



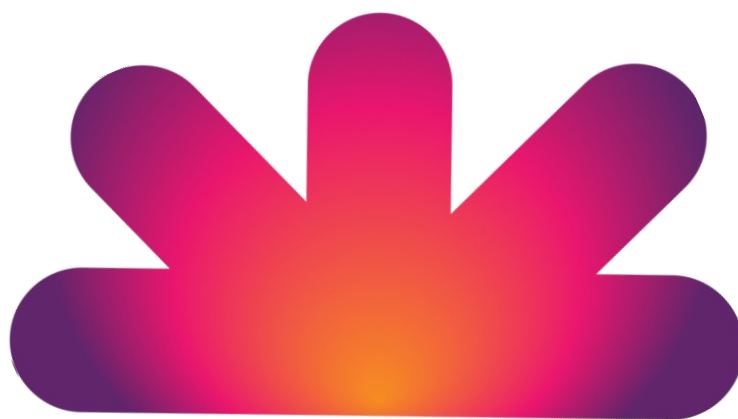
Australian Government
Australian Institute of
Family Studies



Healthy Masculinities Roundtable

Pre-event materials

6 May 2026





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Executive summary

Purpose of the roundtable

This Healthy Masculinities (HM) Roundtable brings together senior Australian Government officials and academic experts to progress a shared, evidence-informed approach to HM across Commonwealth policy.

HM work is expanding rapidly across multiple Australian Government portfolios. However, there is currently no unanimous conceptualisation or measurement of HM to inform policy development, monitoring or evaluation, limited cross-portfolio coordination and emerging research priorities. This roundtable is designed to address these gaps by building consensus across 4 focus areas:

1. Defining healthy masculinities in an Australian policy context
2. Policy, research and evaluation priorities
3. Transforming systems for gender equitable outcomes
4. Communicating healthy masculinities to the public

The intended outcomes of this roundtable are to:

- progress towards a policy-relevant HM definition and agreed framing that incorporates inputs from numerous fields that can be used consistently in policy, program and research contexts.
- determine a ready-to-action shortlist of priority policy and research questions and list of preliminary indicators to assist monitoring progress
- develop a shared understanding of levers and responsibilities in relation to HM across portfolios/departments/agencies and opportunities for coordinated action
- improve how we communicate health masculinities to the public so messaging supports program delivery.

How these materials were developed

The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) prepared these pre-event materials to provide an evidence-informed foundation for roundtable discussions. They are not intended to represent any materials that may be published by consensus after the roundtable. They draw on:

- input from government stakeholders and academic experts, including published and unpublished materials
- AIFS' systematic and scoping reviews of HM programs, masculinity research and related interventions
- a scan of existing HM frameworks and measurement tools in Australia and internationally
- a mapping of current Commonwealth policies relevant to HM across attending agencies (AGD, DFSVC, DHDA, DSS, Education, eSafety, Home Affairs and the Office for Women)
- emerging research from key focus areas, such as the role of the online environment in shaping masculinities.

The materials are structured around the 4 focus areas and include summary tables, discussion points and intended session outcomes for each roundtable session.



How to engage with these materials

These materials are comprehensive by design but AIFS recognises that attendees will come with different levels of familiarity and available preparation time. The following guidance is offered depending on your available time and role.

If you are a government attendee

Time available	AIFS recommends focusing on ...
10 minutes	▪ The discussion points and intended session outcomes listed at the end of each focus area. These will give you a clear picture of where your portfolio fits and what the roundtable is seeking to achieve. ▪ The policy table (Table 5, Focus Area 2) – which maps all current Commonwealth policies relevant to HM by objective, target cohort, policy phase and portfolio owner
30 minutes	▪ Add Focus area 1 (Defining HM) – particularly the sections on <i>What is healthy masculinity?</i>, <i>How does HM relate to masculinity and other related concepts?</i> and the Lifecourse table (Table 4, Focus area 1). This will equip you with the key definitional and framing issues that will underpin all 4 sessions.
60 minutes+	▪ Read the full pack, with particular attention to Focus area 3 (systems-level levers & online ecosystem) and Focus area 4 (public messaging, the manosphere and counter-narratives table). These sections contain recent evidence and will support deeper engagement in afternoon sessions.

If you are a non-government attendee

Time available	AIFS recommends focusing on ...
10 minutes	▪ The discussion points and intended session outcomes at the end of each focus area – these outline the specific questions AIFS and government are seeking your expert input on, and the practical outputs the roundtable aims to produce.
30 minutes	▪ Add the HM frameworks table (Table 3, Focus area 1) and the evidence gaps section (Focus area 2) – which summarise the current state of the evidence, the main theoretical approaches and where the research base needs strengthening. These will help you identify where your expertise can add most value.
60 minutes+	▪ Read the full pack. The online ecosystem overview and manosphere response section (Focus areas 3 and 4) contain emerging evidence and divergent approaches. This material will benefit from expert scrutiny and discussion. The counter-narratives table (Focus area 4) is a practical output that would also benefit from your input.

AIFS thanks all attendees and their teams for the cooperative and generous spirit they have applied to these discussions to date. We are looking forward to continuing this work with you towards a practical, evidence-led understanding of this emerging priority for Australian families and communities.



Focus area 1: Defining healthy masculinities in an Australian policy context

Working towards a consensus-driven, pragmatic definition and framing of HM is essential to establish a shared, evidence-informed understanding of what HM means across Australia's diverse policy landscape. Without this, current and developing HM-related work risks being fragmented, reactive or inconsistently applied across sectors.

Issues for consideration

What is healthy masculinity?

- There is no universally accepted definition of healthy/healthier/masculinity/masculinities (HM).
- An increasing amount of Australian policy and programs across multiple portfolios are being designed that focus on or draw upon HM. However, most of these programs operate with different implicit understandings of HM (Flood et al., 2024; Roberts et al., 2019).
- There is a broad consensus that HM (and its related terms; see below) collectively refers to a set of beliefs, roles or behaviours that helps boys and men respond to harmful gender norms or rigid gender stereotypes about what it is to be a boy or a man.
- The shift towards HM is motivated in part to move away from a deficits-based approach towards a strength-based approach to engaging boys and men, as evidenced in other policy areas (Fogarty et al., 2018). This shift can help address policy questions and program outcomes by resonating with the intended target population, facilitates incorporating broader systemic drivers, reduces further reinforcing stigma and shame, and is optimised for prevention approaches.
- There are some risks associated with HM approaches when engaging boys and men (Flood, 2024b) (e.g. reinforcing gender binaries/essentialism, centralises masculine identities for boys and men, exclusionary focus on male role models), and a broader need to maintain a focus on harm reductions and accountability.
- Furthermore, there is a need to develop HM concepts within various social, cultural and gender-diverse groups in order to guard against applying a homogenous view of HM to disparate settings (Prehn et al., 2025).
- There is also considerable debate about whether policies and programs around HM should seek to replace or decentralise harmful traditional masculine norms (deconstructive approach), modify or adapt these norms based on context (reconstructive approach), take a hybrid approach based on individual preferences (hybrid approach), among other possible options.
- In Australia, as elsewhere, most existing HM programs are currently focused on reducing family, domestic, and sexual violence (FDSV), driven through a gender-equity lens. The applicability of these approaches to other portfolio areas is an area of active consideration.
- From a policy perspective, a clear and broadly accepted HM definition would:
 - facilitate cross-portfolio alignment
 - support effective policy design
 - enables clear governance and accountability
 - improves monitoring, evaluation, and evidence building

- reduces implementation risks
- support effective communications with the target audience and Australian public.

How does HM relate to masculinity and other related concepts?

- There is also no universally accepted definition of masculinity.¹
- Broadly, masculinity refers to the socially constructed patterns of practice, meanings and expectations associated with being a man in a given social context (Connell, 1995).
- Masculinity is not a fixed trait, and varies considerably across time, place, cultures, class, race, sexuality, age, and in response to social, economic, political, and cultural changes. Because of this plurality, the term *masculinities* is generally preferred.
- **Hegemonic masculinity** refers to the culturally dominant and socially legitimised form of masculinity within a given context, which supports and justifies men's collective dominance over women and the hierarchical ordering of masculinities among men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). It suggests a set of traditional norms or ideals that are socially rewarded, and taken as natural or desirable, that sustain patriarchal systems.
- There is no definitive list of traditional (or hegemonic) traits; however, these commonly include:
 - self-reliance: the drive to solve problems independently
 - stoicism: valuing emotional control, self-reliance, and limited expression of vulnerability
 - physical strength: valuing athleticism and physical capability
 - competitiveness: the desire to succeed, win, or achieve high status
 - dominance: taking charge or leadership in social or professional hierarchies
 - risk-taking: a higher tolerance for physical or financial uncertainty.
- Contemporary approaches to masculinity, such as HM, emphasise other traits both in response to traditional values and changing societal expectations, such as:
 - emotional literacy: the ability to identify, process and express a full range of emotions
 - vulnerability: seeing the admission of struggle as a form of courage rather than weakness
 - empathy: the capacity to understand and share the feelings of others
 - accountability: taking ownership of one's actions and their impact on others
 - relational connection: prioritising deep friendships and social support over isolation
 - nurturance: applying 'protection' to caregiving and supporting the growth of others.
- Hegemonic masculinity has a historical framing based in feminist sociology and political theory and seeks to explain how gendered power hierarchies operate among men and between men and women. As such it is a theory of structural and power dynamics within society that seeks to explain how masculinity reproduces power and inequality.
- HM has recently developed as a public health-oriented approach, with a consequent focus on applied, preventive work. This facilitates implementation in various programs, policies and settings.
- In short, hegemonic masculinity attempts to explain why the harms exist, HM helps to frame the response.
- Other related concepts are summarised in Table 1.

¹ To some extent, the avoidance of a single definition for masculinity is deliberate. It acknowledges that the expression of masculinity is context-specific, changeable and avoids marginalising other groups experiences.

