

JSCC Discussion Paper: Focus on Men's Health

Some sobering facts about men's health:

- On average men die 5 years earlier than women and largely for preventable reasons
- 1 man in 5 dies before the age of 65
- 10.8 million men across the globe are facing a prostate cancer diagnosis
- Testicular cancer is the most common cancer found in men, it often strikes young, BUT 95% of cases are treatable. Although the survival rate is high, there is a large proportion of men who are left with life limiting conditions.
- Men make up 75% of the global suicide rate, with one man being lost to suicide every minute.
- 3 out of 4 suicides in the UK are men, with more than 4,000 men taking their own lives in England and Wales last year.

Traditionally men have been more reluctant than women to engage when it comes to their health, both mental and physical. The development of organisations which focus specifically on men's health in recent years and promotional events such as [Movember](#) and [International Men's Day UK](#) help spread the message that men need to look after themselves.

Men and mental health

Today, suicide is the biggest cause of death in UK men under the age of 50. 4,129 men took their own lives in England and Wales in 2021, with the highest rates of suicide being in men from mixed and white ethnic groups. Men also report lower levels of life satisfaction than women, according to the Government's national well-being survey, and are less likely to access psychological therapies, with only 36% of referrals to NHS talking therapies being for men. In addition, more men than women go missing, sleep rough, become dependent on alcohol and use drugs frequently.

Research into why this occurs from the [Mental Health Organisation](#) explains that society's expectations and traditional gender roles play a part in why men are less likely to discuss or seek help for their mental health problems and feel there's a stigma attached to doing so. According to the [Movember Foundation](#), 58% of men think society expects them to be emotionally strong and not show weakness. Other studies show the lack of social support for men correlated with increased restriction of emotions and has been associated with more experiencing psychological distress and that a high proportion of men in western societies are less equipped to cope with life's challenges because they are not as able as women to adapt to new ways of managing such challenges.

All of this means that men are less likely to speak openly about their feelings, are less able to recognise symptoms of mental health problems, reach "crisis point" more readily than women and consequently their mental health suffers. Today, one in eight men in England are suffering with a mental health issue but are struggling to address it and this is only likely to get worse as the cost of living crisis deepens. Another shocking statistic states 40% of UK men said it would take thoughts of suicide or self-harm for them to reach out for help. There are however signs that things are beginning to change with some sources reporting more men reaching out to share how they are feeling, e.g. research by health insurer [Vitality](#) found that the number of men seeking support through their Talking Therapies service has spiked in recent years, with a 41% increase from 2019 to 2021.

What can the Council as an employer do to help?

Given that in general there is a reluctance for men to seek assistance with their mental health, ease of accessibility must be an important factor when considering the provision of support at the Council. Our current work sourcing a supplier for our EAP contract when the present provision expires in 2023, has highlighted that engagement with the service by men is significantly increased when Live Chat or Whatsapp functions are available, so this will be considered as part of the evaluation the new contract.

By publicising specific men's health events to employees through Insight and the Message Board, the Council can assist in highlighting these valuable initiatives, but men's health should not just be for November; awareness of the health issues that affect men disproportionately should occur all year round. This has led to the recent creation of a Men's Health page on the Council's intranet to spread the word about the support available. The intranet page highlights easy health checks that can be done at home and what to do if changes are noticed as well as information on how employees can help to support the men in their lives.

In developing the intranet page we recognised that men's health can be adversely affected by events occurring not only to themselves, but also to those they care about, so it signposts to other support available which men may find helpful to access too, such as menopause guidance and assistance for those undergoing fertility treatment or experiencing pregnancy loss or stillbirth.

Internal support for our staff:

- Counselling support and advice is available through our [confidential employee advice service](#)
- 24/7 access to a [GP consultation service](#)
- [Mental Health First Aiders](#)
- [Sick pay](#) from day 1 of absence
- Referral to our [occupational health service](#) to provide support in managing a health condition
- [Flexible working policy](#) and Leadership Team support for flexibility, including homeworking
- [Bereavement and other types of leave](#)
- [Support for carers](#) caring for the carer is vital to maintain their physical and mental health
- [Financial wellbeing](#) intranet page signposting support
- [The Inclusion Group](#) provides a forum to share experiences and raise awareness
- Various signposting to external support