
First Meeting of the Men's Health Week (MHW) 2020 Planning Group

Date: Friday 29th November 2019
Time: 11.00am - 1.45pm (including lunch)
Venue: Armagh Diocesan Pastoral Centre, Dundalk, Co. Louth
Minute Taker: Colin Fowler

Present:

Lise Alford - 3Ts
Lorcan Brennan - Men's Development Network (MDN)
Alison Doake - South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT)
Anne Farrell - CIE Group
Colin Fowler - Men's Health Forum in Ireland (MHFI)
Finian Murray - Health Service Executive (HSE) Dublin North East
Michael McKenna - YouthAction NI Work with Young Men Team
Andrea McDermot - AnyMan
Kevin O'Hagan - Irish Cancer Society (ICS)
Andy O'Hara - Traveller Health Unit
Roisin O'Hara - National Screening Service
Patricia O'Neill - Clanrye Group
Peter Shaw - Community Sports Network

Apologies:

Julie Aiken - Samaritans Ireland
Kevin Balanda - MHFI
Edel Byrne - Irish Men's Sheds Association (IMSA)
Michael Collins - Pavee Point Men's Health Programme
Jim Curran - Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU)
Marese Damery - Irish Heart Foundation (IHF)
Carrie Davenport - Shoot Positive
Cólleen Devine - Sport Ireland
Paula Devine - ARK
Helen Forristal - Marie Keating Foundation
Sandra Gordon - Cancer Focus NI
Sian Johnston - Extern
Seanna Gray - Male Menu
Lisa Harold - National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)
Marita Hennessy - Researcher, NUI Galway
Sinéad Hughes - Southern Health and Social Care Trust (SHSCT)
Lucy Browe - Migraine Association of Ireland
Michael Lynch - Men's Action Network
Emma McCrudden - Northern Ireland Chest, Heart & Stroke (NICHHS)
Niamh McDaid - Bowel Cancer UK
Craig McHugh - Union of Students in Ireland
Michael McKeon - Dublin City University (DCU) School of Nursing
Áine Montgomery - HSE, Clare
Sarah Jane O'Dwyer - AnyMan
Paul O'Kane - Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT)
Emer O'Leary - Men on the Move
William Purcell - Primal Paddy
Deirdre Ryan - National Screening Service

Sandra Semple - Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHSCT)
Brian Staunton - Sport Ireland
Rachael Treanor - National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)
Brona Turley - Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council

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 any 'new faces' to the group) and gave a brief overview of the housekeeping arrangements.

Apologies were tendered from a broad range of organisations who were unable to make today's date, as well as from others who - due to the distance to travel - have committed to contributing remotely via email and telephone follow-up calls. A number of other people have recently moved jobs, while some organisations still have to reply to confirm if they will be able to participate this year.

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. Everyone is welcome to invite other organisations to attend future meetings and/or to input electronically.

Colin highlighted that the purpose of today's meeting was to get to know each other, understand what MHW is, reaffirm the core value base of the week, reflect upon any learning from previous weeks, and explore a possible theme for MHW 2020.

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 MHW is and the previous themes that have been adopted during International Men's Health Week (MHW) each year (see: www.mhfi.org/mhw/about-mhw.html).

MHW always begins on the Monday before Father's Day and ends on Father's Day itself. During 2020 it will run from Monday 15th until Sunday 21st 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 begin to organise local activities to mark this week.
- 2005: MHW is first celebrated in Ireland on an all-island basis (when 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.

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, and the development of a men's fitness programme.

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 values and positive approach are still valid for MHW 2020 and set the right tone for the week. No amendments or additions were suggested, and they will be adopted again this year.

5. Learning from Previous Years

Lorcan asked the meeting if there was anything from Men's Health Week 2019 - or previous MHWs - which we should continue, change, avoid or learn from ...

- Early planning is crucial; as is having the theme agreed early on.
- The face-to-face planning meetings facilitate relationship building and more in-depth discussion of issues.
- It is important to avoid focusing upon 'toxic masculinity' during the week.
- Gender identity is fluid, and this needs to be reflected in the week and/or become the topic of more conversations.
- The daily themes / social media campaign was a positive aspect of MHW 2019.

- Champions for men's health should not only be high profile people, but also 'everyday heroes'.
- MHW offers an opportunity to highlight the positive qualities / achievements of men. Doing this via photos and videos is particularly useful.
- Having groups such as Traveller men in the MHW imagery gives a powerful message of inclusion to everyone and increases the visibility of these particular groups.

6. Theme for MHW 2020

Colin highlighted 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.

It is useful to have a call to action (e.g. last year it was *'Make the Time. Take the Time.'*) which poses a challenge for policy makers, service providers, practitioners and men themselves, and helps to kick-start a wider discussion on improving men's health.

