



Real talk: Masculinity and young men's mental health

POLICY REPORT

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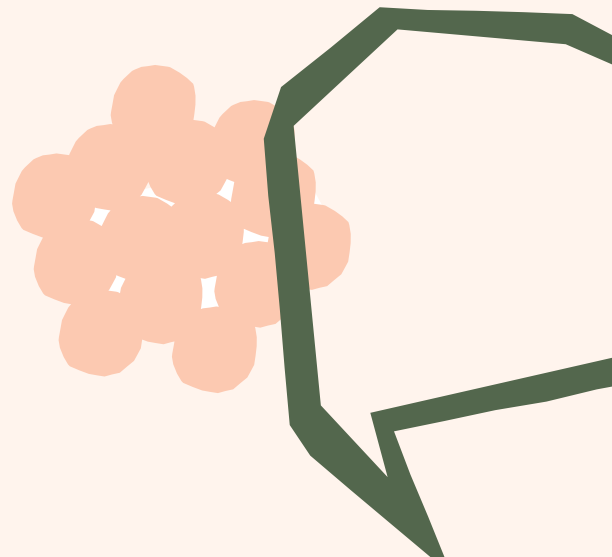


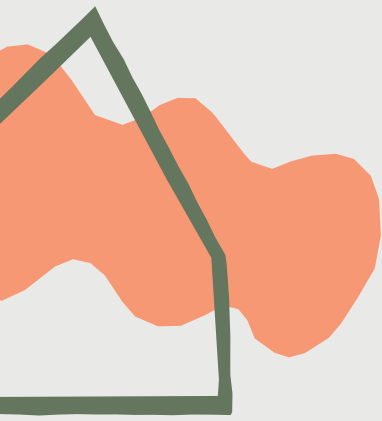
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Orygen acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands we are on and pay respect to their Elders past and present. We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationships to Country, which continue to be important to the First Nations people living today.

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The final report reflects Orygen's analysis and independent conclusions. It may not necessarily reflect all the opinions or conclusions of key contributors.



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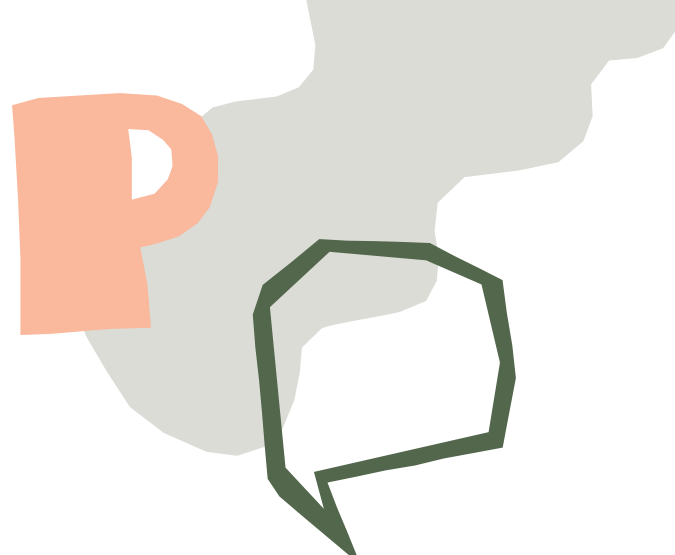
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Executive summary

Mental ill-health is a significant public health concern for young men in Australia. Recent data revealed that **the number of young men experiencing mental ill-health had increased from 26 per cent in 2007 to 32 per cent in 2020-22**. Mental ill-health in young men is associated with a range of adverse health and social outcomes, including *suicide, substance use disorders, disrupted education and employment, risk-taking behaviour and reduced social connection*.

Despite this, young men continue to access mental health services at lower rates than young women, even when experiencing similar levels of distress. This disparity is often attributed to the role of gender socialisation, particularly traditional masculine norms that promote *self-reliance, strength and emotional restraint*. Conformity to these norms influence how young men understand, experience and respond to mental health challenges, making it harder for some young men to seek support.

When young men do reach out, they often encounter services that are not designed with their needs in mind. Increasing the availability of gender-responsive training would equip mental health professionals with the skills and knowledge to engage young men more effectively, including understanding the role of masculinity in shaping mental health experiences.

At the same time, digital environments are also playing an increasingly influential role in shaping young men's attitudes towards masculinity and mental health. While some online content reinforces harmful stereotypes and stigma around help-seeking, digital platforms also present new opportunities to engage young men in ways that feel relevant and accessible.

The challenge lies in recognising and building on the positive aspects of masculinity while addressing areas where young men need greater support for their mental health. Future policy and research should seek to address factors related to some masculine norms that influence young men's mental health and help-seeking (e.g. emotion regulation). There is a need to challenge and redefine societal expectations of masculinity in Australia to create a more supportive environment that promotes diversity and wellbeing and encourages help-seeking without undermining young men's sense of masculinity.

Importantly, these efforts must be grounded in the voices and lived experiences of young men themselves. As one young man told us: **"We talk about young men, but we're not talking to young men."**

To inform this report, Orygen commissioned a YouGov survey in March 2025 of 800 young men (16-25 years old) and 400 men from older generations to understand their perspectives and experiences of young men's mental health and wellbeing.

YouGov overview

Orygen commissioned a YouGov survey of young men aged 16-25 to address gaps in understanding young men's perspectives on masculinity, mental health services and policy. The survey aimed to explore the mental health

and wellbeing of young men, with key findings presented throughout this report. A total of 795 young men participated in the survey, conducted in March 2025.

Of the young men aged 16-25 who participated in the YouGov survey:



87 per cent lived in capital cities and 13 per cent lived outside of capital cities.



77 per cent identified as heterosexual and 13 per cent identified as non-heterosexual. 10 per cent preferred not to say.



48 per cent were from NSW, 19 per cent from Vic, 13 per cent from QLD, 7 per cent from SA, 11 per cent from WA and 2 per cent were from TAS/NT/ACT.



40 per cent completed secondary school, 18 per cent hold a bachelor degree, 23 per cent have some secondary school education, and 13 per cent have a certificate, diploma, advanced diploma, or TAFE qualification.

Issues and solutions

Key issues

1. Young men face unique barriers to engagement with mental health support services.

Young men face distinct barriers when engaging with mental health support services and often experience mental ill-health in ways that differ from young women. Integrating gender-responsive content into education and training programs is essential to ensure mental health professionals have the skills and understanding needed to deliver more effective, tailored support for young men.

2. Traditional notions of masculinity influence young men's experiences of mental ill-health and their likelihood to engage with support services.

Rigid adherence to some masculine norms can discourage emotional expression and help-seeking, limiting engagement with mental health services. Future policy and research should seek to address factors related to masculine norms that influence young men's mental health and help-seeking.

3. Social media platforms are having an increasingly influential role in shaping young men's masculinities and attitudes toward mental health.

While some online spaces can serve as avenues for health advice and peer support, they can also reinforce unhealthy masculine stereotypes and negatively impact young men's mental health and attitudes towards help-seeking.

4. Current mental health policy does not address the specific challenges and opportunities for young men.

Young men are not identified as a priority population within the National Men's Health Strategy. The National Men's Health Strategy should be updated to expand its focus on young men and embed a healthy masculinities health promotion approach.



Solutions

Research and knowledge

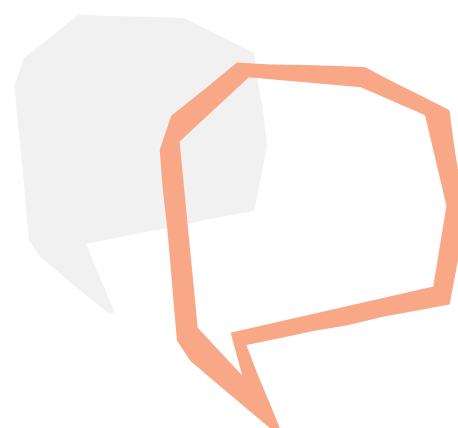
- Establish a living review of literature and evidence on young men's mental health.
- Address critical research gaps in relation to understanding the role of young men's masculinity and mental health.
- Longitudinal research to understand the influence of online spaces on young men's masculinity and mental health.