Table 1: Terms related to healthy masculinities and masculinity

Term	Notes
Caring masculinities	Masculinities that value care, interdependence and relationality, and reject domination (Elliott, 2016).
Deconstruction/decentring masculinities	Reduce the importance of masculinity as an organising identity, while emphasising common humanity (Hoffmann & Addis, 2024).
Flexible masculinities	Refers to adoption of different masculinities, based on context (Jung, 2024; Spendlow & Seidler, 2020). Originally in reference to migrants adopting to dominant norms to their host country. More recently, this concept has extended to flexibly applying masculine norms based on a broad range of context (also: <i>mobile</i> , or <i>strategic</i> masculinities).
Gender role strain	The psychological state in which perceived gender role demands have negative consequences for individuals or others (Pleck, 1995).
Gender sensitive	A policy, program or treatment that has been adjusted or adapted to be more effective or appropriate for its target gender.
Gender transformative approaches	Programs and approaches that seek to challenge and redress harmful and unequal gender norms, roles and power relations that privilege men over women (World Health Organization, 2011).
Harmful (or rigid) masculine norms	As above
Healthy masculinity/ies	As above
Hegemonic masculinity	As above
Hybrid masculinity/ies	The approach of some (typically privileged) men to incorporate other elements (e.g. marginalised, or feminine identities such as being 'compassionate' or 'emotionally-open') into their own masculine identity (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014).
Hypermasculinity	A term popularised in media and taken to generally refer to exaggerated forms of select male behaviours, such as an emphasis on physical strength, aggression/violence, and human male sexuality (Mosher & Sirkin, 1984).
Inclusive Masculinity Theory (IMT)	A theory explaining contexts where declining homophobia allows men to enact more emotionally open, tactile, and gender-flexible masculinities without status penalty (Anderson & McCormack, 2016).
Indigenous masculinities	The practice of cultural renewal for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. Dynamic and diverse practices, sustained through storytelling, ceremony and obligations to kin and Country (Prehn et al., 2025)
Intersectionality (masculinity)	Refers to how a man's experience of power and privilege is shaped not only by his gender, but simultaneously by other social identities such as race, class, sexuality, age and disability (Murray, 2025).
Man box	A concept that describes a set of beliefs within and across society that places pressure on men to act in a certain way (e.g. stoic, hetero/hypersexual, dominant, self-sufficient, aggressive) (Hill et al., 2020).
Masculinity/ies	As above
Positive masculinity	Focuses on the positive attributes and strengths associated with masculinity (e.g. leadership, mentorship, responsibility) to encourage, rather than limit, men with a focus on connection, motivation and authenticity (Wilson et al., 2022).
Precarious Manhood Theory	States that manhood is an elusive, achieved social status that is hard to earn and easy to lose, requiring constant, public and often aggressive validation (Vandello & Bosson, 2012).
Progressive masculinities	Beliefs and actions that move away from traditional, harmful norms to emphasise gender equality, care, emotional openness, non-violence, inclusion and critical reflection on power and privilege.
Reconstructive masculinities	Expand and reshape what masculinity can include.
Relational masculinity	An approach that defines strength through connection, emotional depth and mutual dependence, rather than traditional patriarchal dominance, stoicism or isolation.
Toxic masculinity	A term taken to refer to harmful, traditional stereotypes of manhood that emphasise extreme toughness, dominance, aggression and emotional repression, harming both men and those around them (Flood, 2022).



Is it necessary to measure HM specifically or masculinities more broadly?

- From a policy perspective, whether to measure HM specifically or masculinities more broadly depends on what the policy is trying to achieve, who it is targeting, and what decisions the data will inform.
- Where policy aims to understand and reduce harm (e.g. violence prevention, mental health or risk-behaviour initiatives), measuring masculinities broadly using established or emerging norm-based tools may be sufficient.
- These tools help government establish baselines, identify at-risk/emerging groups and track whether harmful norms are declining over time.
- Where policy aims to promote positive or healthier outcomes (e.g. early intervention, respectful relationships programs, or men's health promotion), measuring only masculinities/norms may risk missing information on key outcomes (e.g. help seeking, caring roles, respectful relationships, social connection).
- However, there is currently an absence of a single, accepted operational definition in Australian (or international) policy contexts. This risks HM programs or interventions being contested, difficult to compare across portfolios or poorly understood by stakeholders.

What are the existing HM and masculinity measures?

- Table 2 (below) lists currently available HM or masculinity measures.
- There are only 2 existing scales/measures of HM, and both are relatively new with limited examples of use in programs or evaluations to date.
- Masculinity scales however are more commonly used in research and evaluations. Most have not been developed or tested in Australian settings.
- Measures of masculinity have continued to evolve over the past 50 years with changing theories of gender roles and societal expectations.
- The most common masculinity instruments attempt to measure adherence to masculine norms. These types of measure were a departure from earlier scales that viewed masculinity of femininity on a single spectrum of behaviours or traits.
- Other masculinity scales attempt to measure masculinity in the context of their socio-political environment (e.g. peer relationships, race/class, paternal expectations, geographical context). While others measure practices and behaviours among men (e.g. parenting, violence, sexual healthy, etc.).
- These scales generally attempt to elicit what is positive by the absence of adherence to problematic masculine norms (deficits-framing), with limited strength-based approaches within the questions themselves.
- In some approaches this framing is justified. It recognises that masculinity is not merely a set of neutral traits, but a system of power that may privilege some men, while harming others, as well as women and children.
- However, an emerging view is that if such a deficits-based focus becomes the only lens through which masculinity and associated outcomes are understood and operationalised, there is a risk research, policy and programs will miss opportunities to foster positive, safe and healthy outcomes for all Australians (Cole et al., 2021; Englar-Carlson & Kiselica, 2013).

Table 2: List of major healthy masculinities or masculinity measures/tools used²

Scale / measure	What does it measure?	Where has it been used?	Validated?
Specific to healthy masculinities			
Healthy masculinities scale (Elliott, O'Brien et al., 2022)	1. Attitudes and knowledge about aggression and violence; 2. Self-efficacy in challenging aggression and violence; 3. Knowledge about sexism; 4. Self-efficacy in challenging sexist behaviour; 5. Mental health and emotions; and 6. Discussing masculine ideals.	Developed to specifically evaluate 3 healthy masculinity programs in Victoria (Elliott et al., 2022): Monash Respectful Communities The Man Cave Sport and Life Training	Not externally validated but initial testing of the scales reliability indicated that all scales had adequate-to good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alphas ⁴ ranging from .59 to .86.
The Relationships Fostering Healthy Masculinities (RFHM) Scale (Di Bianca & Mahalik, 2025)	Evaluate experiences within interpersonal relationships that promote healthy masculinities among men	Not yet (still very new).	Yes
Other tools on masculinities			
Gender-Equitable Men (GEM) scale by Equiundo and Population Council/Horizons	Attitudes toward gender-equitable vs inequitable gender norms, including violence, sexual relationships, reproductive health, and household roles	Frequently used to evaluate gender-transformative programs in global health and violence prevention research	Yes
Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI-30)	Degree of conformity to traditional masculine norms (e.g. emotional control, risk taking, dominance, self-reliance)	Extensively used in psychology, men's mental health, and gender studies	Yes
Meanings of Adolescent masculinity scale (MAMS)	Masculinity norms specific to adolescence and includes questions on emotional restriction, heterosexism	Used in mostly school-based educational programs e.g. GuysWork (Gilham et al., 2023)	Limited validity
Male role norms inventory scale (MRNI)	Conformity to traditional masculine ideology, e.g. restricted emotionality, dominance, toughness	Masculinity research in health, gender role studies. Also adapted to adolescence	Yes
Man Box Scale	Extent to which respondents adhere to rigid masculine stereotypes across 7 key pillars	Used in Australia (e.g. JSS, The Men's Project & Flood, 2024) and internationally. Mentioned in various policy setting	Yes
Gender role discrepancy stress scale	Stress and distress arising from perceived failure to meet masculine norms (i.e. feeling 'less masculine' than others)	In men's health and mental health studies	Yes
Gender equitable norms scale (GENS)	Attitudes toward equitable vs inequitable gender norms, including beliefs about male authority, female submissiveness, acceptability of violence, sexual decision-making and domestic roles.	Primarily used in adolescent and youth studies, especially in global health, SRHR, and violence-prevention research. Most commonly used in studies from sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia	Yes

² An extensive list of current masculinity measures can be found at [Measures for the assessment of violence and/or gender: A compendium | www.xyonline.net](#)



Existing framework scan

- There have been recent calls for a national framework around HM, including a strengths-based national definition and measurement methodology for HM to guide future campaigns and/or program implementation (Office for Women, 2026).
- Table 3 (below) summarises current key healthy masculinity frameworks or best practice approaches in Australia and internationally. There are three main approaches taken in this space, which come from distinct and overlapping literature on evidence of effectiveness when working with boys and men, and theoretical and psychotherapy literature.

Summary of frameworks for HM masculinities

- HM frameworks have been developed across different contexts, with slightly different goals. Most have been developed to support decision makers on what aspects are important when promoting HM, while others are used to advocate the use of HM framing when working with boys and men, and how this can be operationalised.
- Gender transformative approaches are often promoted in frameworks that engage men and boys, and that promote healthy masculinities. Gender transformative approaches challenge dominant forms of masculinity including the norms, behaviours and relationships associated with ideals of manhood (Jewkes et al., 2015; Our Watch, 2019). This approach is commonly taken in the prevention of violence against women.
- Health promotion frameworks (e.g. VicHealth, The Man Cave) promote the importance of healthy masculinities programs having shared outcomes i.e. tackling both gender equality AND improving the health and wellbeing of boys and men. Psychosocial and relational frameworks focus on taking strength-based approaches to masculinity/manhood and the limitations of adherence to rigid/hegemonic masculinities. The most commonly occurring themes across existing frameworks on positive masculinities:
 - masculinities are socially constructed, and there are multiple forms of masculinity
 - taking strengths-based approaches to engaging boys and men
 - promoting gender transformative approaches, where appropriate
 - encouraging emotional expression and vulnerability
 - rejection of harmful masculine ideals such as dominance, control and violence (e.g. through critical reflection, role modelling).
 - creating a sense of shared responsibility towards a common goal.



Gaps in existing frameworks

- Production of frameworks on healthy masculinities is perhaps premature, given the evidence on effectiveness or usefulness of HM framing is still contested.
- Very few frameworks consider intersectional approaches and working with diverse communities including working with First Nations and CALD populations. Even in cases where intersectionality is acknowledged, it is inconsistently operationalised in the frameworks.
- Emerging evidence highlights the role of the online environment as a critical driver for the development of masculine ideals and associated behaviours which is absent in most frameworks.
- Resistance and backlash towards prevention efforts in the space of violence against women and promotion of gender equality is a known barrier when engaging boys and men. There is some emerging evidence that highlights approaches to address these barriers among boys and men in different settings (Our Watch, 2022; Pfitzner et al., 2026).