Whatever theme is selected, it needs to be catchy, easy to explain, and easy to express visually.

In advance of today's meeting, Colin had asked potential Planning Group members to submit suggestions for the theme, and the following ideas were tendered ...

Gaming Addiction
The Unfinished Journey
The Strength Within
Work on It
Get to Work
Join the Dots
Take 5

The [not A] lone Ranger
Mission isPossible
20:20 Vision - I can see clearly now
It's ManAgeAble
Get Connected
Connect Yourself

Some of these suggestions are recycled from MHW 2019, while others are new inputs. Colin gave a more detailed explanation of what each suggestion meant, and a conversation ensued about these possibilities as well as others.

The discussion covered ...

- Although gaming is a very important issue for men, focusing solely upon it would narrow the scope and impact of the week. However, a strong catchphrase could be: *'Men's Health Week - it's not a game!'*
- Some suggestions are too smart / complicated (e.g. 'The [not A] lone Ranger') and others too vague (e.g. 'The Unfinished Journey').
- Many men are already 'connected' to harmful, controlling or destructive things such as gambling or pornography.
- Plugging into the 'virtual world' can have many positive benefits, but there is also a need to unplug from it sometimes and to connect to real people. This might require some men disconnecting.
- New 'smart' technologies, platforms and programmes make virtual connections easy, but it's also very easy to lose your sense of balance.

The strongest theme which emerged from the discussion was the need for men of all ages to lead a balanced life. This could include ...

- Work ~ life balance
- Virtual ~ real world balance
- Living in the past ~ present ~ future balance
- Study ~ friends balance
- Family ~ mates balance
- Online ~ offline balance
- Exercise ~ relaxing balance
- Drinking to socialise ~ drinking to excess balance
- Junk food ~ healthy eating balance
- Stress ~ chilling balance ...

It was also pointed out that MHW next year will take place in 2020 - which offers a once-off opportunity to play with the concept of 20:20 perfect vision / seeing clearly. 2020 is also a 'balanced' number.

It was agreed, therefore, that MHW 2020 should focus upon this idea of encouraging balance in order to improve men's health and wellbeing - as imbalance impacts negatively upon this. It was felt that this would: be a strong generic message; have wide appeal and potential for buy-in from all sectors; avoid preaching about men's bad behaviour; encourage everyone (men, workplaces, service providers etc.) to find positive ways to strike the right balance; highlight that change is possible; offer an opportunity for every sector to offer their 'Top 5 (or 10) Practical Tips' to achieve balance in their specialist area.

Suggestions made for the call to action were ...

- Are you getting the balance right?
- Have you got the balance right?
- Check your balance
- Find your balance
- Get the balance right
- How balanced are you?
- Strike the right balance
- What does balance mean to you?
- Are you juggling too much?
- Too many balls in the air?

Colin will circulate these suggestions to the wider Planning Group membership, and ask for a first round of voting on preferred options to narrow the field of possibilities.

A number of ideas were tendered as to how this concept of balance, and juggling a myriad of things, could be represented visually. These included ...

- Have a man standing on the fulcrum of a see-saw juggling a number of balls.
- The man could be either a drawing or a real person (there was suggestion to ask Irish Comedian / Magician Jack Wise to be the model - as his act features juggling).
- The fulcrum could be either the year (i.e. 2020 written as either 20:20 or 20 | 20), or a pie chart showing different percentages - of demands - in each sector.
- The balls being juggled could have words on them representing discrete health areas e.g. physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social etc.
- One version of the online poster could leave these balls blank for groups to insert their own words during group work discussion (although the space might be too small for this).

This juggling theme could, potentially, be expanded by ...

- Putting instructions online explaining how to teach yourself to juggle.
- Encouraging everyone to participate in a 30 second 'Juggling Challenge' - wherein they video themselves and upload their efforts to a dedicated website.
- Inviting celebrities to undertake the 'Juggling Challenge'.
- Do a couple of roadshow events during MHW wherein we ask men in workplaces / shopping centres / sports clubs etc. to do the challenge (using balls with the key health words written on them).

7. Planning Group Membership

Finian reminded everyone that the Planning Group is open to anyone who is willing to contribute to it - either in person or electronically. Members of the group were invited to bring along any contacts that they have to the next meeting - so long as they let Colin know in advance to ensure we have a seat / food for them.

Three suggestions were made for new participants. These were Tangent (within Trinity College Dublin), Bodywhys and GambleAware.

8. Any Other Business

Lorcan explained a little bit about the White Ribbon Campaign in Ireland and offered group members copies of the poster and the small white ribbons that supporters wear.

9. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Planning Group will be held in the Diocesan Pastoral Centre, Dundalk, on Monday 27th January 2020. It will begin at 11.00am sharp.