



**Submission to the
Senate Select Committee on Men's Health**

March 2009

Background

Australian Health Promotion Association (AHPA) is the peak body for health promotion in Australia. AHPA is the only professional association in Australia established for health professionals engaged in a range of activities including practice, research, policy development and/or study of health promotion; and others with an interest in the discipline.

AHPA is a member based organisation that operates at both National and State and Territory levels. It provides a forum for the exchange of ideas, knowledge, information, and advocacy for population health and health promotion.

AHPA's objectives include providing opportunities for professional development; increasing public and health professional awareness of the roles and functions of health promotion practitioners; advocacy; and contributing to discussion, debate and decision-making on health promotion policy and programs.

The role that the Australian Health Promotion Association has played in supporting professional education about men's health promotion

At a national level, two of AHPA's major programs are an annual National Health Promotion Conference and publication of the *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*. Over the past few years there has been an increase in men's health promotion presentations at national conferences and the occasional article related to men's health published in the *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*. Such work has consistently shown that there is a lack of investment in, and co-ordination of men's health, at both state and national levels, which has led to calls for the development of a national men's health policy. AHPA are pleased to hear that a consultation process is currently underway to develop a national men's health policy. AHPA will encourage members to participate in consultation processes if provided with an opportunity to do so.

Topical issues that relate to the intersection between men's health and health promotion include:

- The homogenisation of men when discussing men's health, and a lack of understanding about key differences within and between sub-populations of men, such as Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander men, men from rural and remote backgrounds, men with disabilities, and other vulnerable or disadvantaged populations of men.
- A lack of funding to support a men's health research agenda focused on the social determinants of health, including a national longitudinal study on men's health.
- A lack of understanding about the social construction of gender (masculinity and multiple masculinities) when developing and implementing men's health promotion activities (and whether hegemonic masculine stereotypes should be incorporated or avoided in men's health promotion work).
- A lack of understanding about men's lay perspectives of their health and how these relate to men's health literacy
- Limited knowledge about engaging men in health promotion activities, although the existing evidence-base suggests that settings based approaches (such as workplace health programs and men's sheds) provide an environment conducive for addressing men's health needs

It should be noted that some organisations such as Andrology Australia, Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia, Beyond Blue and Foundation 49 have shown a commitment to men's health education on an ongoing basis – often with the support of philanthropic funding sources.

It should also be noted that community organisations such as Freemasons, Rotary, Apex and Lions Clubs have supported men's health to varying degrees over the past couple of decades.

The policy position of the Australian Health Promotion Association in relation to gender and health

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) recently developed and adopted a *Gender and Health Policy* (2008) with input from members of AHPA (attachment A). AHPA supports all policy positions of PHAA, including that relating to *Gender and Health*.

In doing so, PHAA and AHPA note that:

“Gender is more than biologically determined sex difference”

“Relational practices..., the distribution of power,...and behavioural expressions of masculinity” influence health of men and women.

PHAA and AHPA acknowledge that:

“The continuing work of the...men’s health movement in highlighting the specific concerns of men”

“Growing public, professional and political interest in men’s health and the release of the national discussion on a men’s health policy by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing in June 2008.”

“The Australian government’s in principle commitment to a national policy on men’s health”

PHAA and AHPA affirm that:

A dual strategy of policies with a specific focus on gender, alongside those which adopt a gender-mainstreaming approach (the incorporation of attention to gender in all policies and programs) is valued.

Additional elements of this policy can be found in attachment A.

Key organisations committed to improving men’s health promotion and health education in Australia

Key organisations with an interest in men’s health include:

Professional Associations with an interest in men’s health

- Australian Health Promotion Association

- Public Health Association of Australia
- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
- Australian Medical Association
- GPs4Men

Men's Health Organisations

- Andrology Australia
- Foundation 49
- Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia
- Mensline Australia
- Men's Health Australia
- Beyond Blue
- Lone Fathers Association
- Jurisdictionally based men's health organisations

Community Organisations that have supported men's health promotion activities

- Freemasons Foundation
- Rotary
- Apex
- Lions

Research Institutions/Networks with a focus on men's health

- Freemasons Foundation Centre for Men's Health, University of Adelaide
- Men's Health Information and Resource Centre, University of Western Sydney
- Fathers Program, Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle
- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Men's Health Research Council
- Australian Fatherhood Research Network
- There are numerous other research institutions that have a broader focus on gender and health

A list of contemporary men's health publications

There has been a growing body of Australian men's health scholarship. Some key contemporary men's health promotion references from the last four years include:

Malcher, G. (2009). Engaging men in health care. *Australian Family Physician*. 38 (3), 92-95.

Burton, N., Walsh, A. & Brown, W. (2008). It just doesn't speak to me: mid-aged men's reactions to '10,000 steps a day'. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*. 19 (1), 52-59.

Smith, J. & Robertson, S. (2008). Men's health promotion: A new frontier in Australia and the UK? *Health Promotion International*. 23 (3), 283-289.

Monaem, A., Macdonald, J., Woods, M, Hughes, R. & Orchard, M., Jasprizza, E. (2008). A proposed longitudinal study of boy's and men's health and wellbeing in greater Sydney, Australia. *International Journal of Men's Health*. 7 (2), 192-209.

Smith, J., Braunack-Mayer, A., Wittert, G. & Warin, M. (2008). "It's sort of like being a detective": Understanding how men self-monitor their health prior to seeking help and using health services. *BMC Health Services Research*. 8 (56), (doi: 10.1186/1472-6963-8-56)

Smith, J. (2007). Addressing men's health policy concerns in Australia: What can we do? *Australia & New Zealand Health Policy*. 4 (20), (doi: 10.1186/1743-8462-4-20)

Smith, J. (2007). Beyond masculine stereotypes: Moving men's health promotion forward in Australia. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*. 18 (1), 20-25.

Bentley, M. (2006) A primary health care approach to men's health in community health settings: It's *just* better practice. *Australian Journal of Primary Health*, 12 (1), 21-26.

Macdonald, J. (2006) Shifting paradigms: A social determinants approach to solving problems in men's health policy and practice. *Medical Journal of Australia*. 185 (8), 456-458.

Malcher, G. (2006) "What is it men's health?" – Men, their health and the system: a personal perspective. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 185 (8), 459-460.

These references provide a useful insight into some of the issues being raised by the Senate Select Committee on Men's Health. In addition to the references provided above, there is a plentiful supply of men's health promotion grey literature in the form of unpublished evaluation reports.