

NATIONAL HEALTH POLICIES FOR MEN

THE EXPERIENCE OF IRELAND

Men's Health Week Conference
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Issues covered

- Policy and men's health
- The Ireland Men's Health Policy Review
- Lessons learned for Ireland and globally



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About me

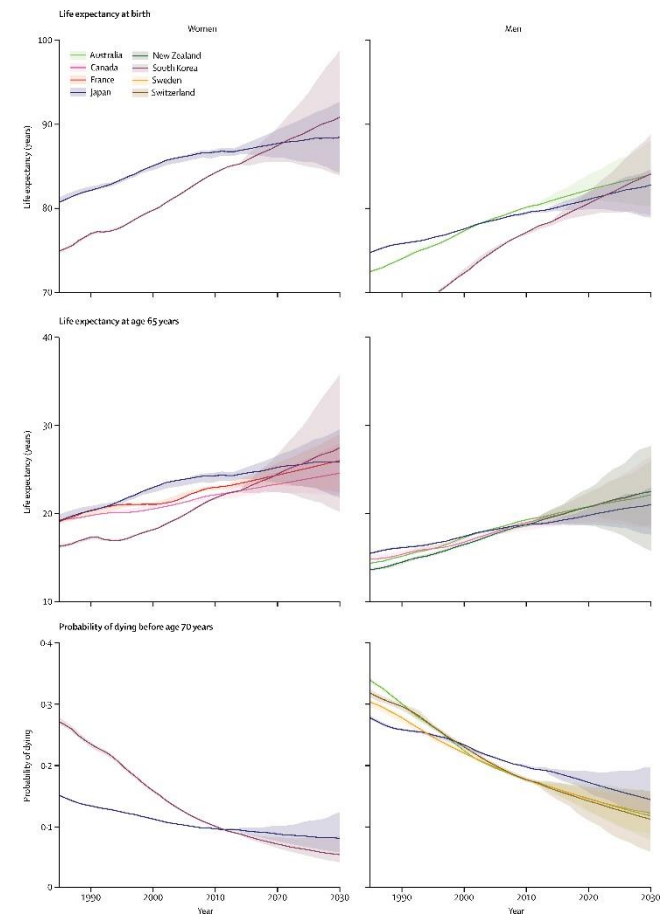
- Working in men's health for 20 years
- CEO of Men's Health Forum England and Wales 2000-12
- Director, Global Action on Men's Health (2013 – to date)
- Independent consultant in men's health (2012 – to date)



Policy and men's health

THE ROLE OF POLICY IN IMPROVING MEN'S HEALTH

- Men's health is improving globally without almost any male-targeted interventions



