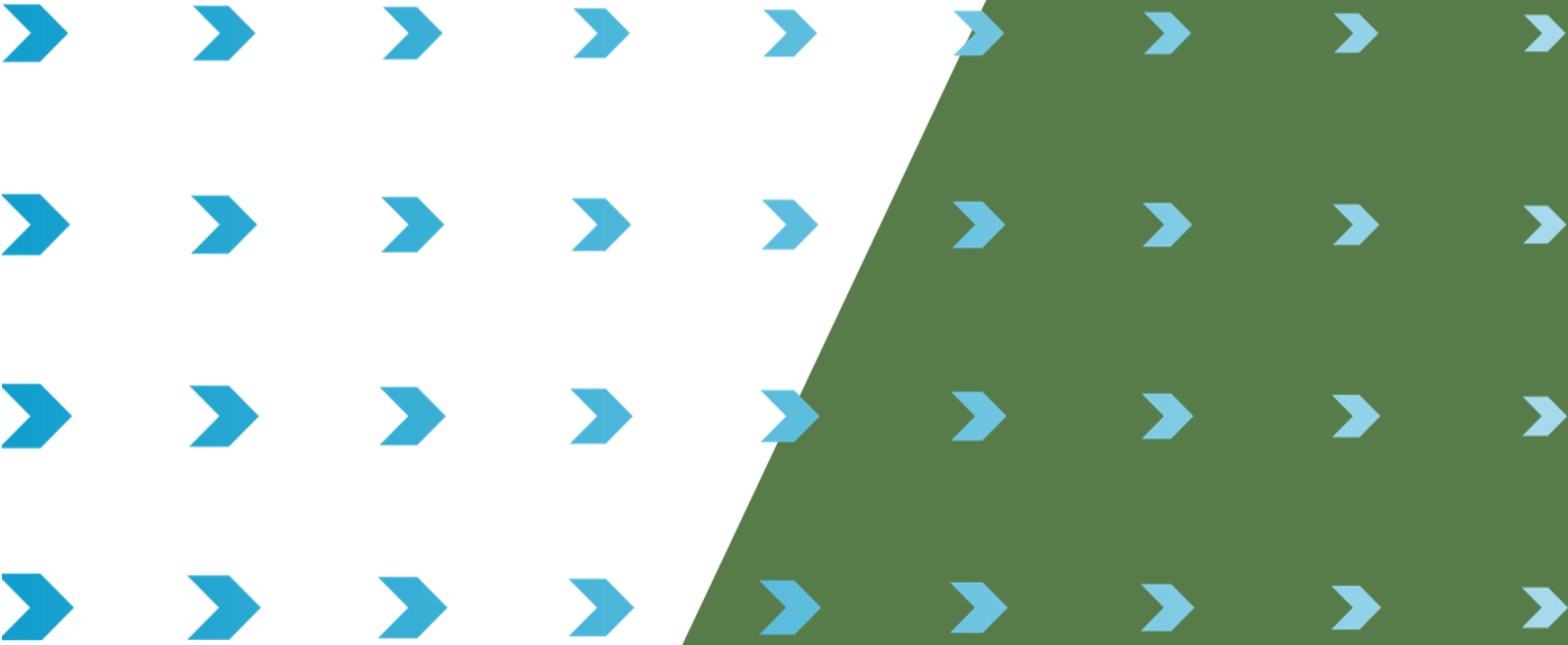


BUDGET SUBMISSION
2024



Men's Development Network

Better Lives for Men, Better Lives for All



Men's Development
Network Submission 2024
to the Minister of Finance
and the Minister of Health



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*This policy (National Men's Health Policy) seeks to **promote men's health in synergy with other policies and services within and beyond the health sector.** Such an approach calls for the strengthening of **alliances and partnerships** with the community and voluntary sectors, as well as with the statutory sector in areas such as education, employment, environment and social affairs. The provision of appropriate structures for men's health policy at a national level can provide a strong mandate for this to occur and to ensure sustainable mechanisms are in place to coordinate the work of different agencies to avoid overlap and duplication.*

– National Men's Health Policy, 2008.ⁱ

Introduction to Men's Development Network

As a national organisation which advocates for transforming masculinities, a feminist and intersectional approach to advance the changing of norms and behaviours and to promote health and wellbeing among men and boys, gender equality, and ending gender-based violence.ⁱⁱ Men's Development Network welcome the opportunity to provide a written budget submission to Government, the Minister for Finance, and the Minister for Health for consideration in the formulation of Budget 2024.