Table 3: Key healthy masculinity frameworks or best practice approaches in Australia and internationally

HM framework Title, author and year published	Context/background Who is the framework for? What is it's purpose?	Key focus and takeaways Key elements of framework. Implications for policy/practice
1. Psychotherapy/relational approaches		
A relational-cultural framework for promoting healthy masculinities (Di Bianca & Mahalik, 2022)	Offers a relational approach to help boys and men resist mainstream ideas of what “real men should be, describing how relationships and communities can promote healthy ideas about what it means to be a man. Provides recommendations for interventions to engage boys and men	Basis of framework is boys and men reclaiming fundamental human capacities that hegemonic masculinity stifles and using relationships to do this (with peers, mentors, etc).
Positive psychology / positive masculinity model of psychotherapy with boys and men (Kiselica & Englar-Carson, 2010)	To propose a Positive Psychology/Positive Masculinity (PPPM) framework as an alternative and complement to deficit-focused models of masculinity (for example ‘New Psychology of Men’ (NPM), which focuses on harms of restrictive gender norms). To shift the starting point of work with boys and men from ‘what is wrong with masculinity’ to ‘what strengths men already bring’. The model is for consideration for mental health practitioners and researchers in masculinities/men's health, etc.	Focuses on 10 strengths fostered through male socialisation (but not exclusive to men), and can be drawn upon to support positive masculinities in wellbeing, relationships and responsibility including: 1. Male relational styles: Bonding through shared activity and action 2. Male ways of caring: Protecting, providing, practical/action-based care 3. Generative fatherhood: Responsibility for the next generation 4. Male self-reliance: Agency, initiative, responsibility (balanced with care for others) 5. Worker / provider identity: Meaning, purpose, contribution through work 6. Courage, daring, and risk-taking: When guided by judgment and concern for others 7. Group orientation of men and boys: Belonging, teamwork, shared identity 8. Humanitarian service via male groups: Service, civic contribution, collective helping 9. Use of humor: Coping, connection, tension-reduction 10. Male heroism: Everyday and historical examples of moral courage and sacrifice.
Operationalising positive masculinity: a theoretical synthesis and school-based framework to engage boys and young men (Wilson et al., 2022)	To provide a definition of positive masculinity specific to psychosocial health promotion among boys and young men: <i>‘we conceptualise positive masculinity to represent developmental progress towards the embodiment of key human strengths by males, in particular male ways.’</i> For the purposes of psychosocial health promotion for boys and young men and guiding positive masculinity interventions for boys and young men.	Based on 2 overarching pillars – <i>knowing</i> and <i>being</i> , with 3 ‘key human strengths’ relevant to experiences of boys and young men: <i>Connected</i> , <i>motivated</i> and <i>authentic</i> . The <i>knowing</i> relates to educating boys and young men and the <i>being</i> refers to acting on this knowledge. Each ‘key human strength’ has a specific goal attached to it: <i>Connected</i> requires to be part of a community/ecology but not disconnect or be intolerant to other groups and forming healthier relationships. This is important to reducing VAW and has other goals like reducing loneliness. <i>Motivated</i> refers to having a drive to contribute to society, a sense of purpose and moving away from false expectations from peers on ‘what it means to be a man’. Goals of ‘motivated’ element is to improvement in school engagement and their own future. <i>Authentic</i> refers to being open to full array of emotions including empathy, the aim being to improve help seeking and supporting others.



2. Health promotion framework

Healthier masculinities framework for gender equality (VicHealth, 2019)	To act as a planning tool when working with men and boys To promote the importance of considering masculinities in health promotion from both a personal (mental health/ help seeking) and interpersonal (prevention of VAW) perspectives	Acknowledges gender transformative practice Provides good practice principles: ▪ Aim for change across different levels of socio-ecological model ▪ Prioritise shared outcomes e.g. tackling gender stereotypes should tackle both gender equality AND health and wellbeing ▪ Positive framing and avoiding negative language about men Provides considerations when designing interventions, as well as a theory of change with examples of programs at different 'levels'.
Towards an effective approach for designing and implementing programs and interventions aimed at fostering freedom from unhealthy masculine stereotypes among men and boys: promising principles of practice (Monash University & VicHealth, 2022)	To provide promising principles of good practice to support effective design and implementation of healthier masculinities programs Provides practicalities in designing programs and for evaluation	Emphasises the following promising principles: ▪ Acknowledges importance of gender transformative and intersectional approaches ▪ Importance of masculinities as a plural – that there are many versions of masculinities ▪ Programs should be aimed at wide spectrum of men and boys (targeting marginalised backgrounds is not evidence based). ▪ Programs have a view to measure longer-term behaviour change not just increased knowledge.

3. Gender transformative frameworks / approaches

The Working With Men and Boys for Social Justice Assessment Tool (Keddie, Flood et al., 2023)	To provide leaders, designers and facilitators of programs or initiatives for men and boys the opportunity to review, reflect on and strengthen the principles of gender and social justice in their work. The Tool is relevant for work with men and boys across a wide range of fields and issues, including violence prevention, health and wellbeing, restorative justice, parenting, and other areas.	The tool is based on research on masculinities and engaging boys/men. The tool takes a 'social justice approach' – both as a process and an outcome. A process by connecting with boys and men in meaningful ways, safe spaces and recognising trauma. As an outcome by inviting boys to reflect on values, beliefs and behaviours and how it can relate to inequality and harm (through critical learning). Provides 56 items for consideration when designing programs to engage boys and men, from aims/focus, teaching and learning principles, and evaluation. The tool <i>does not just focus on masculinities</i> in recognition of the fact that violence while gendered, is not just about gender/masculinities. Use of violence is also tied to other aspects of identity, relationships, contexts and structures.
Promoting positive masculinities to address violence against women: A multicounty concept mapping study (Daoud et al., 2023)	To identify key strategies for promoting positive masculinities to improve gender equity and prevent / target VAW (conceived by over 400 young people across Ireland, Israel, Spain and Sweden).	Seven key strategies with 41 actions and measures for promoting anti-VAW positive masculinity. The ranking from highest to lowest for these strategies was as follows: 1. Formal and informal education and training 2. Preventive education and activities in different settings/areas 3. Skills and knowledge 4. Empathy, reflection, and understanding 5. Media and public efforts 6. Policy, legislation, and the criminal justice system



		7. Organisational actions and interventions. The ideas proposed by young people and stakeholders targets all genders, plus parents/teachers, social media influencers, sports players, service providers, police, etc.
Adolescent Boys and Young Men: Engaging Them as Supporters of Gender Equality and Health and Understanding Their Vulnerabilities (Kato-Wallace et al., 2016)	Provides a framework to engaging adolescent boys and young men in gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights Provides practical entry points and program approaches for working with boys in adolescence	The framework emphasises that achieving gender equality requires engaging men, and that doing so does not take away from girls/women's agenda in prevention of VAW. It says there are 2 rationale for engaging boys: ▪ Engaging boys for gender equality – recognising that boys' attitudes and behaviours effect women's and girl's lives ▪ Addressing boys' vulnerabilities- adherence to masculine norms increases their risk of violence, poorer mental health and help seeking Suggests that adolescence is a 'window of opportunity' – critical developmental period Takes a gender transformative approach and recommends opportunities to work with boys and girls separately and together.
Effective Practice in Violence Prevention Education with Boys and Young Men (Flood, 2024a)	To support the design and implementation of violence prevention aimed at boys and men in educational / face-to-face settings	Drawing from the evidence, 6 key elements of best practice for in-person violence prevention are proposed: 1. gender transformative 2. informed (include an appropriate theoretical framework) 3. a whole of institute approach 4. effective curriculum delivery (including advice on curriculum content, structure and delivery and requirements from staff) 5. relevant and tailored to the target group or local population 6. impact evaluation methods that attempt to measure long-term outcomes and use standardised measure.
Supporting Best Practices: Guidelines for Funding Programs That Engage and Mobilize Men & Boys in Violence Prevention (Wells et al., 2020)	To help decision makers who oversee gender-based violence prevention portfolios (Canada context)	Principles of effective practices in engaging and mobilising men and boys in violence prevention: 1. Ensure gender equality is built into all parts of the program so that the work strengthens and upholds the rights of women and people from diverse genders. 2. Embed a gender transformative approach that actively strives to examine, question and change rigid gender norms and imbalances of power. 3. Apply an intersectional lens throughout the design and implementation of programs; 4. Work in partnership with, and be accountable to, feminist principles, women's rights and gender justice organizations. 5. Design an evaluation plan from the outset that includes specific measures identifying changes in violence perpetration and/or victimization. 6. Incorporate principles of compassionate accountability to support men to identify complicity and/or participation in violence and gender inequality, and to make reparations for the damage and move forward in non-violent ways. 7. Prioritise the personal and professional development of staff leading this work.



Transitions into HM across the life course

- HM policy life-course map. This table is designed to highlight the applicability of current understandings of HM domains and approaches to a range of challenges.

