

# Menswatch

Promoting Male Mental Health & Suicide Prevention

## MENSWATCH PROGRAM OVERVIEW 2016

MENSWATCH IS A PROGRAM OF:



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Promoting Male Mental Health & Suicide Prevention

## ABOUT AIMHS

The Australian Institute of Male Health and Studies is a not-for-profit, non-government organisation with DGR, Registered Charity, and Tax Exemption Status.

AIMHS was created to pursue improved health and wellbeing outcomes for men and boys through innovative initiatives, programs and activities, those endeavouring to effect institutional and societal change, as well as those of immediate practical importance and benefit.

In its commitment to this pursuit, the AIMHS is guided by principles of equity, intellectual integrity, and a view of human experience, society, and ethics that is inseparable from biological, psychological, and cultural realities.

AIMHS pursues and promotes excellence in the fields of male health and male studies, through: education, publishing, symposia, forums of discussion, programs of male health and mental health promotion, mentoring, consultancy, and support for undergraduate and post-graduate students.

**Website:** [www.aimhs.com.au](http://www.aimhs.com.au)





## BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

**Menswatch** had its beginnings as a single program – *Male Peer Support Training Program*; one that continues to be the centrepiece of the **Menswatch** suite of programs today.

The program was first piloted on Eyre Peninsula in South Australia to address the issues of male psychological and emotional wellbeing, concerns about male suicide, and the vulnerability of men to mental health difficulties because of the little success of health and mental health services in engaging with their male constituents.

Dr John Ashfield, who was employed by **Country Health SA** to focus on men's health in the lower and middle Eyre Peninsula regions, and who had a strong commitment to preventative community mental health, set about creating a capacity building program (because of the difficulties of direct service delivery in most rural areas), which could engage with men and utilise key men in communities to look out for and offer support to their male peers.

Dr Ashfield was also a strong advocate of demystifying mental health, and putting knowledge into the hands of ordinary people in order for them to take care of themselves and to be agents of promotion, prevention, and early intervention for male mental health.

His immediate dilemma was how to bring together a group of men prepared to take on a role of this kind and to participate in an intensive training group focusing on psychological and emotional issues.

Contrary to the common stereotype that men do not talk about and are resistant to focussing on their inner experience, relationships – and especially mental health issues, Dr Ashfield believed that the problem was more that men are not given appropriate opportunities and the emotional safety to discuss such things. He also knew from experience that

not infrequently, health professionals had little understanding of how to engage appropriately and effectively with males, and that men themselves were often blamed for simply being resistant to help-seeking and self-care.

A single conversation with a farmer in Wharwinda, explaining the aim of the **Menswatch Peer Support Training Program** and seeking his support to perhaps talk to some other key men in the district, resulted in 15 men enthusiastically signing up for the program and participating in the first group just a few weeks later. It was a great success, and once word was out, paved the way for the program to find its way into numerous other communities.

During one of the worst droughts in living memory in the early 2006, the State Government recognised the value of the **Menswatch** program and funded its roll-out as an integral part of the drought response.

FROM ITS HUMBLE beginnings, the **Menswatch Peer Support Training Program** is now the most successful program of its kind in Australia, having trained nearly 2,500 key men of communities and organisations, and ‘embedding’ a whole new capacity for preventative male mental health and suicide prevention in some of the most vulnerable male populations. Men from many walks of life have now completed the program, including men from farming, pastoral, mining, urban, and Aboriginal communities.

## VISION AND MISSION STATEMENTS

**Vision** For males in rural, remote, and urban Australian communities, to be safe from suicide, and to experience timely and respectful support in circumstances of personal distress or difficulty.

**Mission** To build capacity in Australian communities and organisations for: promoting male emotional and mental health and wellbeing; preventing male suicide; and being able to intervene early, respectfully and appropriately with males who are experiencing psychological distress, personal, relationship, family, or mental health difficulties.