This written submission is informed by three key features:

- Our organisation's 26 years of practice in engaging with men and boys across Ireland in relation to their health and wellbeing,ⁱⁱⁱ their social, emotional, and interpersonal development^{iv} and our client support programmes for male perpetrators^v and victims/survivors^{vi} of domestic violence.
- Our experience as Coordinating and Managing Partner of Engage National Men's Health Training Programme.^{vii}
- Men's Development Network is an associate member of Global Action on Men's Health (GAMH)^{viii} and is Ireland's only member-organisation within MenEngage Alliance International.^{ix} We also serve on the Steering Committee of MenEngage Alliance Europe^x and have close relationships with global gender equality institutes such as Equimundo Center for Masculinities and Social Justice.^{xi} As a result, Men's Development Network bring practical knowledge of the national and international best practices for engaging with men and boys in relation to their health and wellbeing through a transforming masculinities approach which is strengths and evidence-based.

The Men's Development Network was established in 1997 in the southeast of Ireland by a group of men supporting each other to be the best fathers and partners possible. This initial group of men grew in their awareness of how the system of patriarchy impacted negatively on them, their partners, and families. In its initial years in existence, the network ran several projects working with men who were at risk of or experiencing marginalisation, in the most marginalised communities. During this time the network and its participants co-created and developed its own methodology of engaging men that has influenced the delivery and development of all its programmes and practices.

These engagements with men also played a significant role in informing the first Men's Health Policy in the world, with a strong emphasis on a social determinants model of men's health. From these early roots, the organisation has grown significantly. Our headquarters is situated in Waterford City, with a core staff of 29 and a further 22 sub-contracted staff working on all our programmes.

As an organisation we have five core values that, when adhered to, create the conditions for individuals to thrive and grow and for societies to adapt and change for the betterment of all. These values of Equality, Non-judgmentalism, Partnership, Professionalism and Love underpin all our work and ensure that the principles of tolerance, respect and dignity are cornerstones of our non-adversarial approach. We see our work within a transformative framework, that aims to create positive environments for reflection, analysis, leading eventually to action, whether this is as individuals or as a society.

The foundations and structures to transform to a more equal society exist. The next step we feel is the transformation of hearts and minds. The rationale and evidence are now in place to positively engage men and boys in becoming the catalyst and agents of change. This is only one piece to the puzzle but a significant piece nonetheless in creating the cultural shifts that engage the silent majority of men and boys in becoming their most authentic selves.

Acknowledging the Role of Feminism and Women's Rights Movement in Applying Gender Lenses to Health Policy and Practice

Organisationally, Men's Development Network acknowledge the leadership shown by women in creating a more equal society. Within both an Irish and global context, feminism and the women's health movement have been powerful drivers in health policy linking gender norms to sex differences in health and wellbeing, as well as advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights. Without the contribution of the feminist and women's rights movement along with individual female champions, it is questionable whether men's health policy and practice would be at its current state of development.

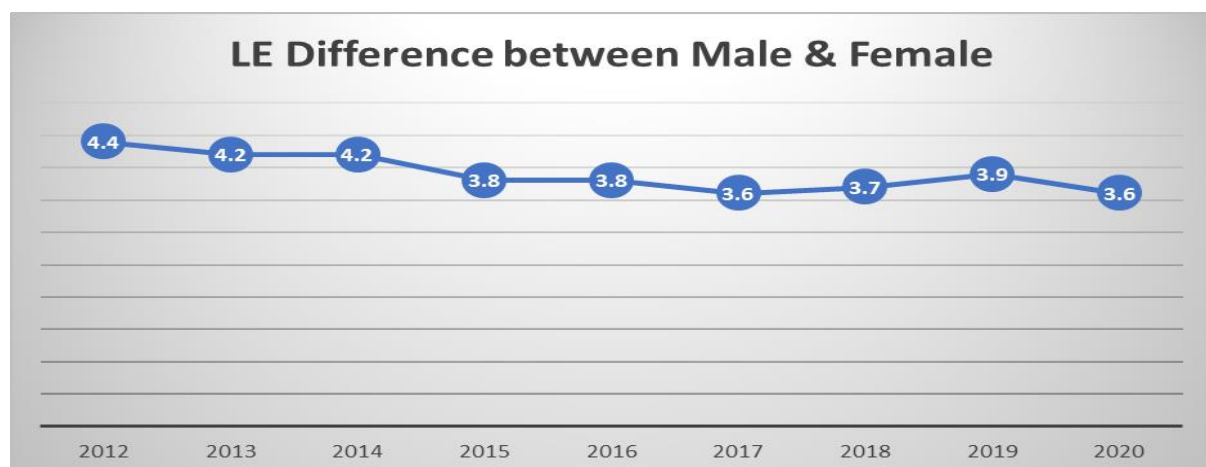
Over the past twenty-six years, Men's Development Network have worked with commitment to develop partnerships and collaborations with the women's rights and feminist movement and to be accountable as an organisation in areas of policy programmes and practice.