Government and policy

- Update the National Men's Health Strategy to include young men as a priority population group.
- Embed promotion of healthy masculinities into the National Men's Health Strategy.
- Engage the spaces young men already inhabit to amplify positive role models.
- Digital mental health services for young men should be an explicit priority in the upcoming National Early Intervention Service.

Programs and initiatives

- Develop targeted digital media literacy interventions.
- Build the capacity of health professionals to support young men.
- Invest in social connection opportunities for young men.
- Partner with young men to develop an initiative to improve engagement and positive connection with the health system during adolescence.
- Increase investment into the regulation of social media platforms, including content moderation.



The mental health of young men in Australia

Recent data from the National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing revealed that **almost one-half of young men (43.1 per cent) aged 16-25 experienced mental ill-health in the past 12 months.** The most common mental health conditions found among young men experiencing mental ill-health are **anxiety (33 per cent), substance use disorder (17 per cent) and depression (15 per cent).**(1)

Suicide and self-inflicted injuries are the leading cause of death and disease burden among young men in Australia aged 15 to 24 years, with young men representing 11.2 per cent of all suicide deaths.(2) Similar rates are observed internationally, with young men being two to three times more likely to die by suicide compared to young women.(3) Recent data from *Ten to Men* (Australia's largest representative cohort study of men's health) found that suicidal ideation is more prevalent among young men than any other age group across the lifespan, with **one-fifth of young men (21.1 per cent) reporting suicidal ideation in their lifetime.**(4) Suicidal ideation in young men is associated with a range of risk-taking behaviours (e.g. substance misuse) that can contribute to adverse physical and mental health outcomes. These behaviours not only increase the risk for immediate harm but also have the potential to impact young men throughout their lives.

Despite the prevalence of mental ill-health and suicide among young men, they remain underrepresented as clients in youth mental health services. Estimates suggest that **only 13.2 per cent of young men experiencing mental health challenges will access mental health support.**(5) Recent ABS data revealed that 52.9 per cent of young men experiencing moderate distress and 30.9 per cent of young men experiencing high or very high distress have never accessed mental health services. Young men tend to access mental health services at lower rates than young women even when experiencing similar levels of distress, reflecting gendered differences in help-seeking behaviours.(6) Service data shows that 6.8 per cent of young men accessed mental health care services in 2023-24, compared with 11.2 per cent of young women.(7) These rates are the lowest of any demographic and disproportionately impact particular populations of young men, including First Nations young men and those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds.

The burden of mental ill-health among young men is likely to be underestimated. Research suggests that standard diagnostic criteria for mental health disorders may be less sensitive to expressions of distress in young men.(5, 6)

Young men experiencing depression or anxiety are more likely to display symptoms that differentiate from standard diagnostic criteria, indicating a distinct clinical phenotype.(8) Mental ill-health in young men is associated with various psychological and social risk factors, including risk-taking, substance misuse and anger. These externalising behaviours can mask mental health symptoms, reducing the likelihood that mental health professionals (and young men themselves) recognise these behaviours as indicators of underlying mental ill-health. These behaviours are also associated with increased risk for suicide in males.(9) Additionally, normative male behaviour can involve withdrawal and muted emotional displays, further complicating the ability for health professionals to identify when young men are in distress. (10) Young men are also less likely to recognise symptoms of mental ill-health in themselves or their peers, leading to lower levels of self-reporting, help seeking and an over-reliance on crisis services.(6, 11-13) This combination of factors contributes to underreporting of mental ill-health in young men, potentially hindering an accurate assessment of the scope of the issue.

Groups of young men at increased risk for mental ill-health

Experiences of mental ill-health and service use barriers are also affected by young men's identity and past experiences. There is evidence of specific risks and barriers among population groups of young men.

First Nations young men

First Nations young men experience some of the poorest mental health outcomes among young men, including disproportionately high rates of mental ill-health, self-harm and suicide. (14) Research highlights that young First Nations men are interested in their own wellbeing and are both willing and able to engage with mental health care when delivered in a way that is gender sensitive, culturally responsive and age-appropriate.(15)

A complex array of factors contribute to the underutilisation of mental health services among First Nations young men. These include, experiences of racism in health settings, lack of scaling of First Nations social and emotional wellbeing initiatives, a lack of culturally appropriate care options and cultural constructions of masculinity.(15) Additionally, poor use of psychometrically and culturally valid measures continues to undermine the accuracy of mental health data reporting and limits the ability for culturally safe assessment and mental health support.(16)

Gender and sexuality diverse young men

In Australia, young men who are gender and sexuality diverse experience significantly higher rates of mental ill-health than their peers.(17, 18) The National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing found that **53 per cent of these young men reported high levels of psychological distress, compared with 18 per cent of heterosexual identifying young men.** These disparities do not exist in isolation. Gender and sexuality diverse young men can experience a range of factors that contribute to their risk for mental ill-health and suicidality, such as discrimination, lack of access to affirming care and social alienation.

Gender expressions that do not align with heteronormative gender role ideals can negatively impact how young men are perceived or treated.(19) In response, gender and sexuality diverse men may experience increased pressure to adopt dominant masculine norms to reduce feelings of minority stress.(20) A recent study found that three-in-five gender and sexuality diverse men felt pressured to conform to masculine ideals, with those under 30 years of age experiencing most pressure. Pressure to align with traditional masculine norms poses further risks to the mental health of young men from this population and is linked to increased risk for substance misuse, resistance to help-seeking and distress concealment.(19, 21)

Gender and sexuality diverse young men face additional barriers to accessing youth mental health services and often delay seeking support until they are unable to self-manage their distress. They also report greater dissatisfaction with mental healthcare than other young men and encounter cohort specific challenges when seeking professional mental health support. These include a fear of prejudice from mental health professionals and a focus on sexuality when irrelevant to the presenting concern. The pathologisation of sexual identity, particularly when unrelated to the concern at hand, can deter these young men from seeking mental health support.(22)



Young men with childhood maltreatment experiences and victim/survivors of family violence

Young men who have experienced childhood maltreatment experience increased risk for mental ill-health and suicidality. In addition to this, childhood maltreatment experiences are strongly linked with risk behaviours, such as substance use and criminal offending. Societal taboos relating to masculinity among male victim/survivors can also cause self-stigma and shame, leading to a lack of help-seeking or disclosure.(23-25)

Young men experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage

Socioeconomic disadvantage is associated with higher prevalence of mental ill-health and substance use among young men. Young men with limited access to resources experience a higher risk for poorer mental health outcomes, which can impact their ability to achieve early adulthood milestones, such as education attainment and employment. Research highlights the importance of early interventions for young men experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage.(26) Socioeconomic disadvantage in adolescence impacts men across the lifespan. For example, Movember's *The Real Face of Men's Health in Australia* report found that the average rate of male premature death in the most socioeconomically disadvantaged electorates is nearly 1.3 times higher than the average rate for the least disadvantaged electorates.(27)

The influence of masculinity on mental health and help-seeking among young men

Gendered differences in experiences and expressions of mental ill-health tend to emerge in adolescence.(28, 29) Adolescence is an important developmental period for identity formation, as young people seek to explore and establish their own emerging identities. This process includes the formation of a 'gender identity' through both personal reflection and input from their social environment, including cultural expectations and traditional gender norms. For young men, this means exploring what it means to be a man.



Adherence to masculine norms remains a key determinant of young men's mental health and willingness to seek support. Analysis of the Orygen commissioned YouGov survey of 800 young men found that **67 per cent of young men aged 16-25 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that social expectations of what it means to be a man has a negative impact on their mental health.**(30) Although many young men align with multiple, diverse masculinities that are fluctuating and adaptive, traditional masculine ideals remain deeply ingrained in Australia.(31, 32)

Young men are more likely than young women to place additional pressure on themselves to conform to traditional gender roles.(33) Analysis of the YouGov data found that **84 per cent of young men agree that they are expected to 'tough it out' and not express their emotions often, compared to women.** *Across the lifespan, this conformity to masculine norms is strongest in young men 15-25 years old and reduces as they age.*(19) Masculine norms may serve as both a protective and a risk factor for young men's mental health, varying based on how rigidly or flexibly they are applied. While conformity to masculine norms can have some positive impacts for young men (e.g. help-seeking associated with being courageous or strong), rigid adherence to masculine norms has been associated with risk for mental ill-health and suicide.