## AIMS OF THE MENSWATCH PROGRAM

- To build capacity in communities and organisations for preventative male mental health and suicide prevention, and to facilitate networking and ongoing support of men who complete our **Peer Support Training Program**
- To provide prevention and early intervention for males experiencing psychological distress, personal, relationship, family, or mental health issues, through a specialised counselling and mental health support service offered by telephone and via videoconferencing
- To build capacity in workforces – especially those often dealing with males, to better understand and more effectively engage with their male constituents
- To engage with women (and women’s groups and organisations) in an endeavour to help them better understand the males in their lives – including male: ways of coping, dealing with stress, processing emotion, help-seeking, communication, and ways of behaving in relationships
- To create literature and resources that support our work with men and women, and in our efforts of preventative male mental health and suicide prevention



## THE URGENCY OF THIS WORK

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Men experiencing psychological distress, or mental health problems, are often poorly understood and catered for by existing services

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The majority of men at greatest risk of suicide are not engaged by mental health services

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Nearly 80 percent of all suicides in Australia are male

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Two thirds of men will die on their first attempt at suicide

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Suicide rates in rural and remote areas are significantly greater than in urban populations, with farmers and indigenous men being most at risk

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Psychological distress and suicide risk for males may be exacerbated by an approach that is exclusively focussed on mental illness or disorder, and which is uninformed by social determinants

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The significance of male psychology, male gender, and cultural expectations of males, are generally poorly understood by health service providers and practitioners

## MENSWATCH IS NATIONAL IN ITS FOCUS AND REACH

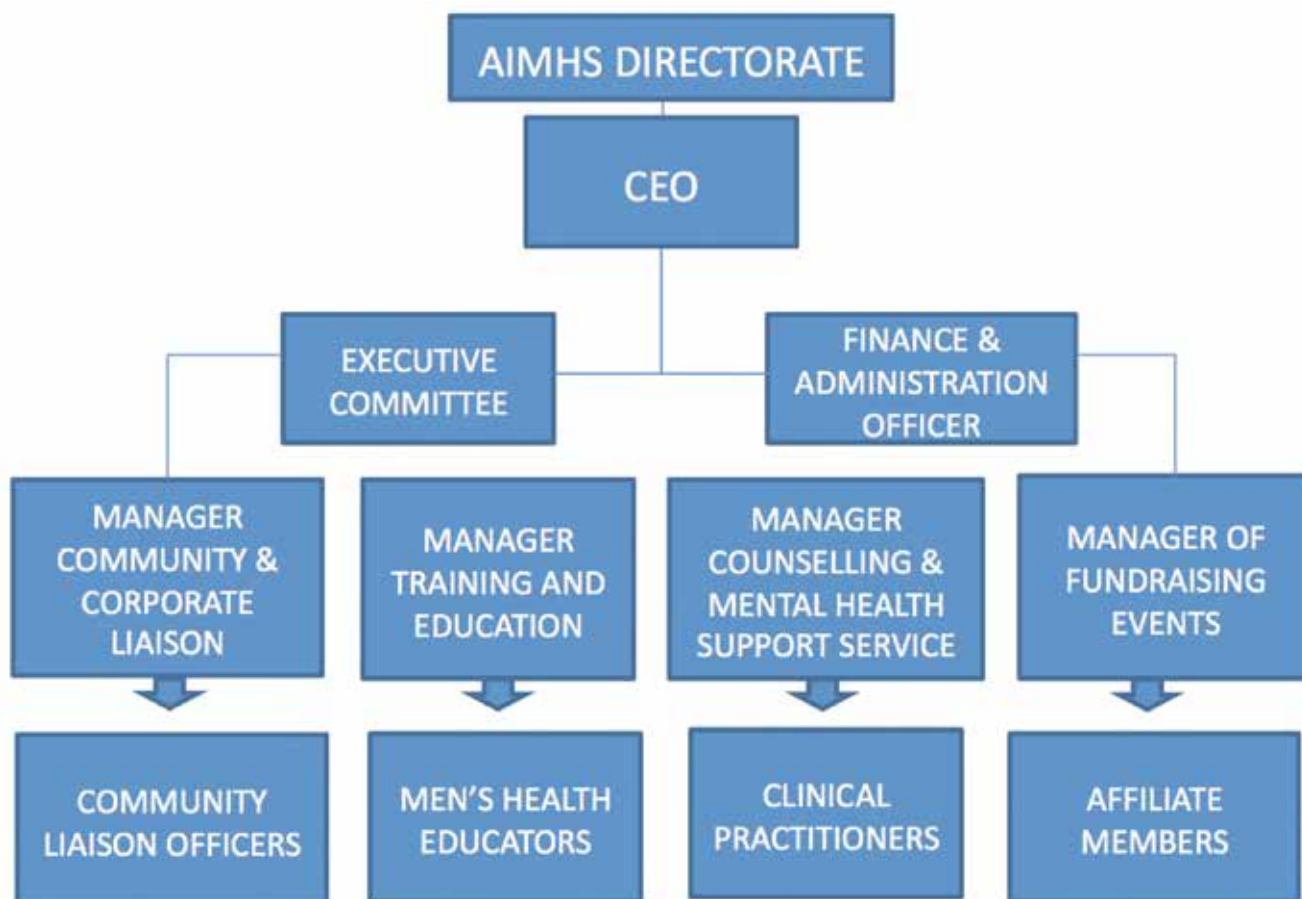
Areas most targeted with our programs have been those where men are at greatest risk of psychological distress, mental ill-health and suicide.

