
First Meeting of the Men's Health Week (MHW) 2025 Planning Group

Date: Wednesday 18th December 2024
Time: 11.00am - 1.00pm
Mode: 'Zoom' Video Conference
Minute Taker: Colin Fowler

Present:

Rowland Blennerhassett - National Ambulance Service Ireland
Lorcan Brennan - Men's Development Network
Julie Bunch - Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
Greg Clark - Health Service Executive (CHO 1)
Lorraine Conneely - Irish Men's Sheds Association
Dáire Conway - Irish Heart Foundation
Clare Corkey - Men's Advisory Project
Aisling Colreavy - Healthy Galway City
Jim Curran - Irish Pharmacy Union
Sean Davitt - Health Service Executive (CHO 5)
Clare Deasy - Health Service Executive (CHO 4)
Ben Dolan - Irish Men's Sheds Association
Emer Donoghue - Mayo County Library
Helen Forristal - Marie Keating Foundation
Colin Fowler - Men's Health Forum in Ireland (MHFI)
Brien Frazer - South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust
Laurence Gaughan - Health Service Executive (CHO 2)
Karyn Gavin - Galway Rural Development (Ballinasloe)
Hannah Glasgow - Action Cancer
Emma Gough - Clanrye Group
Stephen Gourley - AgeNI (Good Vibrations Project)
Michael Hart - Community Development, SHSCT, Craigavon
Conor Keane - Alcohol Action Ireland
Mark Kernohan - Lifeline
Ellie Leonard - Western Health and Social Care Trust
Paula Larkin - Artitude
Ben Lindsay - Health Service Executive (Dublin North City and County)
Ellen Lynch - Shine
Laura McHugh - Longford County Council
Rebecca McLaughlin - Irish Men's Sheds Association
Kathryn Meade - National Screening Service
Fra Mohan - Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
Sonia Montgomery - Western Health and Social Care Trust
Barry Murphy - Bodywhys
Finian Murray - Health Service Executive (National)
Steven O'Connell - Football Cooperative
Shaun O'Donnell - Sport Ireland
James O'Hagan - LGBT Ireland
Kevin O'Hagan - Irish Cancer Society
Adele Rankin - Healthy Ireland, Co. Galway
Kyle Robinson - Extern
Dan Russell - Health Service Executive (CHO 7)
Melinda Ryan - Galway Rural Development (Tuam)

Brian Samson - ESB
Thomas Shaw Hamilton - Waterford Sports Partnership
Jack Sweeney - CAIRDE
Barry Traynor - Promoting Wellbeing Team, SHSCT
John Wall - Men's Cancer Awareness Campaigner

Apologies:

Lise Alford - 3Ts
Paul Anderson - Forever Fathers
Kathrina Bentley - Men's Aid Ireland
Deirdre Bigley - HeadsUp
Pauric Brazil - Health Service Executive (CHO 7)
Alannah Brennan - Newry, Mourne and Down District Council
Michael Broderick - Clanrye Group
Brid Collins - National Youth Council of Ireland
John Collins - Pavee Point
John Paul Collins - Exchange House
Paula Devine - ARK
Martin Dooley - Retired Engineering Trainer
Anne Farrell - CIE
Kelly Forbes - Mental Health Team, Kilkeel Medical Practice
Martin Gillick - Bus Éireann
Garry Glennon - Letterkenny Youth and Family Service
Robert Glusek - Sure Start South Armagh
Sharon Graham - Carer Support Service, South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust
John Haugh - Health Service Executive (CHO 2)
Frances Haughey - Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
Marita Hennessy - INFANT Centre, University College Cork
Caroline Hughes - Action Cancer
Tracy James - Irish Heart Foundation
Ellen Jennings - Bodywhys
Eoin Kernan - Eating Disorders Campaigner
Michael Lynch - C4S
Ben McCallum - Lifeline
Naomi McCartan - Mental Health Team, Kilkeel and Warrenpoint
Johnny McClurg - Community Sports Network
Andrea McDermott - Men's Aid Ireland
Michael McKenna - YouthAction NI
Phil McSweeney - St. John of God
Shane O'Donnell - Health Service Executive (CHO 7)
Paul O'Kane - Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
Martin O'Neill - Martial Arts Coach
Tracey Powell - Southern Health and Social Care Trust
Stephen Quinn - GAA
Kate Reilly - Men's Aid Ireland
Peter Shaw - Community Sports Network
Pam Smyth - Carer Support Service, South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust
Bill Vaughan - Mental Health Ireland
Ayodele Yusuf - Empower

AGENDA ITEMS ...