Common conceptualisations of masculinity in Australia emphasise the ideals of 'toughness', emotional self-control and self-reliance, all of which can discourage young men from expressing their emotions and hinder help-seeking behaviour.(34) Young men may learn to avoid expressions of emotional vulnerability in order to uphold masculine ideals of self-reliance and emotional control. As a result, some young men may perceive the experience of mental ill-health to be shameful and reflective of personal failure or weakness.(5, 12, 35) This is reflected in YouGov data in which it was found that **81 per cent of men aged 16-25 reported that social expectations of masculinity make it harder to seek help when they need it.**



Across the lifespan, conformity to masculine norms is strongest in young men 15-25 years old and reduces as they age.

Moving away from 'toxic' masculinity

Adolescence represents a crucial window of opportunity to help young men to develop a masculine identity in which positive characteristics are encouraged. **Healthy masculinity** is understood as a concept that accentuates the diversity, strengths and beneficial aspects of a masculine identity.(36)

Healthy masculinity does not assert that masculinity is inherently problematic. Instead, interventions grounded in this construct seek to reshape the values and behaviours associated with **traditional masculinity** to establish a positive developmental trajectory for young men.(37) Healthy masculinity can include aspects of traditional norms, such as resilience or courage, when expressed in flexible, non-restrictive ways.

Supporting young men to embody healthy masculinities is particularly important given that references to **'toxic' masculinity** often dominate the public discourse surrounding masculinity.(37) This has implications for young men's mental health, as evidenced by an Orygen survey which found that **67 per cent of young men believe that societal perceptions of masculinity as 'harmful' or 'toxic' is having a negative impact on their mental health.**

Toxic masculinity refers to a version of masculinity that is unhealthy and harmful for both young men who conform to it and for those around them. Recent data from King's College London found that 37 per cent of men aged 16 to 29 find 'toxic' masculinity to be an unhelpful term, approximately double the 19 per cent of young women who feel this way.(38)

Public discourse around 'toxic' masculinity can imply to young men that masculinity itself is inherently harmful. This can confuse and alienate young men, excluding them from meaningful dialogue and leaving them more vulnerable to harmful influences.(39) This narrative also fails to acknowledge the social pressure young men feel, particularly in adolescence, to embody and express their masculinity.(40)

While rigid adherence to gender norms can be damaging to both men and women, young men's health and social practices are routinely viewed through the lens of 'toxic' masculine gender norms and stereotypes. Moving forward, the focus must shift toward promoting healthy masculinities as the foundation for supporting young men's wellbeing. Adopting this approach has potential to benefit not just young men, but their families and communities.

Policy context

There has been an increased focus on men's mental health in the policy landscape in recent years. Australia is considered a global leader in men's health policy and is one of just seven national governments to have formally recognised the health needs of men through a dedicated national men's health policy. These policies have been important for legitimising men's mental health as a priority, providing a framework for action and increasing initiatives that support men's wellbeing.

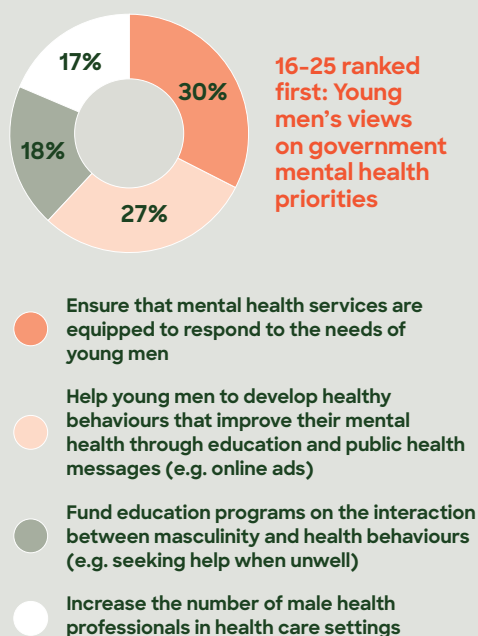
While young men are identified as a priority cohort in two Australian state men's health strategies (NSW and WA), young men are largely overlooked in men's health policies in other jurisdictions and other strategy documents related to mental health and wellbeing. This doesn't reflect what young men say they need.

74 per cent of young men believe that the Federal Government should be doing more to support young men's mental health and wellbeing.(30)

Figure 1 demonstrates young men's perspectives on government priorities for improving their mental health, highlighting four key themes:

- health promotion;
- education on masculinity and mental health;
- service responsiveness; and
- male representation in health care.

Figure 1: Young men's perspectives about how the government should prioritise the mental health needs of young men.



Source: YouGov survey, 2025. (N=795)

The identification of young men as a priority cohort tends to appear in strategies related to gender-based violence. Recent policy attention regarding young men and masculinity has primarily focused on family violence prevention initiatives (e.g. Healthy MaTE). There is also a significant focus on healthy masculinity as a framework in the current National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032.(41) Prioritising young men's mental health within men's health would also help to reduce the risk of violence and antisocial behaviour through improved wellbeing and mental health.

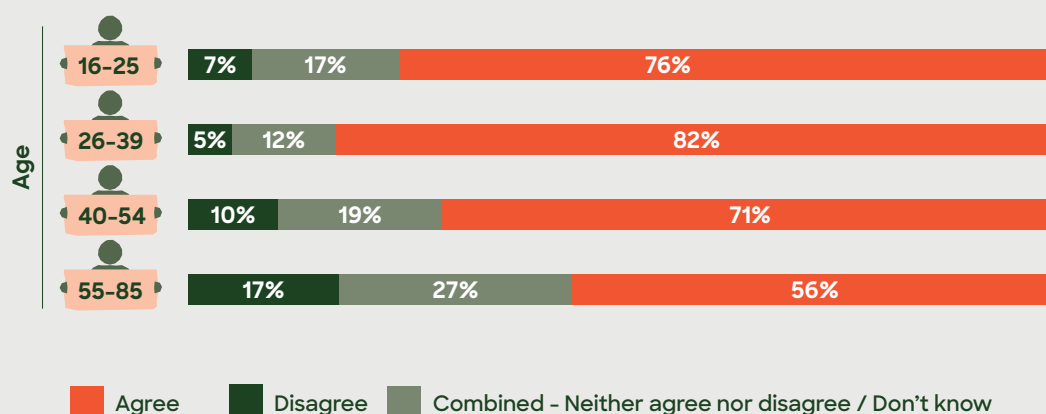
National men's health strategy

In 2010, the Federal Government introduced Australia's first male health strategy, '*Building on the strengths of Australian males*'. This policy sought to improve health outcomes, including mental health, for men at all life-stages with a particular focus on promoting health equity among different populations of men.

Building on this foundation, in 2019, the Federal Government introduced the National Men's Health Strategy (NMHS) 2020–2030.(42) The strategy aims to support every man and boy in Australia to live a long, fulfilling and healthy life. It outlines five key health priorities for action, with the first identified priority being mental health, followed by chronic conditions, sexual and reproductive health, injuries and risk-taking and healthy ageing. The relevance of these priorities for young men is high, with all five priorities being interconnected to the wellbeing of young men. For example, risk-taking behaviours can be a response to underlying mental health distress among young men.

While the strategy acknowledged the heightened risk of mental ill-health and suicide among young men, it did not designate young men as a priority population or target specific actions for them. The list of priority populations in the NMHS is comprised of both population groups and social determinants of health. Although both factors shape experiences of mental ill-health, this approach does not adequately recognise the distinct mental health needs of young men.

Young men today face unique pressures and risks, a reality that is recognised across age groups. Analysis of YouGov data found that **76 per cent of young men aged 16–25 agree that their generation faces distinct challenges compared to previous ones. This perspective is strongly supported by men of older generations, particularly those aged 26–39 (82 per cent) and 40–54 (71 per cent).**

Figure 2: young men today face unique challenges relative to young men in previous generations.