We aim as a men's development organisation to be viewed as strong allies and supporters of the quest for an end to health inequalities. We welcome and endorse the recently published Women's Health Action Plan 2022-23, as well as any subsequent national policies or action plans. This budgetary submission aims to ringfence a budgetary allocation for men's health and wellbeing, separate entirely from the vital resources allocated to support women's health and wellbeing in Budget 2024.

Some Statistics: The Case for Men's Health

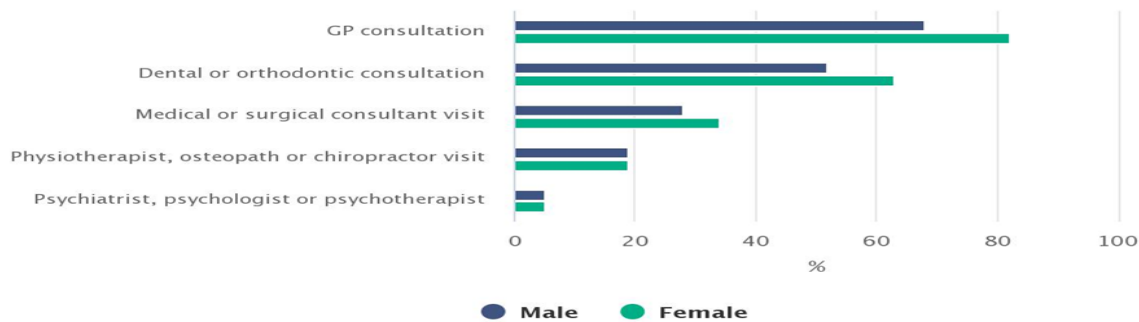
Data on factors such as health and life expectancy are complex owing to the larger number of factors that must be included in any consideration. There are however several social determinants of health and life expectancy which hold true across data sets with the most prescient of these being that of gender. Put simply, men live shorter lives than women.

Eurostat data from 2020 places female life expectancy at 84.4 years and the male figure at 80.8 years. The good news however is that male life expectancy is rising and had been on an almost unbroken upwards trajectory up until 2020. Overall life expectancy (LE) is increasing yet the rate of increase is higher for men which means the gap between female and male life expectancy is shortening. This is at least partially owing to the focus on men's health and wellbeing as seen in the HI-M strategy, yet there are still improvements which can be made and years of life which can be extended.



Men are far less likely than women to visit a health professional. The most recent Irish Health survey from 2019 tells us that men (68%) are less likely than women (82%) to have visited a health professional in the previous 12 months.

