



**Submission by the Men's Advisory Network
(M.A.N.) Inc.**

To the Health Reform Committee

August 2003

The Men's Advisory Network (M.A.N.) Inc.

M.A.N. is the umbrella/peak organisation for service providers, organisations and individuals concerned with men's health, wellbeing and other issues affecting men and boys in Western Australia. It receives financial support from the Department of Health. Some background material on M.A.N. is attached.

This submission focuses on the need to consider gender issues in all aspects of the planning and delivery of health services.

Government Policy

The need for specific attention to be devoted to the health of men and boys was identified in A Report on Men's Health Western Australia 1996 prepared for the Health Department of Western Australia by Huggins A.K., Somerford P., Rouse I. et al. The conclusion stated:

Men's health after Aboriginal health is the worst in Australia for all age groups and for the vast majority of health conditions.

The introduction to the 1997 Health Department of Western Australia publication Men's Health: Men's Health Policy and Discussion Paper, states:

Men are recognised as a population that experiences particular and significantly higher mortality and morbidity rates than females. Moreover, the health of some sub-populations of men in Western Australia (WA) is of major concern. These sub-populations include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men; gay, bisexual; rural men; men from non-English speaking backgrounds; men with disabilities/handicaps and men from low socio-economic backgrounds.

In spite of their poor health status, men use health services at a lower rate than women and are perceived to be less amenable to influence by current public health programs. Men, particularly those who are younger and who come from low socio-economic backgrounds, engage in significant risk-taking behaviour often resulting in high rates of alcohol consumption, trauma, smoking, sedentary lifestyles, high fat consumption and unsafe sex practices. Many authors see this risk-taking behaviour resulting from Australian male acculturation patterns and from the effects of economic restraint, where education and employment is directly linked to better health outcomes. Young men are particularly vulnerable to depression and suicide.

The focus of this discussion paper is to introduce a men's health policy for the WA health system and highlight men's health issues and possible strategies.

The goal of the policy was stated as:

To improve the health and well-being of all males in Western Australia, with a focus on those most at risk, and to encourage the health system to be more aware of and responsive to the needs created by the relationship between health and gender.

The principles and strategies set out in the policy are commendable. However, there appears to be little evidence that these have been implemented. If they have, the Department has not publicised the initiatives that it has taken.

In fact, with the exception of the two excellent publications produced by the City of Melville, with the Department's assistance, there is very little literature aimed at improving the health of men, adolescents and boys. The Department has recently provided M.A.N. with funds to also produce some appropriate material.

The current State Government, through the ALP's Direction Statement Men's Health, recognises the relatively poorer status of men's health and the need for services that are targeted specifically at men and boys. The Executive Summary states:

Labor believes that the health of all Western Australians can be improved by a greater understanding of how gender impacts on health outcomes. There are many stark morbidity, mortality and health risk differentials experienced by West Australian men, including a lower life expectancy, and higher rates of death from conditions such as cancer, heart disease, pulmonary diseases, suicide and accident.

Labor's approach to men's health is based on recognising gender differences in health experience and providing the appropriate services, rather than competition between men and women for health dollars.

In working to develop fresh and effective measures to address the issues underlying men's health outcomes, Labor will:

- *Implement a long-term focus on men's health.*
- *Encourage support mechanisms for men in crisis.*
- *Support targeted public health initiatives.*
- *Make the public health system more responsive to men's needs.*
- *Make workplaces safer.*
- *Ensure the education system is more responsive to boys and young men.*

Labor is committed to providing all West Australians with a well-managed, high quality public health system that is accessible to all and is focused on positive health outcomes. As part of fulfilling this commitment, Labor is committed to a new approach to men's health issues.

The policy states:

Labor will ensure that there is an adequate mechanism in place within the Health Department to implement a real and long-term focus on men's health issues.

This will necessitate an across-government approach. To this end, a reference group will be established, resourced and coordinated by the Health Department. This group would, among other things, investigate barriers to better health outcomes for men and opportunities for reducing the health differentials experienced by men.

The Health Department's research and policy capacities will be strengthened to ensure that data collection, research and treatment strategies are sensitive to gender differences, and are of high quality, up-to-date and are used to shape future policy directions. An important element of this will involve setting targets for the improvement in men's health outcomes, in consultation with public health experts and men's health advocates.

All of the above statements are commendable in their intent. However, the implementation appears to be limited.

Reference Group

M.A.N. understands that the government recognises that many of the other issues that affect men, including family law, child support and domestic violence, impact on men's health and wellbeing and therefore have to be addressed.

M.A.N. further understands that active consideration is currently being given to the establishment of the reference group to address all the issues that affect men and boys, as mentioned in the across-government approach outlined in the ALP policy.

M.A.N. believes that this group should be established by and report through the Department of Premier and Cabinet rather than through the Department of Health, as stated in the ALP policy.

There are two reasons for this. First, the issues that impact on the health and wellbeing of men and boys cover the responsibilities of a number of government departments. For example, the education of boys and adolescents has a major impact on many aspects of their future life, not only their employment opportunities.

Second, locating the group within the Department of Premier and Cabinet is more likely to ensure that there will be a real impact across-government, rather than if it is seen as purely a Department of Health initiative and responsibility.

Further M.A.N. has suggested to the Department that in addition to relevant government departments and agencies, the group should also have some non-government representatives. This model is currently operating in some other policy areas.

The Men's Advisory Network calls on the Health Reform Committee, the Department of Health and the Government to give men's health the priority that it requires. Until this is done there will be no improvement in the status of men's health.