Table 4: Menu of healthy masculinities measures/tools used in evaluation (at the individual knowledge, attitudes, behaviour level)

Age cohort	Key periods and transitions	Example life challenges	Applicable masculinities framework or programs	Intended outcomes	Commonwealth policy holder(s)
Boys	School entry; peer play; early identity formation; family routines	School adjustment; family separation; childhood trauma; bullying; exposure to family, domestic or sexual violence; early online or gaming interactions; early experiences of homophobia or gender policing	- Healthy masculinities - Hegemonic masculinities/gender-transformative approaches - Flexible or plural masculinities - Caring/relational masculinities	School belonging; emotional literacy; reduced bullying and gender policing; shared parenting; improved child wellbeing; safer family relationships; early help-seeking and pro-social peer norms	Education; DSS; eSafety; Office for Women; AGD
Adolescent boys and adolescent men	Puberty; secondary school; stronger peer hierarchy; first intimate relationships; growing online autonomy	Peer pressure; school exclusion; body image or status pressure; rejection; exposure to harmful online content; online abuse; family violence; homophobia; emerging substance use or risk taking	- Healthy masculinities - Hegemonic masculinities/gender-transformative approaches - Flexible or plural masculinities - Digital identity and online norms work	Improved mental health and help seeking; reduced bullying, harassment and online abuse; stronger respectful relationship skills; reduced risk taking; stronger school engagement and bystander action	Education; eSafety; DSS; Office for Women; DoHDA
Young men	Leaving school; tertiary study or work entry; leaving home; new relationships; early fatherhood for some	Relationship breakdown or rejection; unemployment or underemployment; social isolation; risky alcohol or other drug use; online grievance or manosphere exposure; family, domestic or sexual violence risk; settlement stress for some cohorts	- Healthy masculinities (help seeking, respect, accountability) - Hegemonic masculinities/gender-transformative approaches - Flexible or plural masculinity - caring masculinity where fathering or care roles emerge - Counter-hegemonic and digital approaches	Better mental health and service use; reduced risky behaviours; improved respectful relationship behaviours; safer online conduct; stronger employment or training engagement; reduced violence perpetration risk	DoHDA; DSS; eSafety; Home Affairs; Office for Women
Middle-aged men	Career consolidation or disruption; parenting; caring for children and or parents; separation; chronic health onset	Work–family conflict; redundancy or job insecurity; separation or relationship conflict; fathering stress; substance use; social isolation; chronic illness; family violence risk in periods of strain	Caring or relational masculinity; flexible masculinity; healthy masculinity focused on help-seeking, shared care and accountability; gender-transformative approaches where organisational norms matter	Better mental health and help-seeking; safer families; stronger co-parenting and child wellbeing; reduced risky drinking and other avoidable health risks; improved work–life balance and social connection	DoHDA; DSS; Office for Women; Home Affairs; AGD



Age cohort	Key periods and transitions	Example life challenges	Applicable masculinities framework or programs	Intended outcomes	Commonwealth policy holder(s)
Older men	Retirement; declining health; bereavement; grandparenting; changing care needs	Partner loss or grief; loneliness; illness or disability; loss of work identity; reduced mobility; social withdrawal; digital exclusion or online scams or abuse; caring for a partner	Flexible or plural masculinity; caring or relational masculinity; healthy masculinity focused on help seeking, connection and safe ageing	Reduced social isolation; stronger wellbeing and suicide prevention; better health service use; safer ageing; improved connection to family and community; reduced stigma around dependency and support	DoHDA; DSS; eSafety; Office for Women



Considerations for the HM Roundtable: Focus area 1

Possible discussion points

- Key concepts and frameworks: what's agreed, what's contested?
 - HM brings together multiple, overlapping concepts from different fields. As its use expands across policy, we need a shared understanding of what HM means, when it applies, and how it should be used in decision making.
- Measuring HM/masculinities:
 - What to measure? When? And in what context
 - Are we focused on reducing harmful norms/strengthening healthy norms, broadening what 'counts' as masculine, or adopt a holistic approach – and how would we measure progress in each and ensure we are working towards a common goal?
 - Intersectional/equity lens: How should HM account for different but interrelated experiences of culture, disability, sexuality, socio-economic position, and place?
 - HM domains: What are the key elements any measurement of HM needs to include (e.g. relationships, parenting, work, health, online behaviour, education, gender-based violence), and what sits outside scope?
- HM across the life course: How should HM apply at different ages and life stages (not just adolescence/young adulthood)?
 - Most HM discussions are currently focused on adolescent boys and young men (ABYM); however, there are unmet needs and opportunities to engage with men across various stages of life (e.g. mid-life and older men, and key transitions such as fatherhood, unemployment, illness or separation).
- Working towards a pragmatic, policy-relevant HM definition and national HM framework.

Intended session outcome(s):

- Progress towards a policy-relevant HM definition and agreed framing that incorporates inputs from numerous fields that can be used consistently in policy, program and research contexts.



Focus area 2: Healthy masculinities – policy, research, and evaluation priorities

Government needs agreement on where to maintain focus in relation to HM, and where new priorities may lie. This will help to ensure interventions are evidence-based, scalable and measurable. This topic will work towards the practical ‘so what’: priority settings and cohorts, capacity building, and the need to move beyond deficit-only measurement toward indicators that capture both risk and positive destinations.

HM policy landscape

- Table 5 below provides a concise map of the main Australian Government (federal) policy levers relevant to HM. It shows where HM already sits within Commonwealth policy, which cohorts are being reached, which parts of the policy continuum are most developed (prevention, early intervention, response and recovery), and where there may be gaps, overlaps or opportunities for stronger cross-portfolio coordination.

**Table 5: Outline of major federal policies of the Australian Government relating to healthy masculinities (listed in alphabetical order)**

Policy/instrument	Policy objective(s)	HM focus/relevance	Target cohort	Policy phase	Policy owner
A Safer Australia – Australia's Counter-Terrorism and Violent Extremism Strategy 2025	Focuses on activities to reduce the risk of violent extremism	- Violence prevention - Social cohesion	Broader community; priority populations; young men	Prevention; Early intervention	Home Affairs
Action Plan Addressing Gender-based Violence in Higher Education	Improves tertiary safety, accountability and complaints pathways; includes national code reforms	- Gender norms & attitudes - Violence prevention	Young men; broader higher education community	Prevention; Response	Education
Criminal Code Amendment (Deepfake Sexual Material) Act 2024	Criminalise the non-consensual sharing of sexual material (including AI-generated deepfakes) via carriage services	- Violence prevention - Online engagement - Gender-based violence	Boys; young men; broader community	Response	AGD
CRRE + National Respectful Relationships Education Framework	Supports evidence-based, age-appropriate consent and respectful relationships education in schools	- Gender norms & attitudes - Violence prevention	Boys; young men; broader school community	Prevention	Education
Family Violence Provisions (FVP) (<i>Migration Regulations 1994</i>)	- Support inclusive multicultural policy settings - Protects victim-survivors in migration contexts	- Violence prevention - Social cohesion	Broader community; perpetrators; migrant families	Response; Recovery	Home Affairs
First Action Plan 2023–2027 (part of National Plan)	Implements the National Plan through 10 actions (incl. gender equality, evidence, workforce capability, systems & services, perpetrator accountability & children/young people)	- Community attitudes/norms - Engaging boys/young men - Perpetrator accountability - Evidence systems	Boys; young men; perpetrators; community	Prevention; Early intervention; Response	DSS
National Men's Health Strategy 2020–2030	Improve the health and wellbeing of Australian men and boys	- Masculine/healthier norms - Help seeking - Emotional wellbeing	Boys; young men; fathers; Priority populations; Men across life course	Prevention; Early intervention	DHDA



		▪ Risky behaviours ▪ Social connection			
National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032 (National Plan)	▪ Whole-of-government framework to end FDSV	▪ Violence prevention ▪ Masculine norms ▪ Gender equality	Boys; young men; perpetrators; community	Prevention; Early intervention; Response; Recovery	DSS
National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence	▪ Shared national understanding of coercive control to improve safety, particularly for women and children	▪ Violence prevention ▪ Perpetrator accountability ▪ Gender norms & attitudes ▪ Community awareness	Perpetrators; victim-survivors; community; front-line services & judiciary	Prevention; Early intervention; Response; Recovery & healing	AGD
National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030	▪ Whole-of-gov framework to prevent and respond to CSA in all settings (institutions, families, online)	▪ Violence prevention ▪ Gender norms & attitudes	Boys; offenders/perpetrators; broader community; priority populations	Prevention; Early intervention; Response; Recovery	PM&C AGD
Online Safety Act 2021	▪ Strengthens protections against cyber abuse, image-based abuse and harmful online content	▪ Gender norms & attitudes ▪ Violence prevention ▪ Online engagement	Boys; young men; broader community	Prevention; Response	eSafety Commissioner
Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches (Unlocking the Prevention Potential)	▪ Strengthen evidence-based prevention of gender-based violence across people, systems and data	▪ Engaging men and boys ▪ Perpetrator prevention ▪ Evidence systems	Boys; young men; perpetrators; community	Prevention; Early intervention	PM&C / DSS / DFSV Commission
Strengthening Australian democracy	▪ Promote social cohesion, democratic resilience, inclusion and shared values	▪ Violence prevention ▪ Social cohesion	Broader community; priority populations; young men	Prevention; Response	Home Affairs
Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality	▪ 10-year strategy on safety, respect, care, economic equality, health and leadership	▪ Gender norms & attitudes ▪ Unpaid & paid care ▪ Health	Community; fathers; young men; middle-aged men	Prevention	Office for Women (PM&C)



HM research: state-of-play and evidence gaps

The following draws on evidence reviews and novel research to understand the state of the evidence on HM, the gaps in the evidence base as well as risks in the use of HM framing.

Existing research on HM

HM framing and promotion is used in predominantly two areas- in health promotion and in the prevention of violence against women. Overall, there is more research on HM within the latter. There is also some therapeutic/psychotherapy research on the value of HM (Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010).

Promoting HM is often a part of gender transformative prevention, predominantly in the prevention of VAW space (Perez-Martinez et al., 2023) but also in health promotion (Zielke et al., 2023; Levy et al., 2020). Most research and evaluation focus on education programs aimed at promoting HM among boys and men. A multi-country study that asked young people directly on how to promote positive masculinities in the prevention of VAW supported this idea and ranked the need for education on HM/positive masculinities as number one priority for young men (Daoud et al., 2023).

From a health promotion perspective, a scoping review by VicHealth explored what methodologies are being used to promote and educate people about healthy and positive masculinities, and whether there is evidence for effectiveness of these approaches (Roberts et al., 2019). The key findings from this review were:

- There is limited robust, long-term evaluations of initiatives/programs on HM. Most studies rely on measurements of short term attitudinal or behavioural change.
- Individual level interventions are not enough to bring about transformative change; there is a need for a socio-ecological approach that considers intersectional and socio-economic factors.
- When working on education/promotion programs it is important to recognise the plurality of masculinities and take a strengths-based approach that leverages male strengths to foster deeper engagement.

The review provides a list of recommendations for data collection and evaluation, intervention design, sector staffing and training requirements and influencing public discourse in the space of positive / healthy masculinities. Another evaluation of 3 gender transformative / healthy masculinities programs in Victoria found that attitudinal and knowledge shifts do not translate to enhanced interpersonal skills or changes in behaviour (Elliott, Roberts et al., 2022).