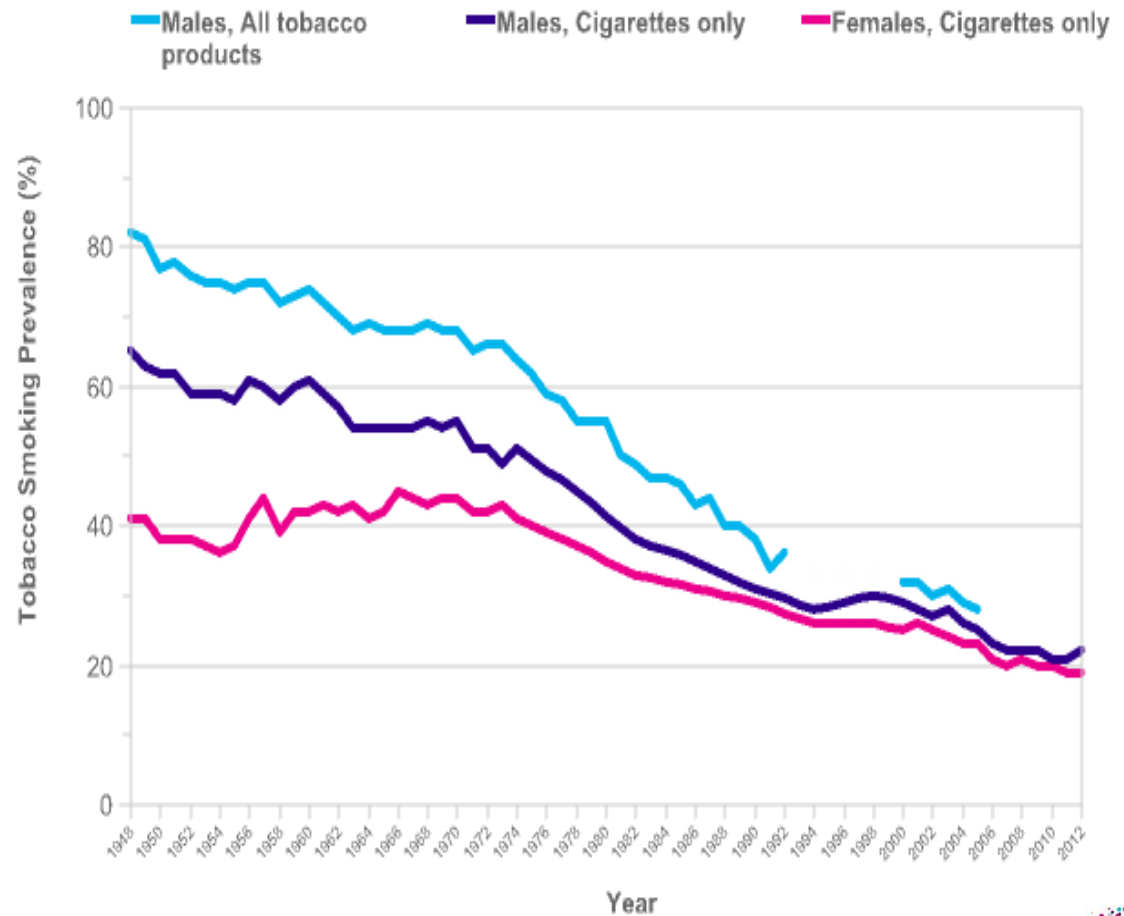
The Lancet 2017;(389)1323-1335
DOI: (10.1016/S0140-6736(16)32381-9)

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Policy and men's health

- Progress can be made by non-sex-specific public health measures (e.g. tobacco control)

Smoking Prevalence, Great Britain: 1948-2012



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- Now an increasingly shared view that health policies and practices should take account of sex and gender differences
- Prof Sir Michael Marmot among those arguing that men's health should be addressed through policy and practice
- Marmot believes national governments in Europe should develop strategies that 'respond to the different ways health and prevention and treatment services are experienced by men [and] women ... and ensure that policies and interventions are responsive to gender'
- In UK, Marmot has called for greater policy focus on men's health
- Global Health 50:50 report argues: 'Inadequate attention and action on gender norms prevent global health organisations from delivering results that leave no one behind.'
- WHO-Europe developing a men's health strategy for the 53 countries in the region
- UNAIDS Blind Spot report recommends a range of gender-sensitive policy and practice responses

But does this mean that a specific men's health policy (MHP) adds any additional value?

Policy and men's health

- Specific policy on men's health now called for by:
 - Men's Health Forum (UK)
 - BMA Northern Ireland
 - European Men's Health Forum
 - Danish Men's Health Society
 - Men's Health Caucus/APHA
- MHPs already introduced in:
 - Australia
 - Brazil
 - Ireland
 - Iran (?)



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Review of Ireland's National Men's Health Policy



- Commissioned by Ireland's Health Service Executive (HSE).
- Purpose: to consider the overall implementation of the National Men's Health Policy and to inform the future direction of men's health policy implementation in Ireland aligned to the key themes of *Healthy Ireland*.
- Particular attention to be paid to governance and implementation strategies, inter-Departmental collaboration, and priority areas of men's health for future work.
- Review completed March 2015.
- Available at:
www.mhfi.org/policyreview2015.pdf



Ireland



Ireland population: 4.6 million

Methodology



- Pragmatic approach
- Literature review
- In-depth interviews (29)
- Online survey (181 responses)
- Survey of key policy stakeholders (11 responses)
- Focus group meeting with men (Larkin Centre, Dublin)
- External expert advisory group

Findings



THE NATURE OF THE IRELAND POLICY

- Based on extensive consultation and research
- Not based on the 'medical model'
- A social determinants approach
- Advocated a 'whole-system' response
- Highlighted prevention
- Advocated community development
- Recognised masculinities and male socialisation
- Did not blame men
- Aimed to support men to become active agents in own health