Our services are extended to men in rural, remote, and urban communities.

We make a special priority for communities affected by drought, unemployment, and other major risk factors for men.



## OUR ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE





## A CLOSER LOOK AT OUR PROGRAMS & RESOURCES

### OUR PROGRAMS

#### Peer Support Training Program

+ Men's health and wellbeing network

*\*Award Winning\* 2,500 men trained*

#### Counselling & Mental Health Support Service

#### Gender Matters:

Staff in-service training & professional development

Conversations with women about men

Suicide prevention literature

### PEER SUPPORT TRAINING PROGRAM

We train **Key Men** in communities and organisations to provide support to other men.

We use an all-male group training model to give men: knowledge, skills, and confidence in supporting other men with:

*Personal problems*

*Psychological distress*

*Relationship difficulties*

*Mental health problems*



## Menswatch

Promoting Male Mental Health & Suicide Prevention

Training men to support other men in their workplace, organisation or community.

Equips men with knowledge, skill and confidence to support other men experiencing challenges with personal, relationship or mental health issues.

*Equips men to make a difference.*

## TOPIC MODULES – 2 DAYS OR 3 EVENINGS

### ***More than the Blues:***

Depression, what it is, and what can be done about it

Depression can become a debilitating condition of mental ill-health. This module explores various types of depression, its symptoms, its treatment, and how simple self-help measures can really help recovery.

### ***Stressed Out:***

Stress, what it is and why it needs to be managed

Stress is more than a feeling, it consists of a range of body system changes, which, if occurring for too long can cause significant physical and mental ill-health.

This module focuses on the nature of stress, and how it can be effectively managed.

### ***When Men Feel Trapped and Overwhelmed:***

Antidotes for powerlessness

Men who experience sustained powerlessness can have very poor mental health outcomes and are more susceptible to suicide. This module explores why men are vulnerable to powerlessness, and constructive ways of overcoming it.

### ***Principles and Strategies for Helping:***

Taking an informed approach

In this module participants are guided through a whole series of practical principles and strategies for working safely and effectively with others affected by personal, relationship, or mental health issues. Self-care is also covered.

### ***Gender Matters:***

Men, women, and difference

Fundamental to any helping role is understanding differences between men and women – particularly in the way they deal with emotion, communicate, problem solve, and run into difficulties with their mental health. This module deals with the issue of gender in a way that is useful and practical for helpers.

### ***Men and Separation:***

How to readjust and manage emotionally

Men experiencing separation are often thrown into painful emotional turmoil, and may feel ill-equipped to know how to deal with its demands and challenges. This module focuses on how men can survive separation, keep their mental health intact, and go on to reshape and adapt their lives to new circumstances.