From a prevention of violence against women perspective, a systematic review on positive masculinities and gender-based violence educational interventions found (Perez-Martinez et al., 2023):

- educational interventions aimed at preventing IPV through addressing hegemonic masculinity (including gender roles, patriarchal norms, gendered attitudes on IPV, and so on) show promising results, including reductions in IPV (both perpetration and victimisation) across 12 out of 15 studies reviewed
- improvements in gender-related attitudes, attitudes towards controlling, sexual and physical behaviours.

However, this review predominantly included studies on programs from contexts such as Asia and Africa, with limited generalisability to Australia. There is still limited evidence on whether



positive masculinities within gender transformative programs is effective in the Australian context.

Other relevant research that may not explicitly explore HM include those that look at the value of challenging gender norms, engaging boys and men in the prevention of VAW, gender transformative prevention (Casey et al., 2016; Levy et al., 2020; Stewart et al., 2021).

Criticisms of HM

Across literature, there is debate about the usefulness of HM in general. Some argue that promoting positive masculinities can take an individualised approach to a whole-of-society problem, and can inadvertently reinforce gender norms (Bower, 2024; McCook, 2022). This may work against health promotion and prevention efforts. This is because promoting positive masculinities can create alternative, but still rigid ideals of what men should be (McCook, 2022). Further, as mentioned, positive/healthy masculinities is not universally understood or defined and has been used differently in different contexts, limiting its potential to be evaluated (McCook, 2022). Although there is growing consensus to move away from terms like ‘toxic masculinity’ and focusing on strengths-based framing like positive masculinity, some argue that keeping these terms can help differentiate which parts of masculinity is problematic (Zhao et al., 2025). Research which focusses on traditional/hegemonic masculinities is therefore important in unpacking which aspects of masculinities do boys and men identify with, and which are problematic.

Gaps in the research and future research recommendations.

Overall, more high-quality, longer-term evaluation is required, within contexts similar to Australia. Clarity on definitions on HM, and how this framing could apply to multiple contexts is also required. There is more research in this space in health promotion and prevention of violence against women, but less in therapeutic practice, early intervention in justice settings, parenting. Most reviews also describe that initiatives to promote positive masculinities focus on the individual level of the socio-ecological model, which can limit their effectiveness in creating long term behavioural changes, and systems-level changes to promote gender equality.



Considerations for the HM Roundtable: focus area 2

Possible discussion points

- Defining outcomes: what are policies and programs actually trying to achieve?
 - Are interventions targeting: attitude change, norm perception change, behavioural skills, values clarification/detachment, accountability, help seeking, bystander action, relationship behaviours? Clarifying the 'what' will enhance the effectiveness of HM interventions
- Priority policy questions: where is HM most actionable right now? Where should it be in the future?
- Building workforce and sector capacity: what skills, training, tools and supports do practitioners and services need to deliver HM work well?

Intended session outcome(s):

- Ready-to-action shortlist of priority policy and research questions
- List of preliminary indicators to assist monitoring progress



Focus area 3: Transforming systems for gender equitable outcomes

Individual-level messaging or short-term programs will not lead to sustainable changes to behaviours or norms without supportive systems – services, education settings, workplaces, online environments, among others – that reinforce equity, care and accountability. This focus area centres the structural and ecological levers that make healthy masculinities 'easier' to practise.

Overview of current HM-related intervention programs

- Table 6 (below) provides a brief overview of some of the main approaches and frameworks that are used in masculinity-based programs.
- Many of the real-world approaches overlap, combine elements of multiple approaches, or are used interchangeably.
- Some are more common in prevention settings (e.g. gender transformation), others are more used in counselling (e.g. gender role conflicts), while others may be viewed as a lens to better understand social drivers of masculinity (e.g. precarious manhood theory).
- The main practical difference between these programs is whether an approach accommodates, reframes, or transforms masculine norms and the power relations behind them, and the outcomes that they target.

Gender transformative approaches (GTA) in an Australian context

Gender transformative prevention involves actively challenging dominant gender norms, structures and practices that maintain gender inequality and drive violence against women (Our Watch, 2019). It goes beyond gender exploitative approaches which reinforce traditional gender stereotypes or gender-blind approaches which ignore the effects of gender on the problem of violence against women (Our Watch, 2019; Varley & Rich, 2019). Gender transformative approaches challenge dominant forms of masculinity including the norms, behaviours and relationships associated with ideals of manhood (Jewkes et al., 2015; Our Watch, 2019). A gender transformative approach requires:

- critical thinking about gender and injunctive norms (what we think others approve/disapprove of) and masculinities (Claussen et al., 2024; Exner-Cortens et al., 2021)
- principles of feminism and intersectionality (e.g. understanding how patriarchy and gender inequality shapes systems and norms)
- taking a socio-ecological perspective and work across individual, relationship, organisational, community and society level to address inequities
- moving beyond binary thinking (importance of recognising multiple identities and intersectionality), acknowledging similarities between men and women and addressing homophobia (Jewkes et al., 2015; OurWatch, 2019; Varley & Rich, 2019)



It is an approach promoted by Australia's peak body in the prevention of violence against women, Our Watch, as well as the World Health Organization. Although there are programs in Australia that draw on principles of gender transformation, they are not always 'branded' as the key underlying theoretical framework, and use of the term is inconsistent.

Limitations of GTA and the importance of the social environment to influence individual behaviour change

Despite the principles described above, 'gender transformative' work is often being done at the individual level, through interventions and programs, often delivered in groups in education or community settings. It is less common to see programs that address multiple levels of the socio-ecological model, which is required for transformative change.

Providing education with the goal of shifting attitudes and changing behaviour, although important, has its limitations. The environment within an individual lives and grows, limits their individual agency for making changes in their own lives (ref: social determinants). This is especially the case for young people, who's attitudes and behaviours are shaped by their family, school, online and community environments. Many GTA programs show improvements in knowledge and attitudes but limitations in changing behaviour. This is partly due to the difficulty in measuring behaviour change, but according to behavioural science, the relationship between attitudes and behaviour is complex (Jewkes et al., 2015; Stewart et al., 2021). People may experience an 'intention-behaviour gap' where their intentions don't align with their actual behaviour (Stewart et al., 2021). Therefore, changing attitudes may be helpful in changing behaviours, but it's unlikely to be enough on its own. Further, there may circumstances under which attitudes are more likely to change behaviours, for example, during developmentally appropriate ages (Claussen, 2017; Keating & Baker, 2025; Struthers et al., 2019; Wells et al., 2024; Williams & Neville, 2017) or in the absence of risk factors associated with the use of violence (Joshi & Truong, 2024).

It is critiqued that although in theory, gender transformative approaches need to be less binary and intersectional, the programs and interventions branded by this approach may not do so adequately. For example, working with young people from different cultural, racial backgrounds may require unpacking about what leads to violence, without the assumption of gender inequality/misogyny as the key underlying driver (Wells et al., 2024). Programs working with boys and men exclusively, may be useful to facilitate honest and open conversations, but may further contribute to gender binaries, which can work against gender transformative approaches (Stewart et al., 2021).

**Table 6: Overview of main approaches and frameworks used in masculinity-based programs**

Approach / Framework	Focus	Primary goal	View of power	View of masculinity	Primary outcome
Gender-transformative approaches	- Gender inequality - Violence prevention	- Equality - Gender justice	Actively challenged & redistributed	- Socially constructed - Needs critical reflection	Long-term social & behavioural change
Gender-sensitive programs	Recognise & address differing needs/approaches based on context	- Program refinement - Meeting gender-specific needs	Acknowledged; rarely challenged	Traditional roles are used as a baseline	Improved outcomes & access to services within existing norms
Positive masculinity	Promoting 'healthier' traits	Self-actualisation & non-violence	Shifted from dominance to responsibility	A positive resource for growth & ethics	Pro-social behaviour & improved mental health
Gender role strain	Stress caused by rigid norms	Reduce psychological distress in men	Internalised as personal pressure/anxiety	Inherently stressful and often unattainable	Improved well-being; lower shame/aggression
Precarious manhood	Manhood as an 'earned' status	Preventing defensive aggression	Fragile; must be publicly proven	Elusive and easily lost (unlike womanhood)	Reduced risk taking & 'compensatory' violence
Masculine capital	'Man points' & social credit	Leveraging norms for health/participation	Used as a currency for social status	A set of traits that can be traded or spent	Engagement of men who value traditional status
Inclusive masculinity	Homophobia, peer culture, emotional openness	Expand acceptable masculine expression	Focuses on peer culture; structural inequality may be less central	Masculinity seen as historically shifting	More openness and less peer policing
Hybrid masculinities	Mixing of 'Others' traits	Adapting to progressive social climates	Often masked; privilege may still persist	Fluid; selectively includes 'feminine' bits	Modernized appearance of men; 'niche' identities
Caring masculinities	Interdependence & nurturing	Integrating care into male identity	Relational; rejects dominance	Rejection of independence for relationality	Shared domestic labour; improved caregiving



What are some elements of HM and other masculinity programs that are required to be effective?

Based on a review of studies on programs (unpublished AIFS research) working with young people on gender norms and masculinities, in contexts similar to Australia, the following areas were highlighted as important in qualitative findings from participants and facilitators of programs:

Characteristics and skills of facilitators conducting programs:

- Relatable, non-judgemental and open (Claussen et al., 2024; Jaime et al., 2016; Kearney et al., 2016; Meads et al., 2025; Stewart et al., 2023)
- External facilitators were preferred to known adults (e.g. teachers, coaches, etc.) to reduce authoritative barriers (Bruno et al., 2020; Claussen, 2017; Claussen et al., 2024; Jaime et al., 2016; Keddle, Hewson-Monroe et al., 2023).
- Facilitators that are diverse and role models in the community (Elliot et al., 2025; Quam et al., 2020; Stewart et al., 2023; Struthers et al., 2019; Wells et al., 2024)
- Having peers as leaders / facilitators of program (Gittings et al., 2024; Kearney et al., 2016; Struthers et al., 2019; Williams & Neville, 2017)
- There was limited evidence on what gender is preferred by participants

Professional development and training requirements:

- Gender and violence – training on the link between gender and violence (Bruno et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2023).
- Reflexivity training – learning how to detect your own prejudices, and how this influences your work (Keddle, Hewson-Monroe et al., 2023; Keddle & Bartel, 2021)
- Process-oriented learning – moving away from lecturing style/authoritative stance and practicing two-way conversations (Bruno et al., 2020; Keddle, Hewson-Monroe et al., 2023).
- How to teach empathy – the process of standing in the shoes of others, without belittling or creating pity, or reinforcing gender binaries by framing emotional expression as ‘feminine’ (Keddle & Bartel, 2021)
- Empowering young people beyond performative emotions or attitudes towards action and responsibility (Keddle & Bartel, 2021)
- Careful facilitation of personal examples- personal examples and stories are useful in creating a sense of openness but need to be careful not to overly simplify complex issues or minimise acts of violence (Bruno et al., 2020; Kearney et al., 2016).
- How to build critical awareness through gentle questioning on gendered power dynamics, and anticipating and responding to backlash (Keddle, Lees et al., 2023; Keddle & Ollis, 2021).