Source: YouGov survey, 2025. (N=1341)

Health policies that address young men's specific health needs and health practices are most effective in improving outcomes.⁽⁴³⁾ For example, young men experience unique health risks as they transition from education to independence, a period often marked by changes in living arrangements and reduced access to supports. Stakeholders raised concerns about the lack of policy focus on young men, given they account for a significant proportion of premature mortality in Australia. The recent NSW Government Men's Mental Health Forum echoed these concerns, identifying young men as a priority population for mental health action, particularly in suicide prevention.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Stakeholders emphasised the benefits of expanding the strategy's focus on young men, noting that positive health behaviours adopted in young adulthood improve wellbeing outcomes and have flow-on effects in later life.

An expanded focus on young men would support opportunities for targeted funding and policy initiatives. This strategic shift would facilitate the development and implementation of tailored programs and services for young men, ultimately reducing the burden of mental ill-health and suicide among young men.

There is an opportunity in the NMHS to challenge masculine stereotypes to improve mental health outcomes.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Incorporating masculinity-focused initiatives into the strategy would ensure that the unique challenges faced by young men are not overlooked in efforts to improve mental health outcomes. This approach would align the strategy with the National Suicide Prevention Strategy 2025-2035, which identifies the importance of services tailored to masculinity constructs in improving the effectiveness of suicide prevention supports.

Currently there is no discussion or actions related to masculinity contained within the NMHS. In contrast, Ireland's National Men's Health Action Plan 2024-28 (the first country to implement a strategy focused on men's health, followed by Australia) places a focus on healthy masculinities as the basis for boys and men to be more actively engaged in their health and wellbeing.⁽⁴⁶⁾

The NMHS could benefit from adopting a similar approach to Ireland, ensuring that masculinity is not overlooked in efforts to improve young men's mental health. This should include developing a healthy masculinities framework to guide health promotion initiatives that challenge harmful gender stereotypes and promote wellbeing among young men. The framework could include guidelines for programs delivering healthy masculinities work and a framework for embedding a focus on healthy masculinities across health promotion efforts, including mental health campaigns, educational settings, and clinical practice. To maximise appeal and acceptability to young men this must be co-designed with them. A good example of this is the *'Healthier Masculinities Framework for Gender Equality'*, published in 2020 by VicHealth to guide masculinity-informed health promotion with men and boys.⁽⁴⁷⁾

Update the National Men's Health Strategy to better support young men

Policy solution

Update the National Men's Health Strategy to include a designated focus on young men and specific mental health actions, informed by a co-developed healthy masculinities framework.

Evidence and rationale

Young men experience higher rates of mental ill-health and suicide than other populations of men. Current policies do not directly address young men's mental health, help-seeking or masculinity constructs.

Health policies that address young men's specific health needs and health practices are most effective in improving health outcomes.

Outcome

A national policy focus on addressing low help-seeking rates and mental health outcomes for young men.

The intersection between masculinity and young men's mental health guides health policy.

Young men are adequately recognised in health policy. The specific mental health needs and health practices of young men are supported by policy.

Online spaces, masculinity influencers and young men's mental health

Research suggests the process of identity formation is being increasingly informed and shaped by online environments, particularly social media platforms. Social media platforms are important places for young men to socialise and interact with friends and family, as well as public figures, such as online influencers. The eSafety Commissioner found that young men online are conforming with, confronting and challenging social and cultural expectations of what it means to be a man today.(48) While online platforms offer young men the freedom to explore and experiment with their identities, young men engage with online platforms during a developmental period in which they are disproportionately concerned with gendered social expectations. Online depictions of traditional masculinity, particularly from masculinity influencers or the 'manosphere', can increase pressure for young men to conform to gender roles.(49, 50)

The 'manosphere' is a term used to define fringe and radicalised online sub-communities that rose to prominence almost a decade ago. While distinct manosphere communities exist, common ideologies routinely advocate for male supremacy, amplified traditional norms of masculinity and position feminism and societal progression for women as coming at the expense of men's health. Masculinity influencers and masculinity-framed content once confined to these manosphere communities, has now become mainstream.(51) This mainstreaming is due to a range of factors including the rise of algorithmic technologies now embedded in most social media platforms and the desire for information, guidance and connection amongst young men, particularly surrounding the issues which are important to them, including dating, relationships, physical-appearance and masculine identity.(50, 52)

It is a common perspective that social media content about masculinity is universally 'toxic' and harmful, particularly among older generations. However, for young men now engaging with masculinity influencers and the content they create, the role of this content and its impacts on their lives and relationships may be more nuanced. *Manosphere communities and broader masculinity content can meet young men's need to understand their vulnerabilities, social disconnection, anxieties about the future and mental health struggles.*(39, 53, 54) Additionally, many masculinity influencers explicitly speak to defining roles that men should be fulfilling in society, providing young men with a framework for their developing identity.(55)



There are a range of factors contributing to young men's pathways to masculinity content. A 2024 review found that the more time young men spend online, the more they were exposed to content that endorsed traditional masculine norms or misogynistic views.(49) The lack of effective content moderation is a key factor in the spread of online content that endorses traditional masculine norms or misogynistic views.(39, 53) Masculinity influencers compete for attention in online spaces that reward controversial content with views and shares and algorithms tend to suggest content based on young men's perceived preferences and interests, in ways that can reinforce or radicalise existing attitudes, insecurities and perceptions.(54) Evidence suggests that pre-existing gender norms influence patterns of social media use and then reinforce these norms.(49) For example, young men who hold negative beliefs about feminism may be more likely to spend time in online spaces that reinforce and validate these views. However, the extent to which this relationship is causal remains unclear. Other bodies of research posit that young men tend to encounter this content not out of ideological alignment but rather, a search for identity, community, and in response to pressure to embody masculinity standards.(53, 56) To date, longitudinal data in this area is lacking, limiting the capacity to make inferences about causal relationships.

Rates of mental ill-health among young men engaging with masculinity content is likely to be high, given that young men appear to be driven to this content to address their distress.(57) Research indicates that **social media platforms can push young men experiencing loneliness, low self-esteem, and mental ill-health towards masculinity content that discusses these issues.** (55, 58) These findings suggest that some masculinity influencers and related algorithms are potentially taking advantage of young men's psychological vulnerabilities, steering them toward masculinity content for engagement and profit.

Masculinity influencers often claim to be helping young men with their mental health by framing their content as 'self-help' for young men to improve themselves. As an example, content analysis of a prominent masculinity influencer revealed his most frequently used words include: 'want', 'get', 'become', 'make', 'powerful', 'man', 'better', 'help' and 'men'.(59) Despite this, masculinity influencers often express contempt for mental health disorders, such as claiming depression does not exist or its prevalence is exaggerated.(54) Research indicates that **help-seeking is highly stigmatised among young men engage with this content.**(54) This stigma can discourage young men from seeking help for their own mental health concerns.

Young men are interested in understanding what it means to be a good man today, and they are often looking for role models online.(48) However, the algorithmic design of online spaces frequented by young men don't tend to elevate positive male role models who can offer constructive guidance on developing healthy masculine identities.(34, 39, 44, 55) In the influencer economy where content engagement (likes, comments and shares) lead to algorithmic promotion, the most disruptive, combative and extreme voices often receive the most attention. Positive role models that encourage nuance and reflection often struggle to compete with content that directly encourages harmful forms of rigid masculinity, potentially leading to the risk of mental ill-health and lower levels of help-seeking.(39, 55) This is reflected in a discussion we had with a young man who told us: **"I fell into the trap (watching masculinity content). I was asking myself, 'Why am I still feeling shitty about myself?'. I see men with lower self-esteem because of it."**

There is an opportunity to utilise places and spaces important to young men to elevate positive role models and support improved mental health outcomes. This must be delivered in tandem with policy efforts to regulate social media platforms, ensuring the burden of responsibility is not solely placed on young men.



Leverage environments where young men already are to promote positive messaging on masculinity and mental health

Policy solution

Develop a targeted communications campaign to directly engage with young men through the environments and platforms they already frequent to deliver targeted messaging on healthy masculinity and mental health. This should include:

- Working with influencers, brands and companies who already hold the attention and trust of young men.
- Integrating evidence-based resources and strengths-based messaging on masculinity and mental health into spaces which hold meaning for young men.
- Involvement of young men in the design of content to ensure authenticity and resonance.