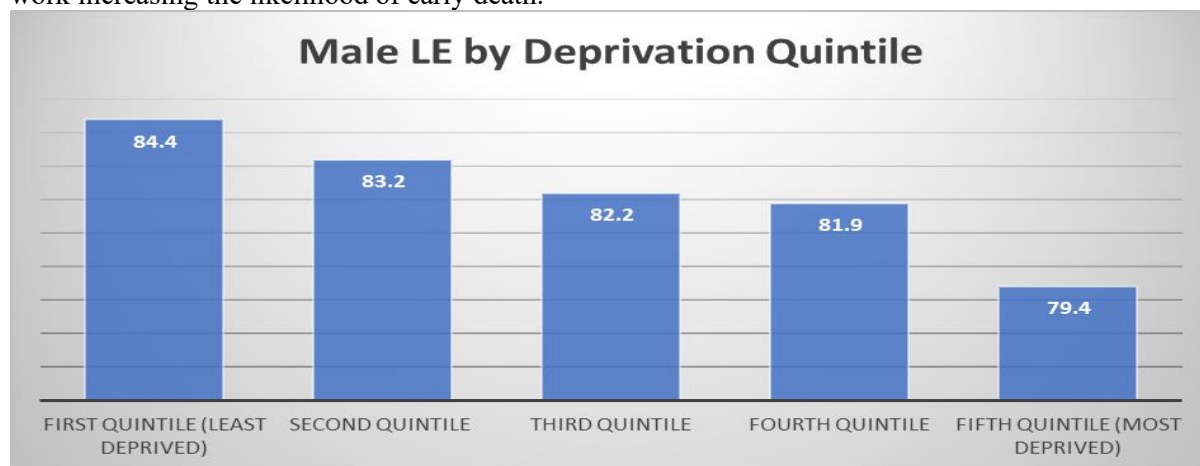
Figure 3.1 Persons aged 15 years and over that visited health professionals within last 12 months by sex, 2019



Source: CSO Ireland
Highcharts.com

Men are overwhelmingly more likely to be counted among statistics for suicide. The most recent figures from the National Suicide Research Foundation tell us that men accounted for 73% of suicides in 2020. Figures from the Irish Cancer Society tell us that men (13,027) are more likely than women (11,299) to be diagnosed with invasive cancer. Incidences of mental health crisis amongst men have increased, and although the rate of suicide has recently decreased the percentage of men has increased. As men are not presenting early to GP's early detention and intervention amongst men regarding cancer has not improved.

While gender is a highly influential factor in health outcomes it is still one factor among many. A focus on gender potentially risks collapsing the highly diverse categories of masculine and feminine into broad church categorisations. This would fail to account for the diversity *within* groups of men and women and in effect treat all men the same. This would fail to account for the myriad differences within gender categories such as social class, ethnicity, occupation and housing status among others. Class is a strongly determinative factor in life expectancy and health. In ROI in 2016-17, male life expectancy at birth in the most deprived areas was 79.4 years, compared with 84.4 years in the most affluent areas. The wealthiest people live an extra 5 years on average than people from the most deprived areas in the country and were also less likely to develop cancer. Standardised mortality rates are also higher amongst this cohort with markers such as no educational attainment beyond primary school and doing 'unskilled' work increasing the likelihood of early death.



Budget 2024: An Inflection Point for Men's Health and Wellbeing

Ireland is now at an inflection point in relation to men's health and wellbeing with the ambition or realisation of intersectoral and interdepartmental approaches yet to materialise to its fullest potential. A national budget, due to its whole of Government nature and whole of society impact is an appropriate place to make the case for dedicated funds to support good health and wellbeing outcomes for men and also to encourage further development of cross-departmental engagements in this area of health policy and practice.

Furthermore, given that there have been three General Elections and seven Ministers for Health since the adoption of the original National Men's Health Policy in 2008, it is a valuable opportunity for Government to re-emphasise commitment and political will for improved health and wellbeing opportunities for men and boys in Budget 2024.

For the benefit of all men women, persons beyond the binary and children, Men's Development Network make this submission knowing that healthier and happier men who can be their most authentic selves is for the benefit of us all within society.

Policy Platform

The significance of Ireland being the first country in the world to adopt a Men's Health Policy and its integration into the Healthy Ireland framework through the Healthy Ireland- Men (HI-M) Action Plan 2017-2021 cannot be understated. These policies and action plans have provided a structural framework for advancements in outcomes for men's health since 2008. There have been advances such as the increase in life expectancy (MHFI report card) and the change in paternity supports for men, but stubbornly, other outcomes remain static or have gone backwards.

Below are outlined a number of policies that provide a policy framework in which our proposal sits.

(1) The National Men's Health Policy

The National Men's Health Policy 2008-2013, has theoretical and philosophical principles which include (a) adopting a gendered and gender-relations approach men's health (b) adopting a social determinants approach (c) adopting a community development approach (d) adopting an intersectoral and interdepartmental approach (e) tackling men's health from a strengths-based approach and (f) supporting men to be more active agents for their own health.^{xii} These principles remain fundamental to the design and delivery of future men's health policies, practices and programmes into the future.