1. Welcome and Overview

Coli welcomed everyone to the meeting (especially the 'new faces') and gave a brief overview of the practicalities of the session.

Once again, there has been a huge amount of interest shown in planning Men's Health Week (MHW) for the coming year - with 48 attendees at today's meeting. However, it was also noted that quite a few of the regular contributors to the Planning Group in the past have now either retired from their jobs or moved to pastures new. They were thanked for their fantastic contributions over the years.

Forty two apologies were tendered - from a broad range of organisations - who were unable to make today's date, as well as from others who have committed to contributing remotely to future developments via email and telephone follow-up calls.

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

Coli highlighted that the purpose of today's meeting was to: get to know each other; gain a shared understanding of what MHW is; reaffirm the core value base of the week; reflect upon any learning from previous MHWs; and to scope possibilities for the MHW 2025 theme.

2. Round of Introductions

Finian 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.

3. Overview of MHW

Finian presented some background on what MHW (www.mhfi.org/mhw/about-mhw.html) is and how it has developed over time.

MHW always begins on the Monday before Father's Day and ends on Father's Day itself. During 2025 it will run from Monday 9th until Sunday 15^h 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 began to organise local activities to mark this week.
- 2005: MHW was first celebrated in Ireland on an all-island basis (when the Men's Health Forum in Ireland - 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.
- 2020 - Restoring the Balance - be part of the solution
- 2021 - Making the Connections: Check In. Check Up. Check It Out.
- 2022 - MISSION:isPOSSIBLE - the action starts with you
- 2023 - The 'Picture of Health'
- 2024 - Know Your Numbers - because men's health counts

In recent years, the planning schedule for MHW has followed a pattern ...

- December: First Planning Group meeting to scope possible themes and agree the value base.
- January - March: Meetings / polls on the theme, call to action, key messages, visual concepts, resources needed, Ambassadors, types of events planned ...
- April - May: Produce / disseminate resources, create a pool of social media messages, alert media to the week, raise island-wide awareness ...
- June: Issue press releases, solicit media coverage, run events, monitor coverage ...

In the past, the following things have been offered to support the week ...

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| ▪ Dedicated web page | ▪ Toolbox for Action |
| ▪ Animation / videos / audio | ▪ 'What can I do?' |
| ▪ Poster - A4 and A3 | ▪ Action Man Booklet |
| ▪ Postcard - A5 | ▪ Social media feeds |
| ▪ Logo | ▪ Daily themes |
| ▪ Badge | ▪ Pool of social media messages |
| ▪ Banner | ▪ Social media graphics pack |
| ▪ Facebook / Twitter images | ▪ Shared hashtag |
| ▪ Signposting to resources and support | ▪ Event promotion |
| ▪ Ambassadors / Champions | ▪ Coordinated press releases ... |

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 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, into sport, can handle himself ... Whenever possible, MHW imagery, written text and spoken word 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.

Lorcan proposed that we should, once again, adopt this approach for MHW 2025 - as these messages set a positive and strengths-based tone for the week. This was agreed by all present. However, everyone was also asked to read the Value Base paper again, and to send any feedback or suggestions to Coli as soon as possible.

5. Learning from Previous Years

Coli asked the meeting if there was anything from Men's Health Week 2024 - or previous MHWs - which we should continue, change, avoid or learn from. Comments included ...