## + MEN'S HEALTH & WELLBEING NETWORK

Men who are trained through our ***Peer Support Training Program*** are invited to be part of a network of men who keep in touch through a periodic ***Menswatch Bulletin***.

They are also invited to gatherings of men from their area to catch up, talk about their experiences, and to take advantage of additional training opportunities (talks, presentations, men's health promotion events etc).

Our ***Men's Health & Wellbeing Network*** also provides valuable information and data to our colleagues engaged in men's health and mental health research.

### **MENSWATCH PEER SUPPORT TRAINING PROGRAM HAS A PROVEN TRACK RECORD:**

Over **2,500** Australian men have completed the program in South Australia; other States have yet to have access to it.

The program was Awarded the SA Government, Dr Margaret Tobin Award for Excellence in Community Mental Health Education

*The program has undergone formal evaluation by:*

 **McGregor Tan Research**

## SEED FUNDING FOR COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONS

Seed Funding for running **Menswatch Peer Support Training** programs is generated from fundraising activities, sponsorship and grants.

We try and make Seed Funding available to community groups and organisations (when we have funds) that would not otherwise have the capacity to meet the full cost of a program.

Seed funding is only available to community groups and organisations that have an identified need in their community. The short-fall in funding must be met by the community or organisation themselves.

The cost of a **Menswatch Peer Support Training** program depends on the geographic location of the community in which it is to be run. The cost is usually between \$5,000 and \$6,000 (which is mostly dependent on travel time, and travel costs for the Educator; intra-state and regional travel is often more expensive than interstate travel).

A simple Seed Funding application form is available and can be completed online and is available on the **AIMHS** website (click on the **Menswatch** menu tab)

## ORGANISATIONS THAT HAVE SPONSORED OR FUNDED MENSWATCH PEER SUPPORT TRAINING PROGRAMS

- Country North SA Medicare Local
- Country Health SA (State Government)
- Port Lincoln Aboriginal Health Service
- Local & District Councils
- Clare Medical Centre
- Peacock Design and Print
- Club Marine
- Men's Sheds
- Agricultural Bureau's
- Whyalla Lions Club
- Renmark Apex Club
- Riverton Football Club
- Salvation Army
- Fat Farmers Fun Run
- Stockman's Hall of Fame
- Country Women's Association
- *Many generous small businesses and individuals!*

## OUR OWN YEARLY SKI FOR LIFE FUNDRAISING EVENT



## MENSWATCH COUNSELLING AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT SERVICE



*This service is offered by telephone or using online videoconferencing*

### ***Male Focussed Service***

Men seeking support or assistance with a personal, relationship, family, or mental health issue, deserve a service that appreciates their issues and experience from a uniquely male point of view, and that ensures the highest degree of privacy and confidentiality.

With our service, men are able to access a practitioner with recognised experience and a track record for working respectfully and effectively with male clients. Their privacy and confidentiality is assured, because we use telephone or online videoconferencing for sessions.

This means there is no longer any need for men to be on public display in a waiting room while waiting for an appointment. They can also secure an appointment time that doesn't require them to take time off work.

### ***We also cater for men's female partners & for women concerned about male loved ones***

Often, female partners/wives/mothers need to talk to a male counsellor because of concerns they have about their partner, son, father, or another male in their lives.

Our service will also provide counselling and psychological therapy to men's female partners/wives – with the same professional dedication and concern as for male clients. We offer the option to female clients to have appointments with a female counsellor/psychotherapist if requested. Offering this service recognises that the health and wellbeing of men and women is inseparable and that particularly in the event of relationship difficulties, it may be needful to engage both partners in counselling and therapy.



## FEE FOR SERVICE WITH PART SUBSIDY IN SITUATIONS OF HARDSHIP

Code	Amount
F1	\$130
F2	\$100
F3	\$75
F4	\$50

*Clients nominate a code that fits their capacity to pay*

- Appointments can be arranged within 24 hours
- No Doctor's referral is necessary
- Catering as well for men's female partners and for women concerned about male loved ones.