Critical enablers of successful health policies are the sustainable interdisciplinary partnerships and the model of training in relation to men's health in Ireland. Since and prior to the introduction of the National Men's Health Policy in 2008, key relationships have been developed between academia, the public health system, Government Departments, civil society organisations within the community and voluntary sector based on principles of dedication and commitment to the work, trust, teamwork, and mutual understanding.

A final key ingredient which has enabled success in promoting men's health and wellbeing over the years has been the steadfast commitment to a research and evidence-based approach to programme design, delivery, and evaluation. Evidence-based policy making is a good public policy practice and there has been a discernible shift towards an evidence-based approach to policy formulation in recent decades.^{xiii}

(2) Intergovernmental approach

Men's Development Network also recommend a broader intergovernmental approach to any future national men's health action plans. In developing and implementing targeted actions and interventions for improved health and wellbeing of subpopulations of men, Men's Development Network specifically recommend the inclusion of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth within future action plans. The desegregation of future action plans to include an intergovernmental and interdepartmental approach will lead to a more holistic, coordinated, and strategic action plan. The future action plan should also seek to develop in parallel with contemporary and inter-related health action plans set out as objective in the Programme for Government, such as the proposed implementation of a National Traveller Health Action Plan^{xiv} and the proposed Traveller and Roma Mental Health Action Plan.^{xv}

The process of health-policymaking has four key actors: the content, the actors responsible for policy implementation, the processes, and the context.^{xvi} Context refers to the political, social, and economic environment in which the actors work.^{xvii} The making of public policy is inherently political as it is the process by which governments translate their political visions into programmes and deliver actions to deliver outcomes.^{xviii} Since the adoption of the HI-M Action Plan, a General Election took place in early 2020^{xix} and formation of a new coalition Government committed to implementation of an agreed Programme for Government.^{xx} The Programme commits to promoting women's health^{xxi} and children's

health^{xxii} which are welcome and vital for the health and wellbeing of women and children across Ireland. The Programme also refers to Healthy Ireland as the national action plan to help people live healthier and longer lives.^{xxiii} However, the Programme makes no reference to the National Men’s Health Policy or the HI-M Action Plan. Men’s Development Network believe that it is vital as a good public policy practice for Government to express its level of commitment to men’s health and wellbeing policies and practices which apply a gender-lens and to adopt a Whole-of-Government Approach to future national policies and action plans.

(3) Men’s Health Policy Review

To establish Government commitment to the National Men’s Health Policy, Men’s Development Network believe it is an opportune time to revise and update the National Men’s Health Policy to match and meet the needs of present-day Irish society. It is almost a decade-and-a-half since the adoption of the National Men’s Health Policy and as per Ferris, *“as circumstances change, evidence for policymaking needs to be updated and re-evaluated.”*^{xxiv}

Positive Outcomes due to policy implementation

Ireland is experiencing an ageing population. Between 2009 and 2019, there was a 35.2% increase in the number of people in Ireland aged 65 or over. This means that there will be significant growth in the age cohort of the population of people with increased requirements for medical care. While gender is a highly influential factor in health outcomes, it is one factor among many. The National Men’s Health Policy recognises that men are not a homogenous group.^{xxv} There are a myriad of differences within gender categories such as social class, education, age, employment status, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, and housing status among others.^{xxvi}

The social determinants and intersectional approach to men’s health is a vital component in addressing these shortfalls. The social conditioning and traditional norms of masculinity need to be positively addressed with men and boys. This is not just about raising awareness; it also requires a change in attitude amongst men and boys regarding their health and wellbeing. For attitudes to change the approach needs to be fully integrated into learning systems within the home, work, school, and leisure.

Budget Request

Men’s Development Network wishes to propose to Government, the Minister for Finance, and the Minister for Health that a specific Men’s Health Fund be put on place for the next five years. The fund would be to the value of €4.5 m/year and its purpose would be to support the implementation of existing policies outlined above, support and improve on the positive advances since the adoption of the Men’s Health Policy in 2008 and implement strategies that address the gaps in provision.