PD was especially important for teachers, as the as the style and delivery is likely to be different to traditional teaching dynamics. Evidence suggests that teachers may experience discomfort discussing IPV and gendered violence with students (Bruno et al., 2020)

Online ecosystem overview

The role of online content in shaping masculinities and gender norms

Emerging evidence suggests the online environment is becoming an increasingly influential aspect of young people's lives, including how it shapes attitudes towards gender norms and masculinities (Bulluss & Baker, 2025; Jesuit Social Services, 2025). Young people can encounter conflicting ideas on gender norms as social media can amplify pro-feminist and misogynistic content (Diepeveen, 2024). The 'manosphere' is a term used to describe online community that advocate for male supremacy, amplify traditional forms of masculinity and undermine women and women's movement towards gender equality (Bulluss & Baker, 2025).

There is some evidence to suggest links between discriminatory gender norms among boys and young men and exposure to sexist social media content online (Diepeveen, 2024). Algorithms push harmful misogynistic content to boys and young men (eSafety Commissioner, 2024, 2025; Fisher et al., 2025). Anonymity can also fuel sharing harmful gendered views online, but also offer echo-chambers for progressive young people too (Diepeveen, 2024). Young people, especially boys and young men feel they are often being told what 'not to do' through education/schools and media, but not enough on what to do (Bulluss & Baker, 2025; O'Gorman et al., 2025). In contrast, influencers present simple guidance on how to 'be a man' which can be appealing, and online communities offer belonging and validation for more traditional masculine norms (Diepeveen, 2024; eSafety Commissioner, 2025; O'Gorman et al., 2025). Boys who align themselves with rigid masculine norms are more likely to find their online life more rewarding than their offline lives (Jesuit Social Services, 2025). Furthermore, teachers are increasingly noticing these negative online influences translating into real life, noticing a regression in attitudes on gender norms in male students in recent years (Wescott et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2025).

The evidence on the relationship between mental health and engaging with masculinity content online is emerging. Rates of mental health difficulties is higher amongst young men who engage with this content online, as platforms can push young people who are vulnerable towards this content (Bulluss & Baker, 2025; Fisher et al., 2025). Masculinity influences often claim their content is 'self-help' for young men to improve themselves, which makes them attractive to young people who are struggling with their mental health. However, due to how algorithms operate, positive role models that showcase diverse or healthy masculinities are not highly accessed by young people (Bulluss & Baker, 2025; eSafety Commissioner, 2025; The Man Cave, 2023; The Men's Project & Flood, 2024).

Research does not support a simplistic understanding of how online content can shape masculinities. Most research is based on associations (not causation), bidirectional (where it is not clear where the social norm pre-exists the online content, which then reinforces the norm), and that some people are more susceptible to being influenced by negative online messaging e.g. misogynistic content (Bulluss & Baker, 2025; Fisher et al., 2025). Young men also are critically aware of negative online content and how algorithms work (eSafety Commissioner, 2024, 2025).

It is also worth noting that the online environment is not necessarily the strongest / most important influence on masculinities and gender norms. Other research suggests other important factors: peer influence (of which some can be online), family especially parents and how they model gender norms, ethnicity and race and gender identity/sexuality (Align, 2024; Jesuit Social Services, 2025; Kågesten et al., 2016; Lomas et al., 2020; Our Watch, 2019; Vives-Cases et al., 2022).

Current policy responses

- The Australian Government is responding to the role of online content in shaping masculinities through a set of measures across prevention, regulation, education and criminal law (see Table 7 below for overview).

Table 7: Outline of major federal policies/programs of the Australian Government to address harmful online content in relation to masculinities

Policy / Program	Objective	Policy focus for online + masculinity	Policy owner
Healthy Masculinities Trial and Evaluation (Healthy MaTE) Healthy Masculinities Trial and Evaluation Department of Social Services	Trial, test and evaluate activities designed to encourage HM and foster respectful relationships among school-aged young men and boys	▪ Designed in part to respond to harmful online messaging ▪ Projects take different approaches but focus on building critical literacy & resilience ▪ Evaluation report due in 2026	DSS
Stop it at the Start (Phase 5) DSS Report Template	National campaign that directly targets online content shaping masculinities	▪ Educates parents / carers of young people about hidden disrespects online ▪ Includes multiple approaches at counter-messaging (Algorithm of Disrespect™, online content placement)	DSS
Unlocking the Prevention Potential: Report of the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches Unlocking the Prevention Potential	Provides independent advice on opportunities to expand and strengthen prevention efforts across all forms of VAW&C	▪ Highlights latest evidence and programs that attempt to tackle the influence of online content / masculinities ▪	DSS / OfW
Young Men Online Young men online eSafety Commissioner	Research series that examines the complexities of online experiences for young men (Part 1) and practitioners (Part 2)	▪ Highlights absence of healthy, positive role models for boys & young men ▪ Summarises practitioner advice on how to provide safe, positive online experiences related to manhood and masculinities	eSafety
Online Safety Act 2021	Provides online regulatory powers, including in relation to digital environments where harmful masculinities are promoted	▪ Schemes related to masculinities, incl: Adult Cyber Abuse, Image-Based Abuse, Cyberbullying, Online Content, and Basic Online Safety Expectations	eSafety
Age assurance technology pilot	Reduce children's access to pornography and other age-restricted online services.	▪ Prevention of harmful attitudes toward sex, consent and relationships.	eSafety
Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024	Legislates steps platforms must take to prevent Australians under 16 from having accounts	▪ Reduces exposure to harmful content during susceptible period of identity formation	eSafety

Consent and Respectful Relationships Education (CRRE) Consent and Respectful Relationships Education (CRRE) - Department of Education, Australian Government	Funding to S&T to support delivery of evidence-based, age-appropriate consent and respectful relationships education in primary and secondary schools.	- Supports young people develop critical literacy about gender norms, consent and respect during online experiences - Addresses the drivers of gender-based violence and the rise in misogynistic and sexist ideas, attitudes and behaviours	Education
Criminal Code Amendment (Deepfake Sexual Material) Act 2024	Creates federal offences targeting the non-consensual sharing of sexually explicit material, including material created or altered using generative AI (deepfakes)	- Directly addresses sexual abuse - Attempts to address sexual entitlement, objectification and control. ss views around	AGD
Privacy and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2024 (Doxxing offences)	Introduced new federal doxxing offences, including aggravated offences where groups are targeted based on protected attributes such as sex, sexuality or religion.	Provide accountability given doxxing is often used as a tool of intimidation and control in online misogynistic communities.	AGD

Government appointments addressing the needs of boys and men

- In 1973, the Australian Government appointed a Women's Advisor to the Prime Minister, the first such appointment by any government in the world
- In 1997, this title was elevated to the Minister for the Status of Women, as a standalone ministerial title.
- In 2010, the Australian Government released the National Men's Health Policy (DHDA, 2010), one of the world's first policies focussed on the needs of boys and men
- In 2025, the Australian Government appointed a Special Envoy for Men's Health (Dan Repacholi MP)
- In 2026, the Victorian Government created Australia's first cabinet-level Minister for Men and Boys (Paul Edbrooke MP)
- The Minister has stated that he will focus on "building a better future for Victorian boys and men: mentally healthy, emotionally capable, respectful in relationships, connected to community and getting support early – because that makes Victoria safer and stronger for everyone" (Cowburn, 2026)
- In 2026, the federal opposition appointed a Shadow Special Envoy for Men and Boys (Llew O'Brien MP)
- Other state governments have recently either appointed related shadow positions (e.g. NSW Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Men's Health (Liberal New South Wales, 2026)) or considering future Ministerial appointments (e.g. SA (Dowdell, 2026)).
- This follows similar international considerations in comparable countries, for example the UK (Uwazuruike, 2026) and Canada (Health Canada, 2026).

- Currently, there is no consensus on the areas of focus required of appointments specific to the needs of boys and men. However, areas proposed to date have included:
 - Support to end gender-based violence
 - Prevention and early detection of chronic disease
 - Men's mental health and suicide prevention
 - Better engagement with primary care
 - Health information and services tailored to men
 - Support for fathers and families.



Considerations for the HM Roundtable: focus area 3

Possible discussion points

- Providing evidence-informed approaches to policy outcomes
 - What are the best-fit approaches (e.g. HM, GTA, others) for various policy outcomes (e.g. preventing violence against women, shared care, fathering, men's body image, men's mental health & help seeking, online harms and radicalisation, social cohesion and inclusion, suicide prevention, family law and post-separation safety)?
- Supporting individual change with systems change
 - How should HM initiatives operate at policy, institutional, and community levels: What needs to change in rules/policy, organisations (schools, workplaces, services), and communities so HM programs are reinforced?
- Ministers for Boys and Men
 - Recent appointments across Australia and internationally have included ministerial appointments for boys and men. What would be the suggested areas of focus for a national portfolio working cooperatively with state portfolios?
- Digital environment as part of the gender ecosystem
 - How online platforms, algorithms and content shape gender norms – and what can realistically be influenced through policy, regulation or partnerships

Intended session outcome(s):

- A shared systems map of levers and responsibilities in relation to HM across portfolios/departments/agencies
- Practical plan for coordinated action that reduces duplication and strengthens gender-equitable outcomes.



Focus area 4: Communicating healthy masculinities to the public

Public communication can accelerate or hinder behaviour change. HM messaging must be clear, strengths-based, and accountable, with careful attention to audience segmentation and the current realities of the various online content ecosystems. This area would focus on linking communication around HM to tangible supports and integrated action across multiple portfolio areas.

