

SUPPORTING OUR MEN

Developing and Implementing a Targeted Suicide Prevention Strategy to Reduce Male Suicides in Tasmania

Budget Priority Statement to the Tasmanian
Government for the 2021-2022 State Budget



Delivered by Men's Resources Tasmania Inc. and on behalf of
the Tasmanian Men's Health and Wellbeing Network

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Introduction

Men's Resources Tasmania Inc. (MRT) lodges this submission to the State Government 2021 - 2022 Budget community consultation process as the governing body for the Tasmanian Men's Health and Wellbeing Network and a peak representative for men's health and wellbeing in Tasmania.

About Men's Resources Tasmania

MRT is a community based, volunteer run, not-for-profit organisation that supports and promotes the wellbeing of men and boys in Tasmania.

Operating for close to 10 years, MRT contributes a male voice to community conversations and public sector policy; particularly around social, health and wellbeing issues relevant to males in Tasmania. We operate primarily through volunteer involvement, with some support from member organisations. MRT delivers male specific health and wellbeing initiatives and support trainings to organisations around the state and are the developer of the successful 'Blokes' Book' and 'Dad's Book'. Being an incorporated organisation, MRT is an important auspice provider for smaller community organisations who require support with such things as insurance, governance or funding to continue their work in our communities.

MRT has a strong partnership with the Australian Men's Health Forum (AMHF) which is funded by the Australian Government and supports MRT's efforts to better serve the men and boys in Tasmanian communities.

Submission Overview

As 2020 brings a close on Tasmanian Suicide prevention strategy, preliminary reports suggest rates have not increased but steadied. Although this could be seen as a point to celebrate, it is a small win in the shadow of a significant national issue – 6 men every day die by suicide

(ABS, 2019). Between 2010 and 2020, male suicides in Tasmania have increased at such a rate that they account for over 75% of all deaths by suicide in the state. During 2019, there were 108 deaths by suicide Tasmania, 85 of those were men. Statistically, that is 1.5 men dying by suicide every week (ABS, 2019).

Reports from AMHF clearly outline the key areas in which our current strategies are failing our men, such as a lack in male specific resources, training and support.

According to the Productivity Commission review into mental health, suicide has “enormous social and emotional impacts on individuals, families and the broader Australian community” (Productivity Commission 2019). The review highlighted the work of ConNetica, which estimated the cost of each suicide to the Australian economy at \$6 million (2007 dollars), drawing on the value of a statistical life measure used to evaluate the cost of lives lost.

Based on this measure, in 2018 male suicide cost the Australia economy at least \$14B. For Tasmania, that equated to a \$510 million loss to the economy – the financial ripple effect of male suicides.

In November 2020, the Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Suicide Prevention Australia, the national peak body for suicide prevention in Australia, called for states to develop male specific strategies for suicide prevention. According to Professor Jane Pirkis, who recently received \$5.6 million of Government funding to research male suicide: “Preventing suicide among boys and men would go further than any other approach to achieving the Prime Minister’s goal of working towards zero suicides” (Vallender 2020).

Inspired by this call, in March 2021, MRT hosted the first Men’s Health and Wellbeing Forum, which resulted in the creation of the first Tasmanian Men’s Health and Wellbeing Network (TMHWN). The network comprises of some of Tasmania’s most prominent service providers (a list of participants in the network can be found in the appendix below) and are in full support of a male specific approach to suicide prevention.

As such, we believe the time to take a gender specific approach to suicide prevention is now! This submission calls for the Tasmanian government to support the development and roll out of a male specific suicide prevention strategy in Tasmania.

Accompanying this submission, we have included two reports from the Australian Men's Health Forum to support this proposal (*'Giving Men a Hand: The case for a male suicide prevention strategy'* and *'How Can Governments Do Better for Men and Boys: A 10-point action plan'*). These documents make the case for a male specific approach to suicide prevention loud and clear and are a necessary partner to this proposal. We recommend reading these documents first before considering this proposal.