Evidence and rationale

Harmful masculine stereotypes continue to negatively influence the mental health and help-seeking behaviours of young men.

The media, brands, and content young men engage with play a significant role in shaping their perceptions of masculinity and mental health.

There is an opportunity to utilise places and spaces that hold meaning to young men to promote healthier masculinities that support improved mental health outcomes for young men.

Outcome

Young men are directly connected to evidence-based resources in trusted, familiar contexts.

Improved mental health outcomes and increased help-seeking behaviour among young men.

Positive shift in narratives around masculinity and mental health in the places and spaces that hold meaning to young men.

Greater authenticity and relevance in healthy masculinity and mental health messaging for young men.

Increase investment into regulation and content moderation of social media platforms

Policy solution

Increase investment into regulation and content moderation resources to help elevate positive role model content online.

Evidence and rationale

Social media platforms have declining content moderation standards and content creators are encouraged to post increasingly extreme content to keep their audience's attention.

Social media algorithms promote and infiltrate young men's feeds with sensationalised content, even if they don't actively engage with it.

A 2025 rapid review highlighted user autonomy as a key recommendation for industry.(60)

Social media platforms should be required to implement design features that allow young men to be active agents in their feeds with increased capacity to suppress and choose content they want to see (e.g. less exposure to misogynist content they did not seek out).

Outcome

Stronger content moderation and algorithmic shifts.

Improved regulation and content moderation amplifies the positive masculinity role models that exist online already.

Safer online environments for young men to engage with positive and constructive role models and masculinity narratives.

Young men are given increased choice and autonomy over the content they see online.

Influencers are less incentivised to create sensationalised or extreme content to garner views and engagement.



Digital literacy interventions

Improving digital literacy will equip young men with the skills needed to critically evaluate the content they encounter online. **While generally tech-savvy, many young men struggle to critically navigate complex online content, leaving them vulnerable to the influence of harmful ideologies, misinformation and sextortion.** Consulted stakeholders confirmed the need to equip young men with the skills required to evaluate the masculinities being normalised online. This approach is supported by studies that demonstrate the benefits of upskilling young men to identify harmful manosphere content and make informed judgments about the information they encounter.(49, 61) Again, it is important to note that responsibility should not solely be placed upon young men to navigate harmful content; there is a role for regulatory bodies in ensuring that social media platforms provide young men with greater control over the content they are shown.

Digital literacy interventions empower young people to remain engaged with social media in ways that are meaningful to them. These interventions also help young people understand how social media platforms manipulate users for engagement and profit.(53) **For young men, the desire for self-determination, boundary-pushing, and self-improvement closely aligns with the goals of digital literacy initiatives, making these interventions particularly relevant to them.** Effective interventions in this area could focus on the extent to which manosphere masculinities represent qualities of masculinity that can have impact on mental health outcomes.

Educational settings are important sites of masculinity formation and offer multiple opportunities to embed digital literacy interventions across different populations of young men. The Australian Curriculum's 'Digital Literacy' (version 9.0) general capability should be expanded to incorporate critical digital literacy skills that equip young men to identify and challenge misinformation spread by manosphere content.(51) The current focus of this general capability does not include education on identifying and countering harmful ideologies and misinformation.

Another such opportunity exists in the 'Curriculum Connection' resource for online safety, which provides a framework for young people to understand their digital environments and manage challenging situations. This reflects recent recommendations made by the eSafety Commissioner.(39) Governments should partner with young men to develop a resource to help young men deepen their critical thinking skills in this area. There is also potential to involve parents and carers in these educational initiatives to upskill their social media literacy and equip them with tools to engage the young men in their lives in related conversations. It remains important to deliver digital media literacy interventions for young people aged under 16 who may be impacted by social media restrictions, ensuring they are empowered to develop critical skills for navigating online spaces and media messaging.



Empower young men to critically assess the content they encounter online

Policy solution

Develop targeted digital media literacy interventions to be delivered to young men as part of the Digital Literacy capability in the Australian Curriculum, version 9.0 and the 'Curriculum Connection' online safety resource.

Embed digital literacy initiatives within existing school wellbeing programs (e.g. Respectful Relationships Education, Be You).

Co-design interventions with young men to ensure it meets their needs and update responsively to reflect shifting trends and technologies.

Evidence and rationale

There is a need to equip young men with the knowledge required to understand how the gender stereotypes they encounter online minimise mental health difficulties and stigmatise help-seeking.

Digital media literacy interventions can target, and hopefully ameliorate, shame, anxiety and insecurities that may be associated with a perceived failure to live up to archetypes of idealised and normalised masculine stereotypes depicted online.

Digital literacy skills are important for young men's mental health, social connections, identity development and safety online.

Interventions should provide young men with effective mental health pathways to support should feelings of shame, anxiety or distress arise from content or influencers they may encounter online.

Outcome

Young men are empowered with skills to evaluate and critique the content they are seeing online.

The risk of mental ill-health linked to online harms is lowered among young men.

Schools are equipped with the resources required to effectively engage young men in digital media literacy education.

Loneliness and social disconnection

Social connection and the ability to confide in others is a strong protective factor for mental health and wellbeing in young men.(62, 63) Conversely, social isolation is associated with a variety of poor mental outcomes and risk behaviours including depression, suicide, substance use and sleep problems. Recent data from 'Ten to Men' indicates a bi-directional relationship between social isolation and mental ill-health, with low levels of social support worsening symptoms of mental ill-health over time.(64)

Social connection is of particular importance to the wellbeing of young men. Young men experiencing mental ill-health are more likely to seek support from informal sources, such as family and friends, rather than formal support services.(65) However, research indicates that many young men experiencing mental ill-health are also experiencing high levels of social isolation and loneliness. Analysis of the data from the National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing revealed that **87.8 per cent of young men with moderate to high levels of distress also indicated they felt lonely. Furthermore, half of these young men (50.7 per cent) reported that they had not participated in any activities with family or friends in the past month.** These experiences of significant social isolation and loneliness limit young men's access to the support networks upon which they are most likely to rely.

The loneliness faced by young men is reflective of trends seen among young people more widely but can be further understood in the context of traditional masculine norms. For some young men, adherence to traditional masculine norms, such as self-reliance and stoicism, may impact the development of meaningful social connections, contributing to experiences of loneliness and social isolation.(37, 66, 67)

Policy interventions are required to provide young men with opportunities to establish the social connection they require to be well and thrive. Co-designed initiatives to help young men strengthen social connections with their friends, family and local communities are needed. Initiatives that normalise young men's connectedness in social settings have shown promise in reducing feelings of loneliness and isolation.(12, 63) *As one young man told us: "Just having social connection and being in spaces to be supported by other people ... it improves how you feel about yourself."*

Stakeholders emphasised that efforts to strengthen social connection among young men must include a focus on promoting healthy expressions of masculinity. Bringing groups of young men together won't necessarily facilitate

increased social connection and may even be counterproductive in environments where harmful male behaviours, such as 'locker room talk' are present. Programs aimed at fostering social connection among young men should focus on enhancing the quality of relationships by promoting healthy relationship skills and encouraging young men to prioritise emotionally supportive relationships.(64) Initiatives in this area could play a role in challenging the stigma around vulnerability, reframing open conversations as demonstrations of strength. (63, 64, 67)

Good examples of this approach can be seen in **The Man Cave** and **Tomorrow Man** programs, which engage young men in developing healthy masculinities and improved mental health within the broader support systems of their schools and local communities. Additionally, The Man Cave has delivered a digital after-hours program on Twitch, which is a video live-streaming service. These integrated models not only build social support and promote genuine connectedness but also address the complex intersections between masculinity, mental health and social connection.

Social connection interventions must also reach young men not currently engaged in education or living at home. These initiatives should focus on fostering a sense of belonging within accessible settings, such as workplaces, online communities and community environments.(67) As highlighted by 'Ten to Men' research findings, this group is at increased risk of experiencing low levels of social support, making them a key target for social connection initiatives.(64) A young man we spoke with emphasised the importance of making social opportunities effortless, saying **it's crucial to "reduce the friction and create spaces where young men can just show up and the opportunity for connection is already there".**

The Man Cave: Promotes healthy masculinity and mental well-being via schools, communities and online.

