Engaging Men in Community Health and Wellbeing Programs

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Engaging men in their own health: ‘It’s easier selling ice to the Inuit’, I hear you say. For a long time, there’s been a perception that men are just not interested in acting to improve their health - they don’t go to see the doctor, they don’t attend programs in community centres and, if there is a problem, they leave it until the last moment to do something about it, often when it is too late.

There may be some truth in this, but it is really only half the story. If you throw a party and nobody comes, do you blame the people who didn’t come? Of course not! You ask, what was wrong with the party, or the way you invited people, or promoted your event. Similarly, it’s the responsibility of health and wellbeing services to appeal to men and engage them in participating in men’s health services. We need to meet men on their own terms, in comfortable territory, and find out what they are looking for in a health service. We need to develop ‘men-friendly’ services.

There are several good programs aiming to do exactly this. The Pitstop program, which has been around for several years now, is operating particularly well in some areas of the state. Pitstop is a program that meets men on their terms and often in their territory. It works best when delivered in a workplace as part of an overall health promotion strategy. Community health nurses and practitioners work together to conduct health checks across several aspects of men’s health - from blood pressure and heart health to stress management, diet and physical exercise.

Another program that is attracting men in new ways is the continence service. Staff of the Southern Branch are aware that men face many issues around continence but have had trouble getting them to come along for consultations. Currently they are trialling extended operating hours - staying open until 7.30 pm every second Tuesday. Offering the service after hours enables working men, who are often unable to leave work during business hours, to seek the assistance and gain the health outcomes that they need and deserve. If the extended hours are a success, the continence service will introduce this model in their other clinics across the state. (Contact the clinic on 1300 723 143 for continence information.)

So how do you assess whether your health service or program is men-friendly and how do you make the adjustments to better appeal to men? There are plenty of helpful resources available, but the following suggestions may get you thinking about ways of developing men-friendly services.

Are any of the staff in your community program men? Men often prefer to talk to another bloke, in a blokey way. Vyv Alomes, from the Rural Alive and Well program, knows all too well that checking in with a bloke and finding out how he ‘really is’ may actually mean talking a bit about his motorbike, or the farm, or a number of other...
things that are important to him before talking about his health. Often, once some common ground and a level of trust have been established, talking about difficult issues can be a lot easier for men. Men will talk, but they need to feel safe and trust the person they’re talking to. That trust needs to be developed, but even a few minutes of conversation can be enough.

**Identify your program as being specifically for men.**

Greg Malcher, a GP focused on men’s health, recently wrote about an Indigenous men’s health service that saw a 600% rise in take up when it was separated out from the local health service.¹

Andrew King, another well-respected authority on working with men, points out the effectiveness of **including men in family issues and events.** For example, if ‘parents’ are invited to a child-focused event or activity, the dad will often assume the invitation is for the mother. However, if dads are specifically invited to their child’s special event—perhaps by making sure kids know they should invite their fathers, or by putting the word ‘dad’ on the invitation or poster, they are more likely to feel that they are welcome.²

**Men’s health events.** Particularly men’s health nights, have been quite successful in many areas of Tasmania, and there are some key ingredients to creating a successful event. It’s important that the event is part of a bigger strategy, so that the event alone is not expected to provide the solutions to men’s health issues. An added incentive, such as a famous sporting personality or celebrity who can capture the imagination of the men in the area, and speak specifically about men’s health, is often motivation enough for men to attend an event, especially if they don’t think they have any health issues. Support is needed from the local health services at these events. If possible, invite male staff to represent their organisation, present relevant health information and give men familiar faces to connect with if they need to visit services after the event.

Finally, **what’s on the wall of your meeting room or waiting area?** Do any of the posters relate to men in a positive way, or do they represent men negatively? Who do the magazines cater for? Car magazines may not appeal to all men either; some may prefer something about surfing or sailing, woodwork, or men’s fashion. Men come from a wide variety of backgrounds and interests. Let’s welcome them all and make it a bit easier for them to stay in the waiting room, and connect with the health services in our community.

For further information, or for details about an upcoming discussion forum, email Jonathan Bedloe at Jonathan.Bedloe@dhhs.tas.gov.au.


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**Ground Breaking Guide set to Get Tasmania Moving**

The Minister for Workplace Relations, Lisa Singh, joined Heart Foundation Chief Executive Officer, Graeme Lynch, on 9 February to launch Healthy by Design: a guide to planning and designing environments for active living in Tasmania.

Currently, Tasmania and Victoria are the only states in Australia to have state-specific guidelines to help planners, designers and related professionals create urban environments that encourage healthy activity. The guidelines provide design considerations for walking and cycling routes, streets, local destinations, open spaces, public transport, and strategies for fostering community spirit. Jointly developed by the Premier’s Physical Activity Council and the Heart Foundation, the guidelines are seen as a powerful way to incorporate health into daily planning decisions that encourage physical activity and social interaction.