Based on the current experiences of those Tasmanian service providers that are part of the TMHWN, the key issues still not being addressed regarding male suicides in Tasmania are:

- A lack of male specific prevention/support resources and trainings
- The time it takes to receive effective support/resources, particularly when in crisis
- Cultural stigma surrounding men's mental health and wellbeing and their associated factors (i.e. drug and alcohol, relationships, financial, etc).

Summary of Proposed Action Points

We believe that a unified collaborative approach between sectors and service providers with a gender specific strategy will be the most effective approach to dramatically lowering male suicide statistics in the state.

Following the effective structure of a 'Collaborative Impact Model' as the adopted framework for the TMHWN (see below for more information on the model), below is a summary of proposed actions based on the view of MRT and the TMHWN:

1. Development and implementation of a Tasmanian male suicide prevention strategy.

2. Funding for Men's Resources Tasmania to support the operations of the Tasmanian Men's Health and Wellbeing Network.
3. Funding for MRT to be the voice and representative for male related matters at government, for policy contribution and as a conduit for the Tasmanian community.

Action Point Breakdown and Costing

1. Development and implementation of a Tasmanian male suicide prevention strategy.

To date, Tasmania has taken a gender-neutral approach to suicide prevention, all the while the gender ratio split has continued to grow. Close to 75% of all suicides in Tasmania are men and this statistic has continued to grow over the past decade. It is very clear that a gender specific approach is necessary to address this issue. With Tasmania having the second highest rate of male suicides per 100,000 behind NT, Tasmania is in a strong position to lead the way with a more effective approach to suicide prevention.

Men's Resources Tasmania holds strong relationships with various men's health and wellbeing organisations, research institutes and training organisations both locally and nationally and as such is in a valuable position to contribute to a male specific approach to suicide prevention in Tasmania.

Recommendation:

The Tasmanian State Government commissions Men's Resources Tasmania to develop a male suicide prevention strategy in conjunction with the government's overarching state prevention strategy.

Cost: \$30,000 to cover cost of strategy development over a 6-month period.

2. Funding for Men's Resources Tasmania to support the operations of the Tasmanian Men's Health and Wellbeing Network.

During March 2021, Men's Resources Tasmania hosted a men's health forum with some of Tasmania's peak service providers. As a result, we collectively formed the first Tasmanian Men's Health and Wellbeing Network under the pretence that with a unified approach we can better support the health and wellbeing of men and boys in Tasmania. This collaborative approach to addressing male health and wellbeing is structured in the framework of the Collective Impact Model. Founded on the works of the [Stanford Social Innovation Review](#), the model has presented significant results when addressing large scale social issues. The results of the model can be seen in [Burnie, Tasmania](#) with Burnie Works, in [Queensland](#) with Logan Together, and in [New South Wales](#) with Just Reinvest.

The framework has 5 key pillars:

- **A Common Agenda:** all participants have a shared vision for change that includes a common understanding of the problems and a joint approach to solving the problem through agreed-upon actions.
- **Shared Measurement:** Agreement on the way success will be measured and reported, with a short list of common indicators identified and used across all participating organisations for learning and improvement.
- **Mutually Reinforcing Activities:** Engagement of a diverse set of stakeholders, typically across sectors, coordinating a set of differentiated activities through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.
- **Continuous Communication:** Frequent and structured open communication across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation.
- **Backbone Support:** Ongoing support by independent, funded staff dedicated to the initiative, including guiding the initiative's vision and strategy, supporting aligned activities, establishing shared measurement practices, building public will, advancing

policy, and mobilising funding. Backbone staff can all sit within a single organisation, or they can have different roles housed in multiple organisations.

Members of the network have already expressed support for MRT as the back-bone organisation supporting the operations of the network under the Collective Impact Model. They represent this support through the inclusion of their names in the TMHWN members list attached in the appendix.

