

The Human Code

Supporting men's wellbeing in the Macedon Ranges

What are the challenges facing men in the Macedon Ranges community and what can be done to better support men's mental health and wellbeing?

We recently did some community research (surveys and interviews) with Macedon Ranges locals to better understand what the community's needs are and the best ways to address them.

The research project, called The Human Code, was funded by the North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network, and included representatives from local services and community organisations, and a youth project working group.

The gender groupings of male and non-male respondents are based on a self-report question that asked participants 'For the purpose of answering the following questions, do you identify as male? (yes/no). Full sample details are available in the report.

Here is what we found.



COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

1. We need more information on supporting men's mental health

People in the Macedon Ranges community need more information around supporting men's mental health, identifying distress, and how and where to seek help.

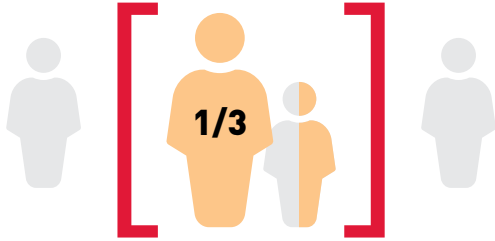


Nearly half of the men surveyed say boys and men are not comfortable seeking out health services when they need them.

*"The biggest barrier for men out here is just their own understanding of what mental health is and how to look after it and the importance of looking after it. It's about them taking the first step through the door and not feeling like they're somehow weak or lesser than because they're making that choice."
(29-year-old)*

2. Many men feel lonely and isolated

Finding meaningful social connections can be challenging. Many men in the Macedon Ranges experience loneliness, social isolation and a reduced sense of belonging.



Nearly one-third of all men and almost half of young men indicated high levels of loneliness.

“[The main challenge is] making friends. Men here have a very transactional and casual relation to one another.” (52-year-old)

“There is a level of disconnection. [With] my male friends... there is certainly a level of sadness, loneliness.” (16-year-old)

3. Younger men are more likely to endorse risk-taking behaviour and violence than men over 30



Half of the men surveyed thought boys and men in the Macedon Ranges need alcohol to feel comfortable talking about their emotions.

“You feel pressure when you go out to a pub ...-you always feel that pressure to go up to eight or 10 [drinks] or sometimes even more. I think doing things in moderation is a very limited thing in a masculine setting. You either do it and you do it way too much or you don't do it all.” (17-year-old)

4. Men are less likely to seek support

A perception remains for some men that they must solve their own problems and cannot talk about their emotions, leading to delays in reaching out for help when experiencing distress.



One in five men indicated experiencing shame in asking for help. Over half of men agreed that boys and men wouldn't be comfortable talking about their mental health before they reach a breaking point.

“You can't break down; you can't melt down. And, well, you do, but you can't. There's no space for it. There are people relying on you.” (59-year-old)

5. Gender roles can have negative impacts on men's wellbeing

Outdated gender roles that place pressure on men to be the main breadwinner can sometimes have negative impacts on their wellbeing. Some men who are not the main breadwinner feel less valued in the community.



Half of male respondents and over half of non-male respondents agreed that boys and men in the Macedon Ranges are expected to take on traditional masculine roles, including being the main provider.

*“So you always have to provide. And if you struggled at work, I guess you’d probably feel a bit of pressure not to mention it. So you have got to deal with it.”
(34-year-old)*

*“Teachers will say to the kids, “Take this home to mum,” or, “Can you get mum to fill this out and bring it back?”... it’s the assumptions people make... and the judgments that you see flicker across people’s eyes when they realize, actually you’re at home with the family... I see it in the men that want to be at home with the kids, and I see it with the men that have been home with the kids, and it’s broken them, and they’ve gone back to work, or they’ve separated.”
(43-year-old)*

6. Many men feel they have to hide their true self

Pressure to fit in and belong leads many men to feel as though they need to hide their true self from others in the community.



A third of male respondents and over half of non-male respondents thought that boys and men in the Macedon Ranges are not free to be themselves.

*“You get caught up in trying to achieve that view of being a man, your ideas of who you should be, they can kind of get neglected and you end up feeling a bit displaced from the real you.”
(17-year-old)*

7. Men feel they treat all genders equally

Contrary to non-males surveyed, males in the Macedon Ranges were twice as likely to believe that they treat all genders equally and are confident to act on gender inequality.



Nearly three-quarters of male respondents felt that boys and men in the Macedon Ranges treat all genders equally, compared with a third of non-male identifying respondents.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Based on this research, the project has come up with several recommendations to help improve men's mental health and wellbeing in the Macedon Ranges Shire.

Here they are:

1. Include a diversity of men in design and implementation of programs and resources

Include a range of men's voices in the design or implementation of any programs, resources, campaigns or marketing to improve engagement and relevance.

2. Introduce community-based programs to better connect men

Programs at Men's Sheds for older men to mentor younger men, and dads' groups engaging with new fathers are examples of community-based initiatives to improve men's sense of belonging and connection.

3. Engage with schools and workplaces

Educate boys and men in the Macedon Ranges on the influence of masculinity on mental health, gender equality, and respectful relationships.

4. Increase men's understanding of mental health through community-based programs

Run programs in workplaces and community sport clubs which offer established spaces to engage with groups of men and increase mental health knowledge and comfort with reaching out for help.

5. Develop a 'Help out a Friend' toolkit or campaign

Create a toolkit or campaign to encourage men to have tough conversations about mental health and suicide, look out for mates who are struggling and help break down stereotypes of always needing to be self-reliant and appear in control.

6. Develop an online local directory of male-friendly mental health practitioners

Help increase awareness about the services available for men and how to access them easily.

7. Engage with health service providers to promote male-friendly practice.

Connect health services providers in the Macedon Ranges with support, resources and training to engage more effectively with men and reduce dropout rates.

8. Use this research to help guide the development of any future programs targeting men's wellbeing.



Got any questions about The Human Code project? To access the full report or find out more get in touch with us at healthpromotion@scchc.org.au

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