Tomorrow Man: Promotes healthy masculinity and social connectedness via schools and communities.

Invest in social connection opportunities for young men

Policy solution

Provide grant funding to support evidenced-based social connection programs. A range of programs are needed to engage young men, across different demographics and interests.

Evidence and rationale

Social connection is a protective factor for mental health.

Many young men report feeling lonely and socially disconnected. These experiences can negatively impact their mental health and increase their risk of engaging with harmful online communities, such as extremist or incel groups.

Positive peer groups can reduce risky behaviours and encourage young men to redefine masculinity in positive ways, promoting vulnerability and emotional connection.

Outcome

Policy approaches that focus on promoting or enhancing social connectedness among young men will improve mental wellbeing.

Expansion of evidence-based programs that support young men to be socially connected.

Increased opportunities for young men to form positive friendships and community belonging.



The mental health care system and young men

In Australia, the mental health care system has struggled to provide young men experiencing mental ill-health with appropriate and effective care. While progress has been made in recent years, young men still experience unique, persistent barriers to accessing mental health support that meets their preferences and needs.(27, 68, 69) **When seeking support, young men report experiences of inadequate clinical responses, limited resources tailored to young men, unease in discussing emotions and a shortage of male practitioners.**(70, 71) These barriers are compounded by challenges relating to lower levels of mental health literacy among young men, presentation to services mostly in times of crisis and the need to overcome stigma relating to masculine norms when accessing services.(65)

For young men who do engage with mental health services, interventions tend to be short-lived, with young men being more likely to disengage from therapy prematurely, primarily due to a lack of connection with the therapist.(71–73) The impact of therapy dropout is problematic for young men given their rates of mental ill-health and suicide, with the risk for mistrust of services and future avoidance.

Adapting mental health support for young men

There is growing recognition of the importance of gender-responsive practice in enhancing young men's engagement and retention in mental health treatment.(65, 74–77) Therapeutic models are largely grounded in principles of vulnerability and emotional expression, which can conflict with traditional masculine norms.(78) One young man told us: **"Talk therapy can be daunting. It doesn't seem to resonate. Most men wait until crisis point. We need to find ways to reach men before it reaches the point of crisis."** Research has demonstrated that incorporating gender-responsive practice into mental health interventions with young men leads to more effective engagement and improved mental health outcomes.(71, 79) **76 per cent of young men felt that mental health outcomes could be improved through tailoring mental health supports to them.**

In the context of young men, gender-responsive adaptations for therapeutic engagement include, strengths-based messaging, the availability of male clinicians, recognition for the impact of masculine socialisation, modified spaces, language that aligns with young men's preferences, and prioritising choice and autonomy in therapy.(75)

While the National Men's Health Strategy includes principles on applying a gendered lens to the needs and preferences of males in service

design, promotion and delivery, there has been little investment in improving the responsiveness of mental health services for young men.(76) Mental health care professionals, and healthcare professionals more widely, often lack the training required to effectively engage, support and retain young men in care.(73, 78) Without specialised training in this area, clinicians may struggle to recognise presenting symptoms that do not align with standard diagnostic criteria or effectively tailor therapeutic approaches to young men. This lack of clinical expertise can result in suboptimal care for young men accessing mental health services and may lead to missed opportunities for early intervention.

Strengthening education and training is essential to prepare professionals with the skills and knowledge needed to address the specific needs of young men. There is an opportunity to integrate gender-sensitive practices and competencies into tertiary education curricula for students pursuing healthcare careers. Additionally, ongoing professional development training should be implemented to enhance the skills of the existing workforce, ensuring that they are equipped to support young men effectively.(34) This aligns with the National Suicide Prevention Strategy, which identifies that, "building workforce knowledge of gender and masculinity constructs, and increasing capacity to apply this knowledge, is central to improving the effectiveness of suicide prevention supports available to men".(80)

The 'Men in Mind' initiative provides training to mental health practitioners who work with men and boys. Its demonstrated effectiveness and positive feedback from practitioners support the case for developing future targeted and scalable training initiatives for practitioners and services engaging with young men.(78) Involving young men in the design and evaluation of these initiatives will be essential to increasing the acceptability of mental health services for them.



76% of young men say tailored support would improve mental health outcomes for young men.

Build the capacity of health professionals to support young men

Policy solution

Fund the development and implementation of an extension of the 'Men in Mind' model, focused on training modules for professionals working specifically with young men.

Healthy masculinities content and capability building should be included to equip health professionals with the skills and knowledge to support young men in developing healthier expressions of masculinity.

Incorporate input from young men with lived experience.

Evidence and rationale

There is a need to tailor mental health services and supports in ways that are acceptable to young men.

While many healthcare professions are providing mental health support to young men with positive outcomes, specialised training can improve their ability to support young men in therapeutic settings.

Ensuring professionals are equipped to engage and respond to young men is critical to improving young men's mental health outcomes.

Outcome

Recognition for the specific needs and differences in young men's experiences of mental ill-health and help-seeking.

Mental health professionals, services and health services more broadly improve their capacity to provide effective, tailored care for young men experiencing mental ill-health.

Improved outcomes for young men engaged in mental health support.

Male representation in mental health services

Efforts to improve the experiences of young men in mental health services must also include increasing the availability of male workforce in mental health services. Research indicates that the presence and availability of male clinicians can positively influence how some young men perceive and interact with mental health services.⁽⁸¹⁾ **While not all young men prefer male clinicians, the availability of choice enables services to better accommodate young men's preferences.** This option is consistently cited as an enabler for improved engagement and support experiences across the literature.^(35, 75, 82) The presence of male practitioners can also help to reduce stigma associated with seeking mental health support.⁽⁷⁵⁾ Consulted stakeholders noted that this was of particular importance for First Nations young men.

Research indicates that men are underrepresented in mental health professions compared to women, particularly in the fields of psychology and social work.^(82, 83) The reasons for this are a complex mix of job stereotypes, societal norms, gender identity, and concerns relating to 'breadwinning' potential. Additionally, as young men tend to have less contact with mental health services, they may also be less likely to enter a related profession.

Analysis of YouGov data found that **90 per cent of young men 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that more needs to be done to attract men to work in mental health care services.**⁽³⁰⁾ There is a dearth of research on effective strategies for attracting men into mental health professions, largely due to the limited number of targeted initiatives and evaluation. However, existing literature suggests that increasing the visibility of male role models in psychology is important, as is providing young men with more accessible information about pathways into fields such as psychology and social work.⁽⁸³⁾

The National Mental Health Workforce Strategy 2022–32 recognises that stigma and negative perceptions surrounding careers in mental health contribute to ongoing workforce shortages.⁽⁸⁴⁾ The strategy highlights the need to challenge these perceptions and "develop and deliver recruitment and career pathways to attract a suitably skilled and diverse workforce". As part of the strategy's strategic pillar to attract and train the mental health workforce, there is an opportunity to partner with tertiary institutions to recruit male practitioners into the youth mental health workforce. Encouraging more young men to enter the mental health workforce could also help to expand definitions of masculinity, contributing to lessened mental health stigma among young men. This initiative should be developed in partnership with young men to ensure it is relevant and appropriate.



Improving mental health literacy and health engagement

Disengagement by men from health services typically begins during adolescence and continues throughout adulthood. This is particularly concerning given the crucial role of early intervention in improving mental health outcomes. Research consistently highlights the need to expand public health campaigns to target young men's disengagement with the health system, particularly in the life-stage of young adulthood.⁽³⁵⁾ This formative period offers a key opportunity to influence lifelong attitudes and behaviours around mental health and help-seeking.