- It is important to nail down the core theme as early as possible, and to get the resource materials into circulation well in advance of the week.
- MHW works best when there is collaborative effort at local level, rather than 'solo runs' by individual groups. Forming local planning groups / forging partnerships yields better results, and shifts the week from being tokenistic to being embedded.
- There is always a 'hook' to attract men, but each organisation / setting needs to think about what it will be for them.
- Celebrating MHW on a county level creates a sense of identity and belonging, and has significant impact.
- Local media outlets can be the best means to promote the week, and it is crucial to both: (i) build strong relationships with them; and (ii) offer them a strategy / template for how they might cover the week without requiring too much effort from them.
- Last year's MHW theme was simple, clear and easy to understand / action. This made for a more effective week in many quarters.
- Many health professionals especially liked the 'Know Your Numbers' theme, and found it easy to integrate into their work. However, the emphasis solely on numbers was also seen as negative by most people working the fields of mental health and eating disorders, as well as by some others who felt that throwing too many statistics around can generate 'information overload'. Thus, there needs to be a balance of qualitative and quantitative messages.
- Having 'Ambassadors' to share their personal stories helps to prompt men to take action. It was great that there were Ambassadors last year from a range of backgrounds (e.g. sport, medical profession, disability, community action, men's health campaigners).
- MHW needs to be backed-up by a range of resources - both in hard copy and electronic. The man manuals, pens and z-cards in 2024 made ideal giveaways, and offered an opportunity to engage men face-to-face.
- Outreach events - which bring the key health messages to men, rather than waiting for men to come to you - are very effective.
- MHW often clashes with other things on the national calendar e.g. Pride, Carers' Week and National Cycling Week. We need to be cognisant of this.
- Community pharmacies can be an ideal gateway to promote MHW, and groups who forged alliances with their local pharmacies reported very positive results.
- The island-wide fixation with 'toxic masculinity' labels can be hard to break and is very unhelpful (see, for example: <https://tinyurl.com/y46enb2n>). The media often fuel this, and it would great if we could get them to sign-up to a code of practice on how they speak about / refer to men and boys.
- While we try to encourage men to look after their health, and to seek help for problems at the earliest opportunity, we also need to acknowledge that sometimes it is very difficult for men to access the primary care that they need.
- MHW works best when the key messages are inclusive of all men. James, from LGBT Ireland, kindly offered to advise anyone who is trying to find appropriate ways to connect with the LGBTQI+ community. He can be contacted at james@lgbt.ie

6. Theme for MHW 2025

Men's Health Week ...

- 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.

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 and their work - and to fit with the MHW value base. Whatever theme is selected, it needs to be catchy, easy to explain, and easy to express visually.

Meeting participants were randomly allocated to 'Zoom Breakout Rooms', and Lorcan asked them to do some 'blue skies thinking' on possible themes for MHW 2025. A number of suggestions were made, and a number of others were sent to Coli after the meeting. These were:

- **Shoulder-to-Shoulder:** Men working together in solidarity to build relationships, a community network and improve their health. This could also link to the Beatles' song 'Come Together'.
- **What Really Counts?:** Last year's theme for Men's Health Week focused on key numbers for men, but this inversion of that theme builds upon it and invites men to also consider what is really important to them by bringing in qualitative elements too.
- **Detoxifying Masculinity | Positive Masculinity:** 'Toxic Masculinity' has become a by-word for men's negative behaviours and attitudes. This theme would seek to challenge this assumption and try to turn it around.
- **Mind Your Self:** The importance of self-care for men - which is often a forgotten about issue.
- **Your Health (or Metabolic) Age:** This would encourage men to see if their health really matches their actual age.
- **Just One Thing:** Ask men to choose a priority issue for them, and invite them to focus upon that one thing that they'd like to change about their health.
- **The Best a Man Can Be:** Play on the wording of the Gillette advert, which seems to have a lot of resonance with men.
- **Health Matters - Start With Yours:** On a plane, passengers are always asked to put on their own mask before helping others. This concept could be applied to men's health too.
- **A Job Still To Be Done:** Highlighting that there is always improvements that can be made to the health of men in Ireland, and challenging everyone - men, service providers, policy makers, employers etc. - to do their bit.
- **Kick-Start Your Health:** Use Men's Health Week as an opportunity to start a longer-term process of improving your health and wellbeing i.e. men's health is not just for June.

- **Connect 4 Health:** Target the negative impact that loneliness and isolation can have on male health and wellbeing. Also, improving men's health is not simply a job for men themselves. They need support, encouragement and opportunities to do so. This could mirror the idea of the 'Connect 4' game, where all the pieces need to be lined-up over time before a winning solution can be found.
- **Start the Conversation:** A call to everyone to begin conversations about what men need and how these needs can be met.
- **Plan your Route:** Be the driver of your own health and wellbeing rather than a passenger, but know that you can't do it on your own - even men need to ask for directions and help sometimes.
- **No Man is an Island:** Get connected - not just to the internet - to friends, community activities, local services, volunteering etc.
- **The Invisible Man:** Shine a light into little known / talked about aspects of men's health and lives, the issues facing them, and their specific needs.

Coli will circulate these broad suggestions to all members of the Planning Group network (including those who could not attend today's meeting), and will run a poll to assess the popularity of each option. The deadline for responses will be close of play on Wednesday 8th January 2025. This will mean that the next Planning Group meeting will have a narrower field of options to fine tune.

7. Announcements

Dáire said that if anyone is interested in booking health checks by the Irish Heart Foundation for MHW, they should get in touch as soon as possible. The email address to do this is: healthchecks@irishheart.ie

8. Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Planning Group will be held via Zoom on Wednesday 15th January 2025 at 11.00am.