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REFERENCES

Huggins A.K., Somerford P., Rouse I. et al. (1996) A Report on Men's Health Western Australia 1996. School of Public Health, Curtin University, in collaboration with Epidemiology Branch, Health Information Centre, Health Department of Western Australia.

Health Department of Western Australia, Men's Health: Men's Health Policy and Discussion Paper, October 1997

Australian Labor Party Direction Statement: Men's Health



The Men's Advisory Network (M.A.N.) Incorporated is the umbrella/peak organisation for individuals, service providers and organisations concerned with men's health, wellbeing and other issues affecting men and boys in Western Australia.

M.A.N. was established in 1997 (previously known as the Men's Health Independent Advisory Council) and was incorporated in 2000. The objects contained in the constitution are:

- (a) To promote the prevention of diseases, both physical and mental, in men;
- (b) To raise awareness of men's health and wellbeing issues in a holistic sense covering physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual components;
- (c) To be the peak body representing men's health, wellbeing and other men's issues in Western Australia;
- (d) To collect, generate and distribute information, literature and resources on the health and wellbeing of men;
- (e) To initiate and carry out appropriate data collection and research on aspects of the health and wellbeing of men;
- (f) To establish and contribute to the maintenance of regional networks concerning the health and wellbeing of men;
- (g) To promote awareness of educational services that specifically address; life style and health issues, relationships, sexuality, violence and anger management, fathering and fatherhood, recovery from sexual assault, youth development, suicide prevention, gender issues, personal meaning and life mission, rites of transition and ageing;
- (h) To provide a forum for leaders of men's groups and other community leaders, who are concerned with the health and wellbeing of men.

The aim of M.A.N. is to raise awareness of issues impacting on men and boys and to advocate on their behalf in order to promote their health and well-being in a holistic sense covering physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual components. This is based on the World Health Organisation's 1986 definition of health and encompasses all aspects of a person's life.

The Charter of M.A.N. states that the focus is to:

- Raise awareness in the community of issues impacting on men and boys.
- Facilitate a forum at which men's issues can be openly discussed.
- Advocate on behalf of men's interests to government and non-government organisations and agencies.
- Support, encourage and provide relevant resources for services, agencies and community groups that work with men.
- Promote and facilitate inter-agency co-operation.

As the peak organisation representing men's issues in Western Australia, M.A.N. will achieve this through the adoption of the following principles:

- Adopt a whole of life approach and represent the diverse views surrounding men's issues, with no restrictions being placed on the issues to be represented.
- Be inclusive of all interested organisations and individuals. Exclusion from membership will only be on the basis of promotion of illegal or unethical activities.
- Consider men's issues in the context of empowering men as individuals and in their roles in their family, their community and Western Australian society as a whole.
- Promote healthy masculinity and the wellbeing of men and boys as being essential to society.
- Promote harmony with women, believing that men and women are equal partners in society.
- Advocate on behalf of men and boys, but remain non-aligned with any political party.

In 2002, M.A.N. received funding from the Department of Health to investigate the options for establishing and maintaining a viable network for community based men's groups in Western Australia. Under the terms of the service agreement M.A.N. was required to:

- Investigate options for a viable network for community based men's groups in Western Australia.
- Articulate the role of M.A.N. in the context of facilitating the coordination of activity associated with improving outcomes for Western Australian men.
- Prepare a database of services and organisations involved in men's health, wellbeing and other men's issues in WA
- Develop a communications process linking service providers, organisations and individuals involved in men's issues in WA

The rationale for this funding may be found in the government's election commitments contained in the Men's Health Direction Statement.

Membership of M.A.N. is open to all men and women who support M.A.N.'s objectives and its charter.

There are three categories of members:

- Individual Members, who have one vote
- Organisational Members, which may be incorporated under the Associations Incorporation Act 1987, unincorporated groups, local government authorities and registered businesses, which have two votes
- Associate Members, which may be any commonwealth or state government department, agency or branch, but do not have a vote

The weighted voting recognises that M.A.N. is a peak body and as such many of its members are other organisations. However, it also recognises the important contribution made by individuals and has retained this category of membership.

The fee structure for the 2003-2004 financial year is:

Individual Member	\$40
Individual Member (Health Care Card Holder)	\$10
Organisational Member employing paid staff	\$100
Organisational Member with no paid staff	\$50
Associate Member	\$75

M.A.N. produces an electronic newsletter. If you wish to receive a copy please reply to: man@iinet.net.au

The Men's Health & Wellbeing Association of WA recently dissolved and transferred its assets to M.A.N.

M.A.N. is affiliated with the Confederation of Men's Organisations, the Australian Federation of Men's Health & Wellbeing Associations Inc., and the Shared Parenting Council of Australia.

Currently people are elected to all positions on the Committee of Management for a two-year term. There are no restrictions on the number of years that someone may serve on the committee.

The members of the Committee of Management and their current vocations are:

David Cain, Chairperson, Program Manager, Osborne Division of General Practice

Janet Armarego, Deputy Chairperson, Health Promotion Officer, City of Melville

Dr. Gerry Jones, Secretary, retired Associate Professor, University of Western Australia

Terry Olesen, Treasurer, consulting psychologist in private practice and doctoral candidate

Dr. Geoff Paull, Committee Member, consulting psychologist in private practice

David Robinson, Committee Member, Principal, North Morley Primary School

John White, Committee Member, Co-ordinator, Mid-West Men's Health, Geraldton

Further information may be obtained from:

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