Improving mental health literacy and attitudes is central in improving young men's engagement with mental health services. Enhancing mental health literacy through targeted initiatives has been shown to improve young men's knowledge and likelihood to seek formal support. Young men often struggle to recognise the symptoms of mental ill-health and have limited awareness of how to access formal support, hindering their engagement with mental health services.⁽⁸⁵⁾ Additionally, young men can be unsure when mental health symptoms warrant support, often believing that help-seeking is reserved for acute presentations of distress (e.g. suicidal ideation) and that healthcare professionals will dismiss their mental health concerns, treating them less seriously than physical health issues.⁽³⁵⁾

Effective initiatives must be strengths-based and involve meeting young men where they are. Key channels for mental health messaging include schools, sporting clubs, online and community organisations that already hold the attention and trust of young men. **Health literacy initiatives should focus on empowering young men, recognising that young men have a genuine appetite for personal growth and wellbeing.** Given the role of peers in young men's mental health disclosure, improving mental health literacy could involve increasing young men's competencies in providing support for mental health challenges.⁽⁸⁶⁾

It is important to recognise the health literacy work already being undertaken by organisations such as The Man Cave and Movember. There is an opportunity to build on these initiatives, ensuring they continue to evolve in ways that are impactful and genuinely engage young men. By strengthening effective approaches and addressing any remaining gaps, young men can be better supported to improve their health literacy and overall engagement with health services.

Young men should be involved in the creation of targeted health promotion initiatives to increase mental health literacy and engagement, including First Nations young men, those from multicultural backgrounds, young men who experience socioeconomic disadvantage and gender and sexuality diverse young men. Given that expectations relating to masculinity influence young men's health behaviours, there is value in mental health promotion efforts which encompass diverse portrayals of masculinity, including those who do not conform to traditional, western ideals.

Partner to improve engagement and positive connection with the health system

Policy solution

Fund the development of targeted initiatives through the National Men's Health Strategy Health Promotion Grants program to promote mental health literacy and connection with the health system during adolescence.

These initiatives should be co-designed with young men to ensure relevance and impact and delivered in partnership with existing health initiatives.

Evidence and rationale

Improving health literacy is one of the primary action directives of the NMHS and aligns with objective 1.3: "Invest in health promotion initiatives targeting men and boys across the life course."

Outcome

Young men have improved mental health literacy, including knowing when and where to seek support.

Young men are empowered to recognise and seek support for mental ill-health when needed.

Improved health behaviours and outcomes among young men.

Digital mental health support

While government recognition of the opportunities provided by digital mental health interventions has increased nationally and across states and territories, young men and men more broadly are not identified in any Australian policy related to digital mental health.⁽⁸⁷⁾ The absence of a focus on young men is at odds with the issues highlighted in frameworks and strategies relating to digital mental health services, which emphasise the importance of engagement for populations at risk for mental ill-health.^(88, 89) Additionally, the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing notes the value of culturally appropriate digital mental health services and highlights the importance of gender-specific approaches to leadership, social and emotional wellbeing and healing.⁽⁹⁰⁾

Digital mental health services provide young men with an alternate help-seeking pathway, primarily as such services can reduce access barriers for young men (e.g. by providing greater privacy/confidentiality).⁽³⁵⁾ *Research indicates that young men have a strong willingness to seek mental health support online and that digital mental health services are an appropriate setting to engage young men in mental health support.*⁽⁹¹⁾ However, to date, few digital mental health interventions have been designed to consider the distinct mental health needs of young men or men more broadly, particularly in relation to masculinities and male identity.⁽⁹²⁾ Those that do are largely delivered by for-profit organisations offering male-centric mental health support with little oversight or regulation. Research indicates that a policy focus and greater investment is needed to drive progress in this area.⁽⁸⁷⁾

There is an opportunity to support the development of digital interventions that address young men's needs and ensure that young men, particularly those from marginalised communities, are not 'left behind' in the digital services revolution. The new National Early Intervention Service provides an opportunity to implement such initiatives at a national scale. Given that the model utilises a 'talking therapies' approach, the National Early Intervention Service should consider how to incorporate gender-responsive approaches that can support young men in ways that feel accessible, relatable and engaging. Doing so could also support young men as they transition from adolescent health services to adult mental health services, reducing the risk of disengagement from mental health services during a period marked by changes in eligibility and service models.

Prioritise digital mental health support for young men in the National Early Intervention Service

Policy solution

Ensure the National Early Intervention Service include gender-responsive approaches and interventions that meet the mental health needs of young men, including consideration for how the service is promoted and made accessible to them.

Involve young men with lived experience of mental ill-health in the development, implementation and evaluation process to increase service acceptability, engagement and effectiveness.

Evidence and rationale

There is no current Australian health policy that makes specific mention of digital mental health services for young men or men more broadly.

There is few digital mental health interventions tailored to young men's needs and preferences.

This policy solution aligns with the identified need within the National Men's Health Strategy for "male-centred information, programs and services".

Outcome

Young men are prioritised in the development, implementation and evaluation of the National Early Intervention Service.

The digital mental health workforce is upskilled to support young men experiencing mental ill-health.

Young men can access no-cost digital mental health support and resources that are gender-responsive.



Research gaps

Integrating masculinity measures in youth mental health surveys

While research into the prevalence and potential outcomes of mental ill-health among young men is well established, gaps remain in understanding contemporary associations between masculinity and mental ill-health in young men. Understanding the role of masculine norms for different age cohorts is essential for improving positive outcomes in young men's mental health.(93)

Increased national data collection to examine the role of young men's masculine norms on mental health was repeatedly identified as a priority by stakeholders. ***Routine data collection on mental health-related masculine norms enhances the capacity for adaptive system responses that better respond to the needs of young men.*** (36) Currently, in Australia, national youth mental health surveys do not include questions regarding masculinity.

Integrating a subset of questions on masculinity into future youth mental health surveys would provide valuable insights for policymakers and researchers. The influence of traditional masculine norms on mental health service use varies by generation, with stronger adherence to certain norms linked with increased service utilisation in some generations.(93) Exploring demographic cohorts with moderate to high levels of mental ill-health through masculinity data could inform targeted interventions to support the mental health of young men across diverse populations. In addition to this, the collection of longitudinal data could enable monitoring of the evident changes in masculine norms among young men in Australia.

The development of questions regarding masculinity requires a standardised measurement tool that considers the diversity of young men's masculinities, beyond traditional gender stereotypes, and reflects a strengths-based approach. Research contends that generic measures of masculinity in data collection do not adequately reveal the varied nuances of the construct, particularly in mental health contexts. (94-96) Conceptualisations of masculinity in research are often framed within a deficit-based model and commonly used tools, such as the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI) primarily reflect masculine norms in western, white, cisgender and heterosexual men.(35, 97) This project is being advanced by Movember, which is developing new masculinities measures.

Improve understanding of masculine norms and the mental health of young men

Policy solution

Fund the development of a subset of questions regarding masculinity for inclusion in future national surveys with mental health indicators (e.g. HILDA, Australian Drug Strategy Survey).

The development process should establish a strengths-based measurement of masculinity that is optimised for young men and encompasses diverse masculinities.

Evidence and rationale

Understanding masculine norms and the degree to which young men personally endorse or reject these norms is important for investigating masculinity and its effects on mental health and wellbeing.

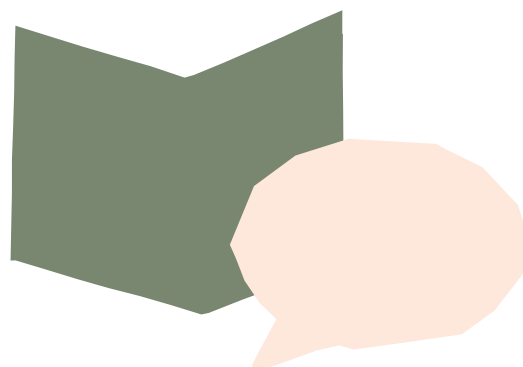
Current measurements for masculinity are often deficit-based or do not encompass diverse masculinities.

Findings could inform tailored, gendered approaches to influence men's use of services fundamental to improved health outcomes.

Outcome

The development and inclusion of survey questions regarding masculinity that are optimised for young men, strengths-based and encompass diverse masculinities.

Increased data strengthens the available evidence base for policy development and understandings of the interaction between masculinity and mental ill-health.