A small intergovernmental taskforce should be established to prioritise the key areas for investment over this 5-year period and play a role in overseeing its implementation in partnership with state agencies and NGO’s.

Item	Description	Amount/year
1.	Taskforce support	€70,000
2.	Policy Review	€100,000
3.	Support implementation of HI-M action plan (yet to be published)	€2,630,000
4.	Support Front- Line service training	€250,000
5.	Public awareness programme	€1,000,000
6.	Youth engagement programme	€450,000
	Total	€4,500,000

Equality Budgeting

The National Men’s Health Policy 2008-2013 recognised that *“the burden of ill-health and mortality is borne, in particular, by men from lower socio-economic groups”*.^{xxvii} In line with the social determinants approach, the Policy recognised that *“social and economic factors, including poverty, are key*

determinants of the health status of men... By recognising diversity within men, this policy acknowledges the right of all men in Ireland to the best possible health, irrespective of social, cultural, political, and ethnic differences”.^{xxviii}

The human right to health is a universal right recognised as essential in ensuring an adequate standard of living through instruments of Customary International Human Rights Law^{xxix} and binding treaties.^{xxx} However, in applying a human rights-based approach to the recognition and realisation of this right, a substantive equality framework is required given that it:

- (1) Seeks to redress disadvantage
- (2) Counters prejudice, stigma, stereotyping, humiliation, and violence based on a protected characteristic
- (3) Enhances voice and participation – countering social and political exclusion
- (4) Accommodates difference and achieves structural change.^{xxxi}

As a method to promoting substantive equality in promoting men’s health and wellbeing, Men’s Development Network urge adoption of Equality Budgeting within all budgetary allocations which apply a gender lens to health and wellbeing in Budget 2024 to advance substantive equality in realisation of the right to health. The Equality Budgeting model ringfences funding for cohorts of men most at risk of/experiencing marginalisation, as recognised in the National Men’s Health Policy.^{xxxii}

Equality Budgeting is a substantive equality measure and human rights-based approach to supporting realisation of the Right to Health. In the words of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: *“The Right to Health imposes three types or levels of obligations on states... the obligations to respect, protect and fulfil. In turn, the obligation to fulfil contains obligations to facilitate, provide and promote”.*^{xxxiii}

“Equality Budgeting’ involves providing greater information on the likely impact of budgetary measures across a range of areas such as income, health, and education, and how outcomes differ across gender, age, ethnicity and so on. Equality Budgeting helps policy-makers to better anticipate potential impacts in the budgetary process, thereby enhancing the government’s decision-making framework.”^{xxxiv}

Following successful pilot programmes, Equality Budgeting has expanded within Government since 2019, two years after the adoption of the HI-M Action Plan 2017-2021. The OECD Scan on Ireland’s Equality Budgeting found that it was a relatively successful measure^{xxxv} which can be improved by moving beyond performance budgeting and by linking with other robust policy tools such as expanding *ex-ante* poverty proofing policies.^{xxxvi} These measures are therefore complementary to the National Men’s Health Policy’s alignment with strategies on social inclusion that target poverty reduction in Ireland and seek to tackle health inequalities.^{xxxvii}

The development of a National Men’s Health Policy is to be heralded for its innovation and providing sound foundations upon which to base initiatives supporting men’s health and wellbeing. However, further innovation is needed. The Department of Health is represented on Government’s Equality Budgeting Interdepartmental Network and commits to implementing Equality Budgeting within their policies.^{xxxviii} Men’s Development Network recommend the introduction of an equality budget embedded within future men’s health action plans to more adequately respect, protect and fulfil the health and wellbeing of the diversity of masculinities in Irish society.

ⁱ National Men’s Health Policy 2008-2013’ (Department of Health, 2008)

ⁱⁱ For further information, see: <<https://mensnetwork.ie>>

ⁱⁱⁱ Men’s Development Network is the Managing and Coordination Partner of the Engage National Men’s Health

^{iv} Training Programme. See: <<https://mensnetwork.ie/mens-health/>> and <<https://engagetraining.ie>>.

^v For information on our developmental methodologies for engaging with men and boys and current national programmes for men, see: <<https://mensnetwork.ie/development-programme>>.