What this network could offer Tasmania:

- A strong and well-connected network to support the roll out of a male suicide prevention strategy.
- A unified effort between service providers and the Tasmanian communities to support the greater health and wellbeing of men and boys in Tasmania. For example, if RAW Tasmanian is needing assistance where Mates 4 Mates or TasMen can help, the network can support that process ensuring no one falls through the gaps.
- An open sharing of resources and information between network members so that each member can be better informed and resourced to serve our boys and men.
- Addressing a shared measurement like lowering suicide rates or decreasing incarceration rates for men with a unified approach has a much greater affect than one organisation attempting to solve the issue themselves.
- MRT will facilitate the gathering of valuable data and perspectives from service providers and communities on challenges they are currently facing and will feed results back into the network for real-time use. Gathered data would also be of significant benefit for multiple sectors and industries as there is a diverse array of members within the network.
- Support with more efficient distribution of funds to those in need. Currently, peak bodies and service providers compete for funding, which ultimately pushes smaller organisations out of the picture. A governing organisation representing the network, whose responsibility it is to have their finger on the pulse regarding men's health and wellbeing, would be better able to manage the effective distribution of finances to organisations operating on a smaller scale.

- Men’s health and wellbeing events and initiatives. Industry leader speaking events, lunch and learn events, networking forums, community events.

The Australian Government invests more than \$5 billion into mental health services each year, with \$750 million allocated to “mental health and suicide prevention” in the 2019-2020 budget. We believe that the TMHWN has the capacity to dramatically lower these costs for Tasmania by the more effective use of networks and services already established in the state.

Recommendation:

State Government funds the employment of a full-time project officer to fulfil this important role, whilst having the financial capacity through a budget to support network operations and initiatives.

Overview:

- Full-time project officer for a 3-year term
- Network operations and initiatives budget for a 3-year term
- Physical office space as the operation base for the network and MRT

Total: \$570,000 (\$190,000/year for a 3-year term)

Expected Outcomes and Expenses Breakdown

Delivery of a male suicide prevention strategy, or stream within the next overarching SP strategy	\$50,000/ year for 3 years
Community engagement with men and boys in Tasmania to inform MRT advocacy and to contribute positive male perspectives to government and community sector policy.	\$50,000/year for 3 years.
Support operations, communications and initiatives for the members of Tasmanian Men’s Health and Wellbeing Network as well as that of	\$50,000/year for 3 years

MRT, with the primary focus of supporting the positive health and wellbeing of males in the Tasmanian community.	
Network operations and initiatives budget: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Network forums - Community engagement events - Men’s health and wellbeing speaking events - Communications/marketing - Travel expenses 	\$30,000/year for 3 years
Physical office space as the operation base for the network and MRT	\$10,000/year for 3 years
Total yearly cost	\$190,000
Total cost over 3-year term	\$570,000

3. Funding for MRT to be the voice and advocate for male related matters for government, policy contribution and community engagement.

As the governing organisation representing the Tasmanian Men’s Health and Wellbeing Network, and possessing an extensive national network relating to men’s health and wellbeing, MRT can offer a unified and well-informed voice on male related issues for government and for the contribution to policy. Currently the Tasmanian government funds a body to represent matters relating to women as well as having representation by Sarah Courtney as Minister for Women. There is no such funding or representation for men at this level and as a result, there is severe lack of contribution from a male perspective on important government issues, policy or representation for the Tasmanian community.

When 81% of male suicides are linked to relationship separation, 83% to financial issues, 85% to pending legal matters and 86% to recent or pending unemployment, it is evident that this

is a multi-sector issue that requires a well informed and connected voice to represent such areas.

Recommendation:

State Government funds MRT to be the representative for male related matters on a government level, an independent contributor to policy from a male perspective and the conduit for community on male related matters.

Cost: \$50,000, paid either as an additional task for the project officer of the network or independently to MRT as the representing body.

Appendix

Tasmanian Men's Health and Wellbeing Network

Members:

1. Men's Resources Tasmania
2. Tasmanian Men's Shed Association
3. Rural Alive and Well Tasmania
4. Mates 4 Mates
5. Drug Education Network
6. Bethlehem House
7. Hobart City Mission
8. Tasmanian Men's Health and Wellbeing Association (TasMen)
9. ManUp Tasmania (auspiced by MRT)
10. TasDads (auspiced by MRT)
11. Men Care Too
12. MoBart MoBro's
13. Community Rites of Passage

Australian Men's Health Forum Supporting Documents

[Giving Men a Hand: The Case for a Male Suicide Prevention Strategy](#)

[How can governments do better for boys and men: A 10-point action plan](#)