Manosphere research

To better address the growing scope, influence and impact of masculinity content on young men's mental health we must broaden our approach in research, policy and intervention to recognise this as a mainstream issue rather than a fringe concern. ***The ever-evolving nature of online masculinity culture outstrips current research capabilities, limiting our ability to understand the ways it impacts young men's mental health.*** While researchers, policymakers and communities are increasingly alarmed about this issue, existing research is in its infancy and limited to cross-sectional snapshots of young men's mental health.⁽⁵⁴⁾ This leaves significant gaps in knowledge about young men's experiences and the long-term implications of digital spaces on young men's mental health.

Existing research limited to manosphere communities has begun to focus on the mental health of young men participating in these communities, rather than the direct effects of masculinity content itself. Future research should investigate the extent to which mental health disparities exist among young men engaging with manosphere communities, and masculinity content and influencers more broadly.

There is an opportunity to incorporate specific questions and sub-studies relating to young men online worlds within pre-existing cohort studies, such as the 'Ten to Men' study. This would allow for a more effective investigation of the intricate relationship between digital determinants (e.g. social media and the content they are exposed to) and social determinants of mental ill-health given the highly intertwined nature of young men's online and offline lives. This would provide policymakers and researchers with longitudinal data that directly captures the experiences of young men regarding the relationship between mental health and engagement with online masculinity content. Given 'Ten to Men' already captures data on masculinity, integrating this focus would also enable deeper understanding of the complex relationship between masculinity constructs, online masculinity content consumption and mental health outcomes.

To effectively address the impact of masculinity content on young men's mental health, young men must be at the centre of future research efforts. Distilling their perspectives on masculinity content is essential to firstly understand young men's digital lives, and secondly to conceptualise the positive and negative ways it's shaping their mental health.

Such research initiatives and data could help inform the co-creation of policy and programs aimed at supporting the wellbeing of young men and mitigating the potential harms of masculinity content. Furthermore, longitudinal tracking may help identify early risk factors, enabling the development of targeted early intervention strategies.

Increase knowledge about the impact of online content on young men's mental health

Policy solution

Incorporate specific questions and sub-studies for boys and young men within The Australian Longitudinal Study of Male Health, 'Ten to Men' study to address critical research gaps in relation to understanding the role of the manosphere on young men's masculinity and mental health.

Evidence and rationale

There is a knowledge gap in the role of online spaces and young men's notions of masculinity and mental health.

There is a need to better understand the relationship between masculinity, manosphere content and mental health outcomes.

Outcome

The Department has a clearer understanding of the role online spaces are having on young men's masculinity and mental health.

Data informs funding decisions and the development of mental health initiatives in this area.



Fragmented research

While research that focuses on the prevalence and outcomes of mental ill-health in young men is well established, the research remains largely fragmented. Fragmented data limits the capacity for developing a clearer picture of young men's mental health. This is of particular importance for young men from marginalised populations, as data variations for certain groups of young men are often obscured within larger, generalised datasets. Integrated knowledge would enable more effective translation of emerging evidence into policy and program development for young men, including those from marginalised communities. Additionally, coordinated research would help to address research gaps in young men's mental health, including better understanding of evolving masculinities, and risk and protective factors in specific subpopulations.

Research points to living reviews as best practice for research integration. Living reviews enable policymakers to access up-to-date evidence and enable researchers to respond to emerging issues with the latest findings, ensuring that policy decisions are informed by the most recent developments in the evidence base.⁽⁹⁸⁾ Additionally, living reviews are beneficial in identifying research gaps for further research exploration.



Consolidate knowledge on young men's mental health

Policy solution

Provide funding to establish and maintain a living review of literature and evidence of young men's experience of mental health and treatment.

Evidence and rationale

Enhancing the capacity for ongoing data and research collation will improve the evidence base to inform policy and programs.

This policy solution aligns with Action area 3.1 of the Men and Boys Health Strategy: Increase and prioritise research investment that will inform meaningful improvements in the health of men and boys living in Australia

This policy solution also aligns with the objectives of the National Mental Health Research Strategy.

Outcome

A consolidated and robust evidence base on the mental health of young men.

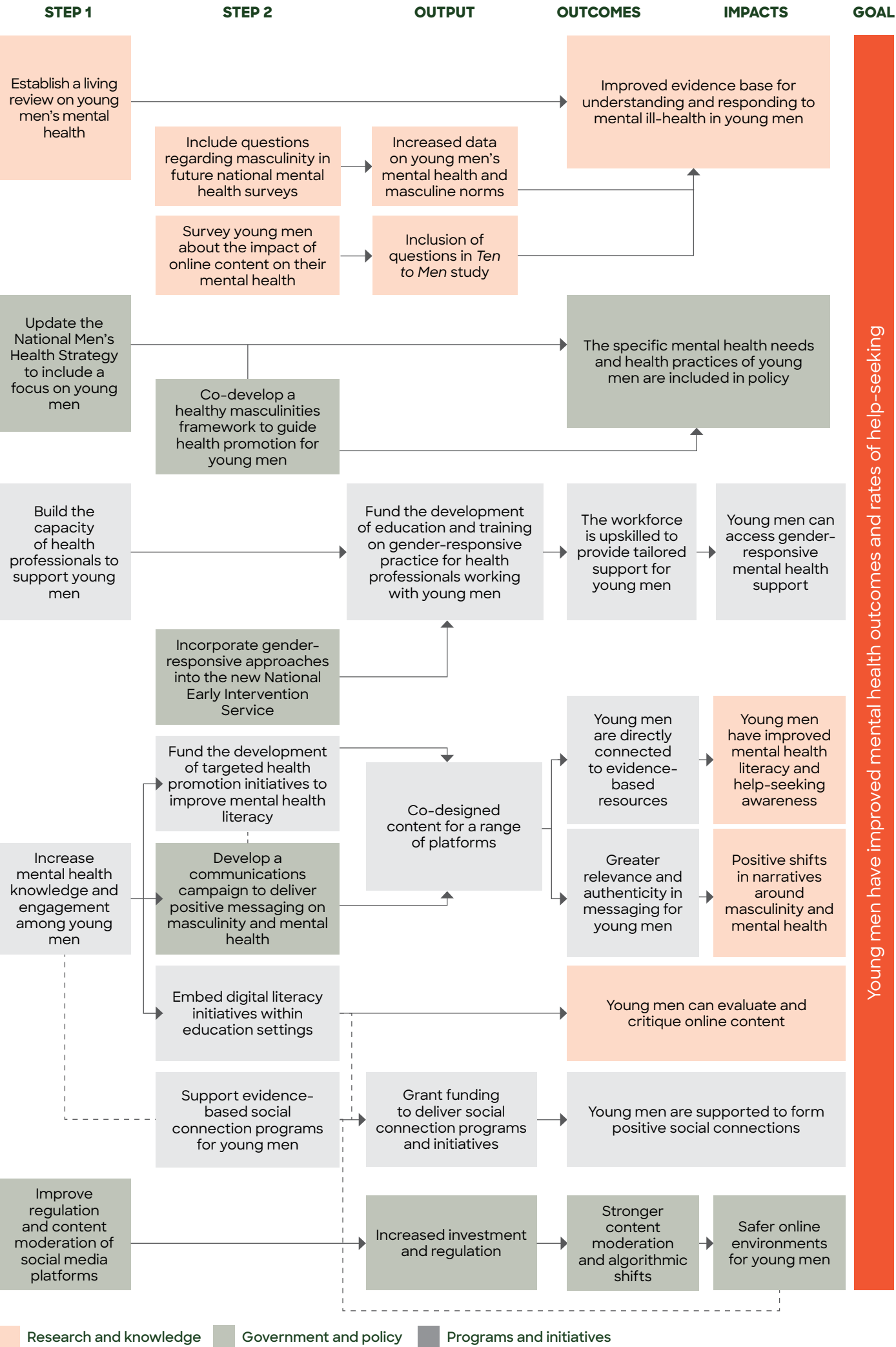
The development of research networks and supporting knowledge translation and data sharing.

Improved access to data for researchers and service sector organisations.

Policymakers and clinicians have evidence to inform policies, programs and practice that best support young men.

Evidence to inform targeted funding and campaigns.

Figure 3: THEORY OF CHANGE.



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