Getting Men's Health onto a Policy Agenda - Charting the Development of a National Men's Health Policy in the Republic of Ireland

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Overview of Presentation

• Putting in context the (short) evolution of men’s health in Republic of Ireland onto a policy agenda
• Methodologies used for policy development
• Overview of a draft policy framework for men’s health
• Making the policy succeed
‘He’s a real Nowhere Man
Sitting in his nowhere land...’
‘He’s as blind as he can be, just sees what he wants to see’
‘Nowhere man, don’t worry
Take your time, don’t hurry.’
Evolution of National Men’s Health Policy
Gestation period 4 years!
So what’s in this national men’s health policy for me?
What’s ‘men’s health’ got to do with me?

"I don’t know how you managed it madam, but you have got through to someone in authority."
‘Men’s Health’?

‘...any issue that can be seen to impact on men’s quality of life and for which there is a need for gender-competent responses to enable men to achieve optimal health and well-being at both an individual and a population level’
Men’s Health Policy

- Challenges
- Opportunities
Men’s Health Policy: Challenges

- Men ‘the privileged sex’
- Health traditionally seen as ‘women’s business’
- Current political climate/ health service ‘reform’
- ‘Men’s health’ – not well understood
- Limited evidence of best practice on what works with men
- Deficit model of men’s health
- Absence of training for service providers – men seen as ‘hard work’
- Absence of male workers in education and caring professions
Men’s Health Policy: Opportunities

• Defining men’s health as a productivity issue
• Applying a cost-benefit analysis
• The potential to forge strong coalitions, alliances and partnerships at both national and local level
• Men willingly engage with health when the approach is right
• Appealing to an upstream population health policy approach
• Targeting men’s health can impact not just on men’s lives, but can have positive spin-offs on the lives of women and children
• Equality or human rights issue
Factors that created a momentum around men’s health in Ireland

• Research
Factors that created a momentum around men’s health in Ireland

• Research
• Regional and National Conferences
• Emergence of men’s health at a voluntary/advocacy level
• Issue based ‘men’s health’
• Local policy initiatives and men’s health workers
• Men’s turn
• The media (‘men in crisis’)
Impetus for policy development

• Quality and Fairness (National Health Strategy, 2001)

Action 15:

A policy for men’s health and health promotion will be developed
Defining men’s health policy

• ‘A formal statement that defines men’s health as a priority area, identifies targeted action at both a micro and macro level and provides a specific framework and plan for action. It describes the procedures of institutions in the statutory, community, voluntary and private sectors, to promote men’s health, and defines the responsibilities and accountabilities of the involved partners’ (adapted from Bull et al 2004)
Background to men’s health policy development

Key Steps

2001 - National Health Strategy – ‘Men’s Health’


Dec 2004 - National Conference on Men’s Health

Dec 2004 - Appointment of National Men’s Health Steering Group


Dec 2007 – Finalize Action Plan and Sign Off by Steering Group

Consultation Process: Phase I

Target Audience

- Health Service Providers
- Academia
- Sporting Bodies
- Workplace Representatives
- Local Authorities
- Government Depts
- Community & Voluntary Sector - Minority groups and representatives
Consultation Process; Phase II

- Isolated Single Rural Men Living Alone
- The Clergy
- The Prison Services
- An Garda Síochana
- Working “Blue Collar” Men
- Working “White Collar” Men
- Young College Men
Consultation Process; Phase III

• Invited submission (n=94)
• Public call for submissions (National Press)

Interactive Web - Submissions
• www.healthpromotion.ie/topics
Consultation Process,
Phase IV

Bilateral Meetings with key stakeholders

- HSE
- Department of Education and Science
- Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
- Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
- Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
- Department of Social and Family Affairs
Overall approach to policy development

The policy:

✓ is firmly positioned within existing government policy (inter-sectoral/inter-departmental)
✓ places a firm focus on the gendered nature of key men’s health issues (e.g. alcohol, obesity, mental health)
✓ adopts a broad determinants perspective
✓ targets interventions at both an individual and a population level
✓ incorporates a community development approach
✓ focuses on prevention as well as cure
✓ adopts a strengths perspective
✓ seeks to support men to become more active agents and advocates for their own health
Layout of Policy

• Part I – (Background & Context)
  ✓ Introduction
  ✓ Theoretical & philosophical principles underpinning the policy
  ✓ Methodologies used
  ✓ Key statistics on men’s health
Layout of Policy

• **Part II (Key Policy Areas)**

  ✓ Structures & Research
  ✓ Marketing, Health Information and Health Promotion
  ✓ Training in Men’s Health & Increasing Men’s Participation in Health and Caring Professions
  ✓ Gender Competent Health Services – Primary Care, Mental Health and Sexual Health
  ✓ Key settings – Home, Schools & Colleges, Workplace & Social Spaces
  ✓ Strengthening Community Action to Support Men’s Health
Layout of Policy

• Part III
  ✓ Detailed Action Plan
So there is something in this national men’s health policy for me then!
And yes, maybe ‘men’s health’ is my business after all!

"I don’t know how you managed it madam, but you have got through to someone in authority."
How can we ensure that the policy will succeed?

• Ensuring credibility of any programmes undertaken through strict adherence to evidence-based research and sound evaluation procedures
• Establishing a clear vision of how men (and women and children) will benefit through the successful implementation of the policy
• Achieving long-term sustainability in terms of governmental commitment, leadership and funding
How can we ensure that the policy will succeed?

• Encouraging intersectoral engagement and close cooperation between government agencies and NGOs
• Maintaining a strong and clearly demonstrated link between hard data and the potential benefits of the policy
• Emphasizing innovative and opportunistic approaches
• Ensuring that there is ongoing consultation with men so that the policy evolves and adapts in accordance with men’s changing needs
How many more baby elephants will be born before we have a men’s health policy in N Ireland?