Understanding the appeal of ‘manosphere’ and how to credibly respond

- Governments across the world are rapidly trying to respond to the growing influence of online masculinity influencers (the ‘manosphere’) across a range of policy areas.
- Increasingly, content and narratives that were originally restricted to the manosphere is blending into a range of online and other media outlets.
- Regular engagement with this type of content for boys and men can lead to increased risk of misogyny and other harms (eSafety Commissioner, 2024; Pfitzner et al., 2026; Wescott et al., 2024).
- Below are some evidence-informed themes for understanding and responding to the manosphere and their influence on boys, adolescent men (and, increasingly adult men), through a HM lens.

Understand why this content appeals – before trying to counter it

- A consistent finding across recent studies is that manosphere content appeals to boys and young men because it meets perceived unmet needs – not because the majority who engage with this content are misogynistic.
- eSafety’s Young Men Online research (2024/2025) found that harmful online content, creators and communities appeal to young men by offering validation, guidance, edginess and belonging at a time when they feel defensive, disenfranchised, uncertain, rebellious and lonely.
- Movember has recently produced a report (Fisher et al., 2025) on the manosphere that synthesises data from over 3,000 young men (aged 16–25 years) in the United States, United Kingdom and Australia. This report had some key findings on the appeal of the manosphere to young men, including:
 - Men and masculinity influencers appeal to young men as entertaining, motivating and inspiring. While most engaged with this content for entertainment, some acted on advice offered, reporting greater positive emotion as an outcome (i.e. felt motivated, happy or purposeful) than negative emotion (i.e. felt anxious or unhappy).
 - Young men who watched these influencers (relative to those who don’t) were more optimistic about their personal circumstances and the social circumstances of men in future. By contrast, these same young men were also more likely to report worse

mental health outcomes, a reduced willingness to prioritise their mental health, and higher rates of risky health behaviours (i.e. steroid use, exercising while injured).

Another recent literature review (McCashin, 2024) concludes that the appeal is driven by boys seeking connection, identity, purpose and status in a context of perceived social and economic insecurity.

Implication for policy: Any response must start by acknowledging the real pressures boys face (loneliness, rejection, economic insecurity, identity confusion) rather than dismissing their engagement as ignorance or moral failure.

Avoid single-influencer condemnation – address the ecosystem

- Research demonstrates that programs or interventions should avoid focusing on condemning individual influencers (McCashin, 2024). This approach tends to:
 - trigger defensiveness and backlash
 - miss the broader ecosystem of content, algorithms and communities
 - become quickly outdated as new influencers emerge.
- Some reports (Milne & Baker, 2025) have highlighted that while many boys and men may distance themselves from the views of specific influencers responding to social desirability cues, they may simultaneously demonstrate a continuum of support for manospheric content promoting sexist gender roles and exaggerated masculine ideals.
- Interventions need to go beyond condemning single influencers and instead situate manospheric masculine archetypes within the systemic subordination of women and queer identities on mainstream platforms.

Implication for policy: Design interventions that address the underlying norms, needs and algorithmic systems, not just named individuals.

Use ‘prebunking’/psychological inoculation, not just debunking

- Misinformation science literature increasingly favours prebunking (pre-emptive inoculation) over post-hoc debunking (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2025; van der Linden & Roozenbeek, 2024).
- Meta-analyses have highlighted that once people accept misinformation, corrections are often only partially effective.
- In contrast, psychological inoculation – exposing people to weakened doses of misleading argumentation techniques and building skills to recognise them – can provide durable resistance.

Implication for policy: Invest in media literacy and prebunking programs that teach boys to recognise manipulation techniques (emotional exploitation, false authority, algorithmic amplification) before they encounter manosphere content.



Use a network of trusted, proximate role models ('anti-Tate' figures)

- eSafety's Commissioner has recently explicitly called for 'himfluencers' – positive, diverse online role models who can offer young men connection, validation and guidance without the misogynistic packaging.
- The recent book *Masculinities and Mental Health in Young Men* points to the need for positive interpersonal connections (particularly with women) and critical introspection are the main pathways out of the manosphere (Wilson et al., 2024).
- Youth workers (or similar figures) have been identified as a powerful counter-figure to the manosphere. Offering what manfluencers offer – validation, guidance, shared experience, belonging – but in a relational, accountable and non-exploitative way, without possible consequences associated with parents or teachers (Brito et al., 2024; Morse, 2024).

Implication for policy: Fund and support credible, proximate role models (youth workers, coaches, teachers, community mentors, positive online creators) who can offer boys what manfluencers offer – validation, guidance, belonging – without the harm.

Build critical thinking, not moral panic

- For credible responses to the manosphere that resonates with boys and young men, evidence suggests avoid a lecturing (or 'moral panic') framing, but to instead focus on building boys' capacity for critical thinking, reflection and discernment (O'Rourke et al., 2024).
- The recent Monash / ANROWS guide for schools (*The Manosphere: Impacts for Young People, Teachers and Schools*) provides practical strategies for teachers to recognise, understand and respond to manosphere influence, including identifying "baiting" tactics used to derail lessons (Pfitzner et al., 2026).

Implication for policy: Design programs that position boys as capable critical thinkers, not passive recipients of correction. Use facilitated discussion, not lectures.

Address algorithms and platform accountability, not just individual attitudes

- Evidence suggests that individual-level interventions are insufficient without platform-level change. For example, eSafety's research (eSafety Commissioner, 2024, 2025) found that algorithms and recommender systems push harmful content onto young men who may not have sought it out, and that this algorithmic amplification is a key part of the problem.
- Policy advice (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2025) has highlighted those other online environments (e.g. online gaming environments) under-addressed space where harmful masculinity norms are normalised and where intervention opportunities exist.

Implication for policy: Combine individual-level programs with platform accountability measures (Basic Online Safety Expectations, age assurance, safety-by-design requirements, algorithmic transparency).



Take a ‘good faith’ approach to engagement

- An earlier evidence review conducted by Women and Gender Equality Canada (*The Shift: Calling in Men Project*) (Pascoe et al., 2022) identified that ‘calling in’ (good faith, relational, developmental) with ‘calling out’ (public shaming, accusatory, punitive) is more effective for sustained behaviour change among boys and young men.
- In the book, *Masculinities and Mental Health in Young Men* (Seidler, 2024) the authors argue that current interventions aimed at young boys and men engaging with the manosphere leave respondents feeling all young men within manosphere spaces are inherently violent. They call instead for a ‘good faith’ approach that engages young men without suspicion and distrust, recognising that many are seeking help – just not through conventional pathways.
- This aligns with the broader healthy masculinities evidence base, which emphasises that strengths-based, non-shaming approaches are more effective at engaging boys and men than deficit-focused or blame-oriented framings.

Implication for policy: Frame programs around what boys can become (connected, respected, purposeful, caring), not only around what they should avoid (misogyny, violence, extremism).


Table 8: Common masculinity-based narratives and possible counter-narratives using a HM framework

Message / Narrative	HM counter-message	Target audience	Policy area	Reference / Example
Gender equality and fairness				
Gender equality has gone too far.	Gender equality isn't zero sum. It provides opportunities for all to thrive in the right circumstances – including men and boys.	Broader community; men resistant to gender equality messaging; media commentators	Office for Women; DSS	NCAS 2021 (ANROWS); VicHealth Framing Masculinity Message Guide (Common Cause Australia, 2020)
Men are now the real victims of discrimination.	Men and boys face genuine pressures, but these are best addressed by expanding support – not by rolling back equality for others.	Broader community; men experiencing disadvantage; online audiences	Office for Women; DHDA; DSS	NCAS 2021 (ANROWS); Flood (2024) Promoting positive and healthy masculinities
Feminism is anti-men.	Feminism has driven reforms that also benefit men: parental leave, mental health awareness, flexible work, and reduced stigma around care and vulnerability.	Young men; online audiences; workplaces	Office for Women; DSS	Flood (2024); hooks (2004) The Will to Change; Pease (2019) Facing Patriarchy
There's a war on boys/a war on men.	Boys and men deserve investment and attention. Framing this as a 'war' creates division rather than solutions. We can support boys and men without undermining gender equality.	Parents and carers; media; policy makers	Office for Women; Education; DSS	VicHealth Framing Masculinity Message Guide (2020); Keddie (2024)
Identity, emotion and vulnerability				
Real men don't cry/show weakness.	Emotional awareness is a strength, not a weakness. Men who can express how they feel build stronger relationships and are better equipped to handle life's inevitable challenges.	Boys; adolescent men; young men; fathers	DHDA; Education; DSS	Seidler et al. (2016) The role of masculinity in men's help-seeking; Man Box (Jesuit Social Services, 2018/2024)
Man up.	Telling someone to 'man up' shuts down the conversation when support is needed most. Courage includes being honest about what you're going through.	Boys; young men; workplaces; sport settings	DHDA; Education	Vandello & Bosson (2013) Hard Won and Easily Lost; O'Neil (2015) Men's Gender Role Conflict



Asking for help is a sign of failure.	Seeking help is a sign of self-respect, responsibility, and strength – for yourself and for the people who depend on you. Most men agree, even if they think others don't.	All male cohorts; health service users; fathers	DHDA; DSS	Seidler et al. (2016); Movember perception gap research (2024/2025); National Men's Health Strategy 2020–2030
Boys will be boys.	Boys are capable of empathy, respect and self-regulation. Expecting less of them sells them and creates problems for everyone.	Parents and carers; educators; broader community	Education; DSS; Office for Women	VicHealth Framing Masculinity Message Guide (2020); Our Watch, Change the Story (2021)
Men are naturally aggressive / competitive / dominant.	Aggression and dominance are learned responses, not biological destiny. Men show enormous diversity in how they relate to others – and most prefer connection over conflict.	Broader community; educators; service providers	DHDA; Education; Office for Women	Connell (1995/2005) Masculinities; Connell & Messerschmidt (2005)
Relationships, respect and consent				
Women say no when they mean yes.	Consent means a clear, freely given 'yes'. Assuming otherwise puts people at risk and undermines trust. All good relationships are built on honest communication.	Adolescent boys; young men; online audiences	Education; DSS; AGD	National Consent Campaign (DSS, 2024); CRRE (Dept of Education); Our Watch, Change the Story (2021)
Jealousy is a sign of love.	Jealousy is about control, not care. Love is about trust, respect and support.	Adolescent boys; young men; young women	Education; DSS	Our Watch, Change the Story (2021); National Plan 2022–2032 (DSS)
A man should be the head of the household.	Strong families are built on shared decision making, respect and partnership – not on one person's authority over another.	Fathers; broader community; culturally diverse communities	DSS; Office for Women; Home Affairs	NCAS 2021 (ANROWS); Working for Women (2024)
It's not violence if I didn't hit her.	There are many types of violence. Coercive control, intimidation, financial abuse and emotional manipulation are all forms of violence.	Broader community; perpetrators; service providers	DSS; AGD; Office for Women	National Plan 2022–2032 (DSS); state/territory coercive control reforms
She provoked me/pushed my buttons.	Violence is always a choice. Responsibility for harmful behaviour sits with the person who uses it, not the person it is directed at.	Perpetrators; men at risk; service providers	DSS; AGD	National Plan 2022–2032 (DSS); Our Watch, Change the Story (2021)
Online content, influencers and the manosphere				
Andrew Tate/[manfluencer] tells the truth about men.	Some online voices exploit men's real struggles (loneliness, rejection, purpose) to sell division, contempt and control. Better guidance exists – from people who actually want you to thrive.	Adolescent boys; young men; parents and carers	eSafety; Education; DSS	eSafety, Young Men Online Part 1 (2024); eSafety, Young Men Online Part 2 (2025)



