message should focus upon everyone doing their personal best.
- Actively trying to engage those cohorts of people (e.g. pharmacists) who will easily understand the 'know your numbers' message, and who want to support action. They'll make great allies.
- Stressing that everyone is more than just a number!

5. Ideas to Bring the Theme / Call to Action to Life

Coli invited everyone to think about how the agreed theme and call to action might be represented visually on our poster and other promotional materials for MHW 2024. He reminded everyone that, for example, on an A4 size poster (the most popular size) it is crucial to have limited text and an image which is easy to discern from a distance. As the space to explain what the week is about is limited, it's important that the message is clear and that it gets everyone's attention quickly.

It is also 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, but it is not, in itself, a campaign. 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 / promote specific issues.

A number of ideas were proposed as potential visuals / graphics which might help to draw attention to the MHW theme and call to action. These included:

- 007 - James Bond imagery.
- Bingo card.
- Dice.
- Lottery balls in a machine.
- Dartboard / 'Bullseye' (TV show) board - possibly have a health issue / topic relating to each of the 20 numbers and ask: what do you require / how are you going to make your finish? We could also do an online version of the board with hyperlinks to explore more information for each number.
- Football skips with the players' numbers on the back.
- A car registration plate - though the problem would be getting a style to work on a cross-Border basis.
- Golf caddy - with the caddy advising the player on which number of club to use for this particular type of situation.
- Scuba diver - looking at his watch / gauge to check oxygen levels.
- Marathon runner - checking his smart watch for time / distance / heart rate.
- Weight lifter - surrounded by a range of static weights.
- Snakes and Ladders board - exploring how everyone's health is not constant, can go up and down, and can be affected by luck (e.g. where you live, what you can afford to eat, the supports available to you etc.).
- Join the dots / paint by numbers - to make a health related image.
- Numbered American Pool balls on a table.
- Airport departure board - have a word play on gate numbers, final call, boarding, departed, delayed etc.
- Phone screen with numbers and icons - with helplines on speed dial.

After the meeting, Conor Keane (Alcohol Action Ireland) submitted another idea for the graphic - a chip and pin card machine. Each PIN number is unique to the individual. We could come up an acronym for PIN like 'Personal Improvement Number' or 'Prevent Illness Number'. The card could be called 'Viva', with a strapline something like 'Your Health Is Your Wealth' or 'It Pays To Get Healthy'. For resources, we could produce replica bank cards which front a Z-Card format with health information on each panel.

After discussion on the merits of each, it was agreed that the short list should be:

- Dartboard / 'Bullseye' board
- Golf caddy
- Join the dots - to create an image
- Airport departure board
- Phone screen
- Chip and pin card

Coli will circulate these to the wider group, and put them to a vote(s) in the week beginning Monday 29th January 2024.

6. Resource Materials for MHW 2024

Lorcan outlined some of the resources developed in the last few years to support Men's Health Week. These have included ...

- Posters (A₃ and A₄)
- Postcards (A₅)
- Man Manual
- A broad range of graphics (e.g. logo, banner, badge, Facebook / Twitter Headers, bespoke social media images)
- Dedicated web page - to act as the central focal point for information on the week
- Facebook and Twitter pages, and a ready-made pool of social media messages
- 'Toolbox for Action' and 'What can I do to mark this week?' briefing papers
- Video shorts
- Branded pens ...

All of these materials are free and, where possible, made available in both hard copy and in electronic format. However, Lorcan pointed out that there is only a very small budget available to produce these resources.

When the concept for the main graphic is finalised, this will be used as the backbone of the posters and postcards to highlight the week.

Lorcan invited everyone to make suggestions for other resource materials which might be useful (if the budget will stretch that far). The proposals for MHW branded materials included ...

- Produce more pens this year - as they are a useful giveaway at events.
- Put QR codes on all materials produced.
- Fridge magnet - with QR code and a few important numbers.
- Shopping trolley tokens on a key ring - the only problem is that we'd have to do a separate run for both RoI and NI.
- Know Your Numbers Z-Cards - with key facts, figures and helpline numbers.
- Branded 'SPORKS' - which are all-in-one spoons and forks.
- Waist measuring tapes.
- Interactive online men's health quiz.
- Infographics.
- Video of men talking about their key numbers.

Two further ideas were submitted after the meeting had ended:

- Create a 'Spotify' (or similar) playlist for the week.
- Produce a few cardboard MHW 'selfie-frames' for use at events.

7. Potential MHW 'Ambassadors'

In 2023, a number of people very kindly volunteered to be 'Ambassadors' for, and the public face of, Men's Health Week on the island of Ireland. They were ...

- David Gillick - record breaking 400m runner, author, celebrity MasterChef winner, and mental health advocate.
- Eoin Kernan - star of the 'Unspoken' documentary about men and eating disorders.

- Gary (Spike) O'Sullivan - middleweight boxing titleholder.
- Dr Mark Rowe - medical doctor, author on health, and wellbeing champion.
- Dr Noel Richardson - architect of Ireland's National Men's Health Policy and Action Plan.

Between them, they managed to generate an amazing amount of high-level TV, radio and newsprint coverage. Previous Ambassadors - with a strong personal story to tell - have also helped to achieve this goal.

Lorcan asked for realistic suggestions for a new raft of Ambassadors for MHW 2024, and the proposals were ...

- Ritchie Sadlier - former professional footballer and pundit with RTÉ Sport.
- Prof Kieran Boyd - Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.
- Niall Breslin - musician, former Westmeath Gaelic footballer / Leinster Rugby player, and mental health advocate.
- Karl Henry - fitness expert on RTE's Operation Transformation.
- Dr Noel McCaffery - ExWell Medical (exercise for wellness with medical oversight) community-based chronic illness rehabilitation programme.
- Brian Crooke - parkHITT wellbeing.

Participants were asked to forward any contact details for these people to Coli as soon as possible, and to contact him if they think of anyone else they know who would be a suitable Ambassador.

8. Possible Activities / Events / Happenings to Mark MHW 2024

Coli invited participants to share any initial plans they might have for Men's Health Week 2024. Examples included: a publication on top tips for men's mental health; merging 5-a-side football with the Five Ways to Wellbeing; walking football tournament for older men; health screening sessions for staff; health fairs; partnership with ParkRun on Dads-and-Lads events; delivering 'Engage' workshops; social media posting; podcasts; running a webinar; distribution of the 'Action Man' manual; putting MHW posters in public spaces; and media interviews.

9. Next Steps

It was agreed that the next meeting will be held online via Zoom. The date will be Wednesday 13th March 2024 from 11.00am - 1.00pm.

Everyone was reminded that membership of the Planning Group is open to anyone who wishes to contribute, and they are welcome to invite other organisations to attend future meetings and/or to input electronically.