^{vi} The MEND Programme works with male perpetrators of domestic violence in supporting men to end their violent or abusive behaviour and become non-violent and respectful within their intimate partner relationships. MEND operates across 8 counties in Ireland and also delivers the national CHOICES Programme. See: <<https://mensnetwork.ie/mend>>.

- vii The Male Advice Line is the national freephone service for male victims/survivors of domestic abuse and violence <<https://mensnetwork.ie/male-advice-line>>
- viii Global Action on Men's Health . <https://gamh.org/>
- ix MenEngage Alliance' <<https://menengage.org>>
- x 'Men's Development Network and MenEngage Alliance Europe' <<https://mensnetwork.ie/menengage>>
- xi 'Promundo: Healthy Masculinity, Gender Equality'^{xi} 'National Men's Health Policy 2008-2013' (Department of Health, 2008) at pages 19-24 <<https://www.mhfi.org/menshealthpolicy.pdf>> accessed May 24th, 2022.
- xii National Men's Health Policy 2008-2013' (Department of Health, 2008) at page 1 <<https://www.mhfi.org/menshealthpolicy.pdf>> accessed May 24th, 2022.
- xiii National Men's Health Policy 2008-2013' (Department of Health, 2008) at page 1 <<https://www.mhfi.org/menshealthpolicy.pdf>> accessed May 24th, 2022.
- xiv Programme for Government: Our Shared Future' at page 77 <<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7e05d-programme-for-government-our-shared-future/>> accessed May 29th, 2022.
- xv *ibid* at page 49.
- xvi Kent Buse, Nicholas Mays, and Gill Wait, 'Making Health Policy' (Open University Press, 2012) at page 8.
- xvii *ibid*
- xviii Tom Ferris, 'The Need for Good Public Policy Practices' (Public Affairs Ireland) < <https://pai.ie/1735-the-need-for-good-public-policy-practices/>> accessed May 29th, 2022
- xix 'President Signs Warrant for the Dissolution of the 32nd Dáil' (President of Ireland, 2020) <<https://president.ie/en/diary/details/president-signs-warrant-for-the-dissolution-of-the-32nd-dail>> accessed May 29th, 2022.
- xx 'Programme for Government: Our Shared Future' <<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7e05d-programme-for-government-our-shared-future/>> accessed May 29th, 2022
- xxi *ibid* at page 47.
- xxii Supranote 32 at page 48.
- xxiii Supranote 32 at page 48.
- xxiv Tom Ferris, 'Reflections on the Public Policy Process in Ireland' Administration, Vol.62, No.4, 2015 at page 98 <https://www.ipa.ie/_fileupload/Documents/PDF/publications/Reflections_onthe_PublicPolicy_Process.pdf> accessed May 29th, 2022.
- xxv 'National Men's Health Policy 2008-2013' (Department of Health, 2008) at page 19 <<https://www.mhfi.org/menshealthpolicy.pdf>> accessed May 24th, 2022.
- xxvi *ibid*
- xxvii National Men's Health Policy 2008-2013' (Department of Health, 2008) at page 2 <<https://www.mhfi.org/menshealthpolicy.pdf>> accessed May 24th, 2022.
- xxviii See Article 12(1), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UNGA, 1966): *'The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing, and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions*
- xxx See Article 12(1), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UNGA, 1966): *'The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing, and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions...'*
- xxxi Sandra Fredman, 'Substantive Equality Revisited' I.Con (2016), Vol.14 No.3 at page 727.
- xxxii For insight into the mutually supporting nature of Equality Budgeting and the social determinants approach in the National Men's Health Policy, see Annex 1.
- xxxiii CESCR General Comment 14, 'The Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health (Article 12)' (OHCHR, 2000) E/C.12/2000/4 at paragraph 33.
- xxxiv 'Equality Budgeting' (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2021) <<https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/aec432-equality-budgeting/>> accessed May 29th, 2022.
- xxxv 'OECD Scan: Equality Budgeting in Ireland' at page 3 <<https://www.oecd.org/gov/budgeting/equality-budgeting-in-ireland.pdf>> accessed May 28th, 2022.
- xxxvi *ibid* at page 4.
- xxxvii National Men's Health Policy 2008-2013' (Department of Health, 2008) at page 20 <<https://www.mhfi.org/menshealthpolicy.pdf>> accessed May 24th, 2022
- xxxviii Supranote 22.