The 'red pill' shows you how the world really works.	'Red pill' content offers simple answers to complex problems, while isolating you from the people and relationships that actually matter. Connection, not contempt, leads to a better life.	Young men; online audiences	eSafety; Home Affairs; DSS	eSafety, Young Men Online (2024/2025); Ging (2019) Alphas, Betas, and Incels
Women only want high-value men/hypergamy is real.	Reducing relationships to transactions dehumanises everyone. Most people want connection, honesty and mutual respect.	Young men; online audiences	eSafety; Education	eSafety, Young Men Online (2024/2025); Hoffman et al. (2020) on incel ideology
Algorithms just show you what you want to see.	Algorithms are designed to maximise engagement, not wellbeing. They amplify extreme content because outrage keeps you scrolling – not because it reflects reality.	Young men; parents and carers; broader community	eSafety; Education	eSafety, Young Men Online (2024/2025); Stop it at the Start Phase 5 — Algorithm of Disrespect (DSS, 2024)
It's just jokes/edgy humour/not serious.	Repeated exposure to dehumanising content shifts what feels normal. Research shows it changes how young men view women, relationships and themselves – even when framed as humour.	Adolescent boys; young men; parents and carers; educators	eSafety; Education; DSS	eSafety, Young Men Online (2024/2025); NCAS 2021 (ANROWS)
Mental health, help seeking and wellbeing				
Therapy is for weak people.	Therapy is a practical tool for dealing with real problems. Using it is no different from seeing a physio for a physical injury – it's about function, not weakness.	All male cohorts; workplaces; sport settings	DHDA	Seidler et al. (2016); National Men's Health Strategy 2020–2030 (DoHDA)
Men's mental health isn't taken seriously.	Men's mental health deserves more investment and attention. The solution is better services and reduced stigma – not blaming others for the gap.	Broader community; young men; policymakers	DHDA; DSS	National Men's Health Strategy 2020–2030; ABS Causes of Death 2023; National Suicide Prevention Strategy
I should be able to handle this on my own.	Self-reliance is useful, but no one succeeds entirely alone. Knowing when to reach out is a skill, not a shortcoming.	All male cohorts; fathers; workplaces	DHDA; DSS	Movember perception gap research (2024/2025); Man Box (Jesuit Social Services, 2018/2024)
Talking about feelings doesn't help.	Evidence consistently shows that naming and processing emotions improves mental health, relationships and decision-making. It's actually one of the most effective things men can do for their wellbeing.	Boys; young men; fathers; older men	DHDA; Education	Seidler et al. (2016); Rice et al. (2022) Lancet Public Health; beyondblue
Fatherhood, care and work				



A man's primary role is to provide financially.	Providing matters – but so does being present, emotionally available and involved in care. Children benefit most when fathers are engaged across all aspects of family life.	Fathers; workplaces; broader community	DSS; Office for Women; DHDA	Lamb (2010) The Role of the Father; Fletcher (various); Working for Women (2024)
Hands-on fathering is 'babysitting'.	Fathers don't babysit their own children. Active fathering is parenting – and it benefits children, partners and men themselves.	Fathers; workplaces; broader community	DSS; Office for Women	Doucet (2006) Do Men Mother?; Elliott (2016) Caring Masculinities
Taking parental leave will hurt my career.	Workplaces that support men's care roles attract and retain better talent. Normalising leave for fathers is good for families, good for business and good for society.	Fathers; workplaces; employers	Office for Women; DSS	Brandth & Kvande (2018); WGEA data; Working for Women (2024)
Care work isn't real work.	Care is essential, skilled and valuable. Societies that undervalue care pay the price in poorer health, weaker families and greater inequality.	Broader community; policymakers; workplaces	Office for Women; DSS; DHDA	Working for Women (2024); Folbre (2012); ABS Time Use Survey
Violence, accountability and safety				
Not all men.	Most men are not violent. But violence against women is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men, and all men can play a role in changing that.	Broader community; young men; online audiences	DSS; Office for Women	Our Watch, Change the Story (2021); National Plan 2022–2032; NCAS 2021 (ANROWS)
Men experience violence too – why is the focus on women?	Men's experiences of violence matter and deserve attention. But the patterns, drivers and impacts of violence against women are distinct and require targeted prevention.	Broader community; policymakers; media	DSS; Office for Women; DHDA	ABS Personal Safety Survey 2021–22; Our Watch, Change the Story (2021)
False accusations are a bigger problem than actual violence.	Research consistently shows false reporting is rare. Focusing on it diverts attention from the scale and severity of violence experienced by women and children.	Broader community; online audiences; media	DSS; AGD; Office for Women	Lisak et al. (2010); ANROWS research; National Plan 2022–2032
What about men's rights in family law?	Family law should be fair and evidence-based. Using it as a grievance platform can distract from the safety of children and the wellbeing of all family members.	Fathers; broader community; online audiences	AGD; DSS	ALRC Family Law Review (2019); Family Law Act 1975 amendments
Diversity, inclusion and cultural safety				



This is just Western/white feminism being imposed on other cultures.	Gender equality takes different forms across cultures, but safety, respect and dignity are universal values. Culturally safe approaches work with communities, not against them.	Culturally diverse communities; settlement contexts; broader community	Home Affairs; Office for Women; DSS	Multicultural Framework Review (2024); Settlement services guidance (Home Affairs)
Gay/bi/trans men aren't 'real' men.	Manhood is not defined by sexuality or gender identity. Inclusion strengthens communities; exclusion harms everyone.	Adolescent boys; young men; broader community; LGBTIQ+ communities	DHDA; Education; Office for Women	Anderson (2009) Inclusive Masculinity; National LGBTIQ+ Health Strategy (draft)
Men with disability can't be 'real' men.	Strength, value and identity are not defined by physical capacity. Narrow definitions of masculinity harm men with disability and limit what all men are allowed to be.	Men with disability; broader community; service providers	DHDA; DSS	Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031; Shakespeare (2014)
Indigenous men are more violent/more of a problem.	Indigenous communities have been harmed by colonisation, policy failure and ongoing structural disadvantage. Strengths-based, community-led approaches support Indigenous men's wellbeing and cultural identity.	Broader community; policymakers; service providers	DSS; DHDA; Home Affairs	Closing the Gap; NT Emergency Response legacy literature; Fletcher (2025) on Indigenous fathering
The 'perception gap' (pluralistic ignorance)				
Most men think asking for help is weak.	Actually, most men privately support help-seeking — they just think other men don't. Taking steps to help yourself, can help others too.	All male cohorts; health services; workplaces	DHDA; DSS	November perception gap research (2024/2025); Seidler et al. (2016)
My mates would think less of me if I showed emotion.	Research shows most men want deeper friendships and more honest conversations – but assume their peers don't. When one person leads, others often follow.	Young men; adolescent boys; sport settings; workplaces	DHDA; Education; DSS	November perception gap research (2024/2025); Man Box (Jesuit Social Services, 2018/2024)
Everyone watches this stuff/talks like this.	Most young men do not endorse misogynistic content. But algorithms and loud minorities can make it seem normal. Making the silent majority visible is a powerful lever for change.	Adolescent boys; young men; parents and carers	eSafety; Education; DSS	eSafety, Young Men Online (2024/2025); Berkowitz (2010) social norms approach
Systemic and structural framing				
This is about individual bad men, not systems.	Individual behaviour matters, but it is shaped by norms, institutions, workplaces, media and policy. Sustainable change requires action at every level.	Policy makers; service providers; broader community	All portfolios	Our Watch, Change the Story (2021); Connell (1995/2005); National Plan 2022–2032



You can't legislate attitudes.	▪ Laws and regulations set expectations and signal what society values. Combined with education, services and community action, they help shift norms over time.	▪ Policy makers; broader community; media	AGD; Office for Women; DSS	Respect@Work (2020); Online Safety Act 2021; National Plan 2022–2032
Programs like this don't work.	▪ Evidence shows that well-designed, well-implemented programs can shift attitudes and behaviours – especially when they are multi-level, sustained and properly evaluated.	▪ Policy makers; funders; service providers; media	All portfolios	Flood (2024); Ruane-McAteer et al. (2020); VicHealth evaluations (2022)



Considerations for the HM Roundtable: focus area 4

Possible discussion points

- Narrative precision: What works, what doesn't, and for whom?
 - Communicating to the public around masculinities / healthy masculinities requires a trade-off between potential risks & benefits (e.g. strength-based messaging vs masculinity essentialism) across multiple policy areas and life stages. Messages can help, but can also reinforce stereotypes (e.g. suggesting 'men are just like this'). We need to balance benefits with these risks across different audiences and ages.
- The perception gap: Addressing the social environment to encourage individual behaviour change. People may want to change but think everyone else expects the old norm; how do we shift what people believe is 'normal' in their community?
 - Pluralistic ignorance (the phenomenon where individuals privately reject a norm but incorrectly assume most others accept it) may be a key barrier to the gap between changing norms and related behaviours. That is, even if many people disagree with a harmful norm, they may stay silent because they think most others support it – so behaviour doesn't change.
- Responding to online discourse around HM: Opportunities, challenges, and credible alternatives.

Intended session outcome(s):

- HM message framing that matches the right message to the right audience, setting, goal and channel—so messaging supports program delivery.



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