Findings



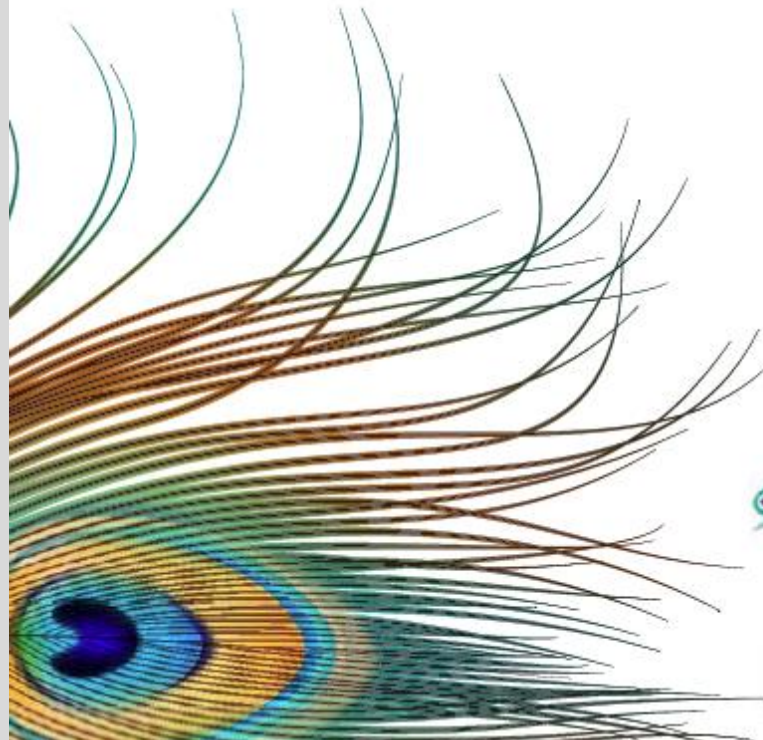
DID IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

- Raised profile of men's health and provided framework for action
- Promoted an increased focus on men's health research in Ireland
- Developed health promotion initiatives that support men to adopt positive health behaviours
- Built social capital within communities for men
- Facilitated development of men's health training programmes
- Created momentum for Healthy Ireland – Men policy launched in 2016.

NATIONAL MEN'S HEALTH ACTION PLAN

HEALTHY IRELAND - MEN HI-M 2017-2021

Working with men in Ireland to
achieve optimum health and wellbeing



Heilthúscara le na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Findings



But less progress on:

- Developing national and local implementation structures or monitoring and evaluation systems
- Developing gender-sensitive clinical and preventative health services
- Initiatives for men as husbands/partners, fathers and carers
- Initiatives in schools and colleges
- Targeting workplaces
- Improving access to sport, recreation and social spaces
- Not possible to measure impact on health outcomes (mortality or morbidity)

Findings



BARRIERS IN IRELAND

- Insufficient high-level political and executive support
- Limited inter-Departmental and inter-sectoral working
- Policy implementation group not sufficiently diverse
- Very little funding
- Policy over-ambitious (10 strategic aims, 118 action points)

