

## RESTORING THE BALANCE AFTER COVID-19 - the Men's Health Forum in Ireland challenges everyone to 'be part of the solution' during Men's Health Week 2020

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Everyone - men, families, communities, service providers and policy makers - is being urged to 'be part of the solution' and to take action to improve the health of men and boys on the island of Ireland by 'restoring the balance' after COVID-19. That's the message from the Men's Health Forum in Ireland (MHFI) as International Men's Health Week begins.

Running from Monday 15<sup>th</sup> June to Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> June (Father's Day), this annual celebration aims to raise awareness of preventable health problems, support men and boys to live healthier lives, and encourage them to seek help or treatment early.

2020 has been an exceptional year. All aspects of life on the island of Ireland continue to be shaped by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. However, these are especially challenging times for males and, it appears, Coronavirus is having a disproportionate impact upon men. Indeed, while there has been a broadly similar incidence and prevalence rate to women, men seem to: be faster at developing serious illness; recover slower from the virus; have a higher overall death rate.

Colin Fowler, Director of Operations for the Men's Health Forum in Ireland, comments:

"Coronavirus has had an impact at many levels. Individuals across Ireland are trying to re-build their physical health, emotional resilience, relationships, jobs, finances, connections and routines. There is a need to find some new form of equilibrium - at least in the short-term. Throughout Men's Health Week, everyone is asked to *'be part of the solution'* and to do what they can - no matter how small - to help to restore some balance and stability. Rarely has this been more needed.

Anyone who has ever learned to ride a bike will appreciate that it's all about getting the balance right. Once this is mastered, anything is possible. However, to get the confidence to do this, you need the support and assistance of people around you that you can trust and rely on. This crucial relationship is captured really well in our Men's Health Week poster which features a father and son - Chris and Ethan - from Belfast".

The organisers of Men's Health Week are calling on everyone to work to create the right environment - as well as opportunities - to improve the health of local males. They have also offered ideas on how to support the week in their *'Toolbox for Action'*, which can be found at: <https://www.mhfi.org/mhw2020toolbox.pdf>

Men and boys can get involved in the week by making the time to read the free 'Man Manual' (which can be downloaded at: [www.mhfi.org/challenges2020.pdf](http://www.mhfi.org/challenges2020.pdf)), and undertaking one or more of the ten practical and realistic challenges issued within it. This booklet comes with a simple warning: *'Reading this Manual can seriously improve your health!'*

Although a lot of progress has been made in recent years to improve men's health across the island of Ireland, difficulties still remain. These include:

- Local men die, on average, almost four years younger than women do.
- Poor lifestyles (including smoking, drinking, diet and lack of exercise) are responsible for a high proportion of chronic diseases.
- Males have higher death rates than women for almost all of the leading causes of death, and at all ages.
- Men's mental health needs are often not recognised or met.
- Late presentation to health services leads to a large number of problems becoming untreatable ...

Michael Lynch, Chairperson of the Men's Health Forum in Ireland said:

"The past few months have shown us the best side of males - when the vast majority have answered the call and did their bit to 'flatten the curve', offered practical help to others, home-schooled their children, strengthened community spirit, showed positive leadership, helped to keep essential services running, and protected the vulnerable people around them. During Men's Health Week, we should celebrate this contribution.

Men's health is not just an issue for individual men. Health can be determined by other factors outside of men's personal control. Thus, there is a need for policymakers, service providers and society as a whole to recognise the role they need to play. In our experience, if men are offered positive choices, and given the encouragement and opportunities they need, they will succeed in living a healthier life."

**ENDS**

*[followed by Editor's Notes]*

## **EDITOR'S NOTES**

1. For more information or an interview, contact one of the members of the all-island Men's Health Week Planning Group:

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With notice, interviews conducted in Irish can also be arranged.

2. Men's Health Week is celebrated across Europe, the USA, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and many other countries.

3. On the island of Ireland, Men's Health Week is coordinated by the Men's Health Forum in Ireland with support from over 90 partner organisations. Financial support comes from the Health Service Executive and the Public Health Agency.

4. The Men's Health Forum in Ireland ([www.mhfi.org](http://www.mhfi.org)) is a charity which works on an all-island basis to improve the health of men and boys. It is a voluntary network of individuals and organisations, men and women, which seeks to identify the key concerns relating to male health and to increase understanding of these issues.

5. Key information on Men's Health Week on the island of Ireland is available online ...

- Full overview of Men's Health Week 2020: [www.mhfi.org/mhw/mhw-2020.html](http://www.mhfi.org/mhw/mhw-2020.html)
- Briefing paper which answers the most common questions about the week: [www.mhfi.org/mhw2020toolbox.pdf](http://www.mhfi.org/mhw2020toolbox.pdf)
- Men's Health Week posters and images: [www.mhfi.org/mhw/mhw-image-pack.html](http://www.mhfi.org/mhw/mhw-image-pack.html)
- Latest developments: [www.facebook.com/MensHealthWeek](https://www.facebook.com/MensHealthWeek) and [www.twitter.com/MensHealthIRL](https://www.twitter.com/MensHealthIRL)

6. Each day of / leading up to Men's Health Week 2020 will focus upon a specific issue:

- Friday 12th June: It's Almost Time - Men's Health Week: Restoring the Balance
- Saturday 13th June: Staying Connected During and After Loss - maintains our sense of balance
- Sunday 14th June: Food - it's easy to strike a balance
- Monday 15th June: Mental Fitness - it's always a balancing act
- Tuesday 16th June: Heart Health - have you got the balance right?
- Wednesday 17th June: Cancer Prevention - is about creating balance
- Thursday 18th June: Quit Smoking - restore the body's balance
- Friday 19th June: Rethink what you Drink - get the balance right
- Saturday 20th June: Physical Activity - restores your overall balance
- Sunday 21st June: Fathers - help their children to become balanced adults

To view the social media Posts and Tweets planned for #MensHealthWeek visit:

[www.mhfi.org/Tweets2020.pdf](http://www.mhfi.org/Tweets2020.pdf)

7. 15,000 copies of the 'Challenges and Choices' Man Manual have been given out to men across Ireland. This booklet issues ten simple and practical challenges to men. After each challenge, there is a reason why it is important to think about this issue. It then offers three choices for action (Do Nothing, DIY, Find an Expert), and explains the consequences of each option. A PDF preview copy of the Man Manual can be accessed online at:

[www.mhfi.org/challenges2020.pdf](http://www.mhfi.org/challenges2020.pdf)

8. The image attached to this Press Release features father and son - Chris and Ethan Smylie - from Belfast. They kindly agreed to be the 'face' of Men's Health Week 2020 on the island of Ireland, and to star in all of the promotional materials.

9. For more information on how COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact upon men, visit:

[www.mhfi.org/coronavirus.html](http://www.mhfi.org/coronavirus.html)