Ms Singh said facilities and spaces that are healthy by design will have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of Tasmanians, providing more access to alternative transport options and more opportunities for physical activity. “Natural and built environments that encourage physical activity are crucial in changing lifestyle behaviours and increasing physical activity levels,” she said.

For more information on Healthy by Design, visit www.heartfoundation.org.au. For a complimentary copy of Healthy by Design, email tas@heartfoundation.org.au, or call (03) 6224 2722.
Councillors Back Move Well Eat Well Schools

Move Well Eat Well, an initiative of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), is attracting a strong following statewide using a simple framework of six healthy messages to assist primary schools to create environments that promote healthy eating and physical activity. Schools that successfully meet a set of criteria are acknowledged and recognised as ‘Award’ schools.

Last year, the DHHS provided funding to the LGAT to assist three councils to get behind their local Move Well Eat Well schools. Councils developed creative proposals for community-based, out of school hours events that actively promoted one or more of the Move Well Eat Well health messages to primary age children. As a result of their efforts, nearly 1,000 children and 193 adults (teachers and parents) participated in a range of activities backing up the schools’ healthy eating and activity messages.

Glenorchy City, West Tamar and Latrobe Councils all came up with ideas that were fun and positive, and importantly, strengthened links with parents and the wider community.

Glenorchy Council, working with Rosetta, Mt Faulkner, Abbotsfield and Collinsvale Primary schools, set up interactive nutrition promotion sessions for students and parents, and facilitated walkathons with a focus on links with the YMCA, healthy eating and fun. The sessions included tasting new foods, question and answer sessions with a nutritionist, and healthy lunchbox ideas.

Each event promoted a range of resources from relevant service providers and helped participants understand their local community support services.

Latrobe Council, working in partnership with St Patricks School and Latrobe Primary, set up an after school program of activity and healthy eating, under the banner, Latrobe Kids….we ALL Move Well, Eat Well. A dazzling range of 22 activity stations enabled students to try all sorts of activities and games, from frisbees to cricket, athletics to footy. A duathlon (run and ride) held for students was so popular that it is set to become a fixture in future years. Participants received a personalised water bottle with the Tap into Water Everyday message and the event received wide-ranging community support including equipment, activity/sports leader time, fruit and water. Many students experienced new activities that they had not tried before and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

West Tamar Council took on the challenge of promoting healthy breakfasts in partnership with local schools in Exeter, Beaconsfield and Riverside. Each breakfast was combined with a before-school activity. Parents, teachers and students got involved with cherry tomato planting, break dancing and cooking demonstrations.

For more information about Move Well Eat Well, visit www.education.tas.gov.au/movewelleatwell, or email movewelleatwell@dhhs.tas.gov.au.

(L-R) Latrobe kids, Chloe Tuthill, Nakiah Sheehan and Emily Charles, moving well and eating well
Youth Taskforce Receives Tasmanian LIFE Award

The Glenorchy Youth Taskforce, a special committee of the Glenorchy City Council, has been recognised for its work in promoting life and preventing self harm, receiving a Tasmanian LIFE Award in the Red Herring Surf Social Inclusion category. The award, presented by Deputy Premier, Lara Giddings, recognises activities, programs, policies or support provided in pursuit of socially inclusive communities.

The Glenorchy Youth Taskforce, the longest running council supported youth committee in Australia, consists of a group of young people, aged between 12 and 24, who have a passion for youth issues and a desire to make a difference within the community. The project, developed in conjunction with the Sexual Assault Support Service (SASS), involved research, consultation and the development of a Self Harm information brochure. Slap bands with the slogan ‘Choose Life Not Pain’ were also widely distributed to high school students to raise awareness and promote discussion of the issue.

The Tasmanian LIFE Awards represent a partnership between the Tasmanian Suicide Prevention Committee, Suicide Prevention Australia, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Health and Ageing.

The Self Harm information brochure is available at the Sexual Assault Support Service located at 95-97 Campbell Street, Hobart, the Pulse Youth Health Centre at Terry Street, Glenorchy, and other health services. The SASS 24-hour Support Line may be contacted on (03) 6231 1817.

Make Tasmania Smoke Free

Included in this edition of LGAT News are two no smoking stickers for your use - one which indicates no smoking and the other which indicates a statutory need to smoke 3 metres from a doorway or air intake area. Your organisation is encouraged to display these stickers to discourage smoking.

These stickers and others are available free of charge from Cancer Council Tasmania which promotes smoking cessation and legislation that limits smoking and its impact on non-smokers.

According to the National Health Survey 2007-2008, Tasmania continues to have a higher adult smoking rate (23.9%) compared to Australia’s adult smoking rate (20%).

To obtain additional stickers, contact Glen Paley at Cancer Council Tasmania on (03) 6233 2030, or email gpaley@cancertas.org.au.

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