Findings



OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF IRELAND POLICY

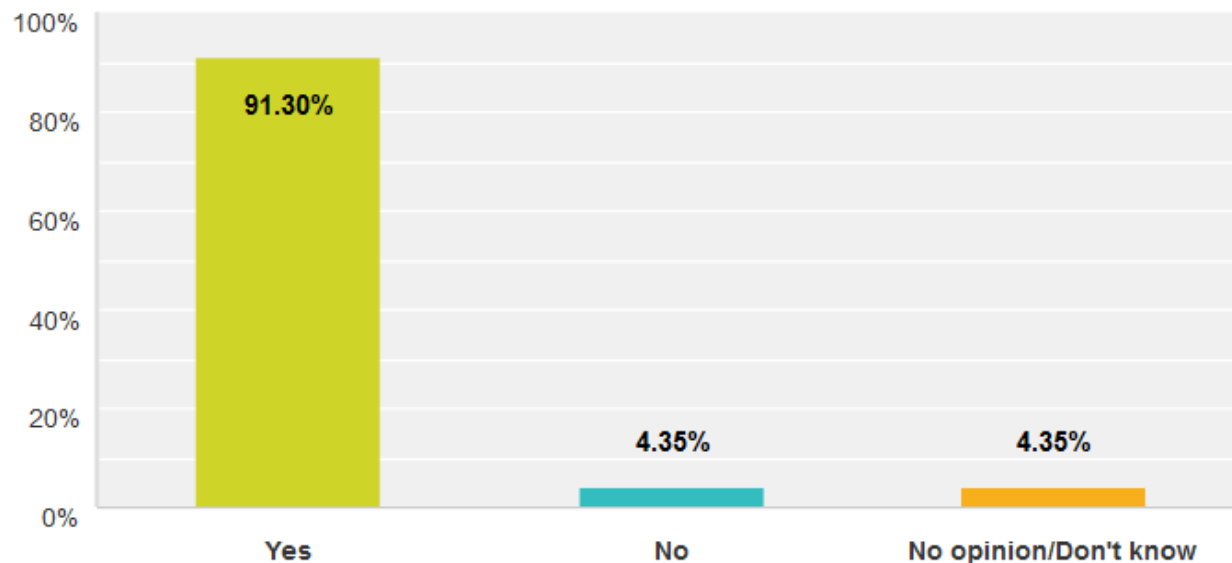
- 'A particular source of inspiration for other countries' (BMJ)
- 'A significant landmark' (European Commission's state of men's health report)
- 'Has had a big impact internationally and inspired others to think about men's health' (Prof John Oliffe, Canada)
- 'Initiatives at this level are very much welcomed and are a tribute to the campaigning work of men's health organisations as well as to the foresight of the governments concerned' (BMA Northern Ireland)
- 'The NMHP has been profoundly important in the relatively short history of "men's health" in Ireland and also internationally' (Ireland Men's Health Policy Review)

Findings



The National Men's Health Policy came to an end in 2013. Do you think that a new dedicated national men's health policy should be established for the period up to 2025?

Answered: 69 Skipped: 114



Wider lessons

THE IMPACT OF MEN'S HEALTH POLICY IN OTHER COUNTRIES (AUSTRALIA, BRAZIL)

Australia

- NMHP similar in scope and approach to Irish policy.
- Significant government money was earmarked for activity in three specific areas of men's health and reference group established to report to a Minister.
- NMHP criticised for omitting measurable indicators of impact and time frames for implementation. Implementation also undermined by lack of clarity about where responsibility for implementation and co-ordination located.

Wider lessons

Brazil

- NMHP less ambitious than Ireland's or Australia's.
- Focused on improving men's use of primary care and sexual/reproductive health services.
- Criticised for over-medicalised approach that focused too much on individual responsibility and insufficiently on wider social determinants of health.
- Has reached 1,000+ municipalities and raised awareness of men's health throughout the region

Wider lessons

Noel Richardson and James Smith argue that a specific men's health policy can:

- Identify men's health as a priority area
- Create a vision and an identity for 'men's health'
- Act as a blueprint and a resource for practitioners and ongoing health policy development
- Provide leverage for expanding men's health work
- Act as a catalyst for increased men's health activity in other areas
- Provide a platform for further action to deliver effective gender mainstreaming which embeds men's health policy within the wider policy landscape



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Wider lessons

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS FOR FUTURE NATIONAL MEN'S HEALTH POLICIES

12 key ingredients:

- Pre-launch research and consultation as well as engagement with men
- Multi-sectoral buy-in
- Sustained high-level political and executive support for policy and its implementation
- Multi-disciplinary implementation team
- Adequate funding
- Address social determinants, intersectionality, prevention, service delivery issues



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Wider lessons

- Policy aligned with wider health policies
- Focused objectives and agreed priorities
- Positive view of men and their strengths
- Delivery supported by guidance and training
- Monitoring and evaluation framework in place at outset
- Take account of women's health as part of a gender-sensitive approach to health policy and practice

Men's health policies are not a panacea but can be central to efforts to tackle health inequalities.



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FURTHER READING

- Baker P (2015). Worth the Paper They're Written On? The potential role of national men's health policies. *Eurohealth* 21(4):27-29.
- Global Health 50/50 (2018). *The Global Health 50/50 Report: How gender-responsive are the world's most influential global health organisations?* London, UK.
- Richardson N, Smith JA (2011). National men's health policies in Ireland and Australia: What are the challenges associated with transitioning from development to implementation. *Public Health* 125:424-432.
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THANK YOU!

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