Our service is delivered by experienced qualified health professionals, with a specialisation in working with male clients.

## CREDENTIALS OF OUR PRACTITIONERS

Our counselling, psychotherapy, and mental health practitioners have extensive training and experience, and have achieved excellence in their field.

All are registered health professionals with either the: Australian Psychological Society, the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia, the Australian Association of Social Workers (or another approved professional body).

All have also undergone a mandatory police clearance check, are familiar with mandatory reporting responsibilities, and carry their own professional indemnity insurance.



## GENDER MATTERS:

*Staff in-service training & professional development*

There is much about men, their experience, way of coping, communicating and dealing with personal and interpersonal problems that is poorly understood.

The program draws on a broad range of recent insights and evidence from a range of disciplines.

It opens up a whole new field of knowledge of crucial importance to anyone working with males or needing to engage them or communicate with them effectively and respectfully.

### *Part 1*

#### **Men, women, and difference**

Considers the relationship between human biology and behaviour, the imperatives of reproduction and survival, and just how crucial the behavioural differences between men and women have been – and continue to be in support of these imperatives.

### *Part 2*

#### **Gender, masculinity and manhood**

Offers an evidence based way of making sense of the particular ways in which men are socially conditioned and compelled to perform certain roles, but for very different reasons to those asserted by current gender 'experts'.

## CONVERSATIONS WITH WOMEN ABOUT MEN

*Half day program for women's groups*

This program aims to provide women with the unique opportunity to make better sense of the males in their life! Many questions that arise for women about men have surprising answers. Better understanding the basis of male/female differences and why men think, feel, and behave the way they do, can make a huge difference to relationships at home, in the workplace, and in the wider community.

The program is often booked so it can run concurrently with **Menswatch Peer Support Training** for men. It has been very popular with women's groups, which have found it fun and informative.

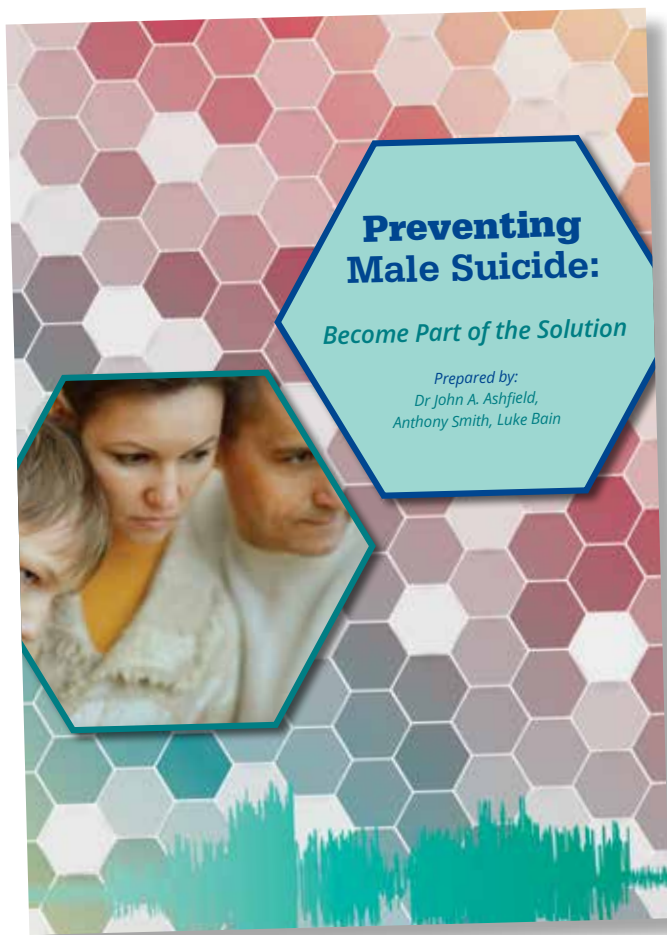


*Conversations with Women about Men*

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Better understanding the basis of male/female differences and why men think, feel, and behave the way they do, can make a huge difference to relationships at home, in the workplace, and in the wider community.

# SUICIDE PREVENTION LITERATURE



## Men, Unemployment and Suicide 2015



Key points as guidelines for appropriate research and program design pertaining to suicide prevention for men

Recent international research provides a serious challenge to the general approach to suicide research and prevention, particularly as it applies to men. Current policy and practice are not only unhelpful to many men, but may actually compound the difficulties that men face. Unemployment is a recognised factor in a large percentage of all suicides.

### 1 Acknowledging the significance of unemployment as a correlate of male suicide

Recent Australian research (2014) shows that unemployed men suicide at 4.62 times the rate of employed men.<sup>1</sup>

Unemployment (in particular, for more than six months), early retirement, or homemakers status have been found to be associated with significantly increased suicide risk, independently of categorised psychiatric diagnosis. In addition, adverse psychosocial working conditions, such as monotonous work, increased responsibility and pronounced mental strain due to contact with work clients, significantly increased suicide risk as well, again independent of categorised psychiatric diagnosis (Schneider et al., 2011).

Employment and a positive modification of working conditions, may possibly be preventive to important adverse mental health outcomes, including suicidality (Schneider et al., 2011).

### 2 Recognising male unemployment as a social determinant associated with high rates of male suicide

Research from the United Kingdom has highlighted that,

...nations that invest in active labour market programmes reduce the risk of suicide.<sup>2</sup>

There are now strong international calls for appropriate labour market policy AS suicide prevention.<sup>4</sup>

### 3 Challenging the arbitrary assumed mental illness /male suicide nexus

It may be the case that common suicide prevention strategies, such as encouraging greater use of

mental health services by men and focusing on raising awareness of links between mental illness and suicide, are unlikely to lead to effective interventions for individuals.<sup>3</sup>

There are strong international calls to take suicide prevention for men out of the 'mental health paradigm.' Many unemployed men are likely to be highly stressed as a result of their circumstances. This should not be presumed to indicate a 'mental health disorder.'

### 4 The current approach of suicide research largely misses the mark for men

To date, research has been insufficient to explain why men, especially during middle age, are particularly vulnerable to taking their own lives. The shortcomings of prior studies include lack of longitudinal follow-up, failure to measure such factors as social integration and dimensional indicators of stress, over reliance on categorical measures of psychopathology, and a focus on proxy outcomes instead of death by suicide.<sup>5</sup>

### 5 Mitigating risk through ethical and responsible industry practices

There are concerns about service provision as it affects men who may be in distress.<sup>6,7</sup>

Targeted awareness campaigns are required to educate professionals who are likely to come into contact with individuals during suicidal crisis.<sup>10</sup>

Service providers across employment and training sectors as well as health and community support sectors have a duty-of-care to ensure appropriate engagement with unemployed men as a precaution against further isolation of men who may be at risk of suicide.

# STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR 2016

- To promote **Menswatch** widely and effectively across Australia, particularly in areas affected by drought and unemployment (where men are most at risk)
- To recruit and orientate three new contract Male Health Educators to facilitate the **Menswatch Peer Support Training Program** (these positions will be largely self-funding)
- To fund roles which up until now have been pro bono and part time, to meet the need for more effective community liaison, marketing, fostering donor support, events management, executive management, a men's health and wellbeing network, and the expansion of the **Menswatch Bulletin**
- To foster collaboration with other likeminded organisations
- To develop our grant writing capacity to better attract philanthropic and government grant funding.
- To procure funding for the **Menswatch Counselling and Mental Health Support Service**, in order to have a fund for subsidising men to use the service (those who lack the financial means to pay full fee for service), and to appropriately promote the service
- To actively promote our **Gender Matters** staff in-service training program – especially to health service staff, and people dealing with men in the employment and welfare sectors
- To utilise mass media and social networking in more effectively promoting **Menswatch** in communities across Australia
- To develop and disseminate further suicide prevention literature.

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