

# Guidance for Effective Engagement with Men's Sheds





PHYSICAL  
ACTIVITY

SOCIAL  
HEALTH

SCREENING

MENTAL  
HEALTH

HEALTHY  
EATING

MENTAL  
HEALTH

HEALTHY  
EATING

SOCIAL  
HEALTH

PHYSICAL  
ACTIVITY

SCREENING

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# SECTION 1.

## ABOUT THIS GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

Research was specifically commissioned by the Irish Men's sheds Association through the National Centre for Men's Health, Institute of Technology Carlow to inform this guidance document and the findings sections 4-7, are based on this research. The Irish Men's sheds Association would like to acknowledge the authors Niamh Bergin and Noel Richardson, Institute of Technology Carlow. We would also like to acknowledge and thank the contribution of the men's sheds members and Shed Support Volunteers.

This guidance document is intended to support health promoting organisations and professionals to respond and engage effectively with men's sheds members through the IMSA's dedicated men's health initiative – Sheds for Life.

It can be used in a number of ways, including:

- to assist understanding and planning of what a men's shed is and what the ethos is
- to review or redesign an existing health programme, activity, service or intervention
- as part of the design of new services, policies or programmes targeting Men's sheds



## ABOUT THE IRISH MEN'S SHEDS ASSOCIATION



### OUR PURPOSE

The Irish Men's sheds Association exists to support an island-wide network of over 400 men's sheds. We are committed to supporting the development of men's sheds as community-focused, member-based organisations open to men of all ages and backgrounds, regardless of abilities or circumstances. Our vision is of an Ireland where every man has the opportunity to join a men's shed, and where men's sheds are integral parts of their communities, accessible to all. We aim to use men's sheds as a means of creating more stable, connected and cohesive communities. We also seek, through men's sheds, to improve the physical and mental wellbeing of Irish men to the greatest extent possible.

### SHEDS FOR LIFE MISSION & VISION

*Sheds for Life* – is a dedicated men's health initiative developed by the Irish Men's sheds Association and supported by the HSE Healthy Ireland Framework and Healthy Ireland Men 2017-2021 National Men's Health Action Plan.



## SHEDS FOR LIFE MISSION STATEMENT

*Sheds for Life* will provide a positive, holistic approach to men's health that targets aspects of physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing by building on the existing health enhancing, supportive environment of a men's shed.

This will be in line with the ethos of men's sheds, a grassroots approach is applied, placing the men's needs and views at the core of all associated health promotion activities.

All health-related programmes or activities run under the *Sheds for Life* umbrella will complement the existing activities or priorities of any shed involved. In line with the foundational ethos of men's sheds, participation is strictly voluntary, and all programmes must respect the culture and essence of the shed; namely the autonomy and independence of the shed environment.

As the overseeing body of *Sheds for Life*, the Irish Men's sheds Association closely monitors all the initiative's compatibility with the ethos and values of the men's sheds movement. The development and delivery of men's sheds programmes remain entirely within the domain of the Irish Men's sheds Association, as guided by the needs, wishes and feedback of its members. The IMSA also provides partner organisations with the requisite guidance to ensure that their involvement respects the autonomy, ethos and culture of the individual shed member, shed and the wider movement.



## SHEDS FOR LIFE VISION

Our vision is a future where all men's sheds members can enjoy physical and mental health and wellbeing to their full potential.

**BETTER HEALTH STARTS RIGHT HERE**

Sheds for Life is a new male health initiative from the Irish Men's Sheds Association. To find out how your shed can get involved, visit: [www.menssheds.ie/shedsforlife](http://www.menssheds.ie/shedsforlife)

## WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Key to the effective implementation of the *Sheds for Life* initiative is a collaborative approach between the Irish Men's sheds Association (IMSA) and a range of other health-related partner organisations across Ireland, in a wide variety of projects and initiatives.

IMSA will seek to continue to build and maintain diverse, mutually beneficial partnerships with like-minded organisations without compromising the key objectives or independence of the Association.

IMSA will seek partners whose goals, values and actions promote and/or enable men to look after their physical and mental wellbeing.

IMSA will endeavour to instil the importance of designing and tailoring programmes, initiatives and resources to respect the culture and ethos of the men's shed setting as well as the health needs of the men's sheds members. IMSA will support organisations to create the right conditions for new and productive relationships with men's sheds and their members.

### Principles of Sheds for Life Partnerships

The Irish Men's sheds Association's approach towards work with partner organisations under the *Sheds for Life* – men's health and wellbeing initiative is based on the following principles:

- Partnerships are based on a shared vision of improving men's health in Ireland

- Partnerships are based on alignment with IMSA and men's sheds ethos, values and shared goals
- Partnerships are based on an agreed strategy
- Partnerships are based on mutual accountability and trust
- Partnerships are based on a mutual commitment to making sustainable changes in men's health
- Partnerships are based on realistic goals and objectives
- Partnerships are based on establishing clear roles and responsibilities
- Partnerships are adaptable to change where required, as agreed by the respective parties
- Partnerships agree to a shed-led approach through consultation, feedback and participatory research
- Partnerships are founded on a basis of shared learning

While partnership may exist at an all island, national or local level the same principles should apply to ensure a consistent approach across the board for all organisations wishing to work with men's sheds. Partners who operate at a national level with a regional or county sub branch/ operation should ensure the same principles and guidelines are issued and followed at all levels on which the partnership operates.

## SECTION 2.

### WHAT IS A MEN'S SHED?

A Men's shed is a community-based organisation open to all men regardless of age or background. Men's sheds are grassroots, member-focused spaces which offer men a pressure-free environment in which to share skills, make new friends and connect with their communities. The company of other like-minded men, comradery and banter are placed at the heart of every men's shed.

One of the primary objectives of Men's sheds is to advance the health and wellbeing of the participating men.

Members of men's shed work on many different projects, from woodwork to vegetable-growing to singing in choirs. However, each member is free to participate in his own way and at his own pace – even if all he wants to do is have a chat and a cup of tea. All men are welcome.



#### What a men's shed is not

- It is not a health service or programme, but men's health and wellbeing may improve
- It is not a formal training programme, but men may gain new knowledge and skills
- It is not a service for men, but activities organised by men
- It is not a sports club, but men could play sports
- It is not an information service, but men can ask for information they need
- It is not a referral service, but men can be recommended to attend

#### What happens in a men's shed?

Everything and anything! The shed's activities are entirely decided by the men themselves – there's no obligation to take part in anything unless you want to. Typical activities include:

- Woodwork/carpentry
- Arts & crafts
- Social outings and excursions
- Model-making
- Talks and workshops
- Participating in community events (e.g. Tidy Towns, parades etc).
- Health & wellbeing programmes
- Walking groups
- Choral singing
- Bee keeping

## SECTION 3.

### THE SHED AS A SETTING FOR HEALTH VERSUS A HEALTH SERVICE/SETTING



In recent years there has been a growing focus on the issue of men's health – both physical and mental – in Ireland. Men continue to be at greater risk of a range of diseases and conditions than women, and their life expectancy remains notably shorter – by as much as five years. Men's sheds are already at the forefront of improving men's health and wellbeing in Ireland.

Men's sheds have increasingly been recognised as an alternative space supporting the health and wellbeing of Irish men (Department of Health & Children, 2009), and a setting to engage men with holistic health promotion (Cordier & Wilson; 2014; Misan & Sargent, 2009). Very few men attend sheds specifically for health reasons. But a comprehensive survey on men's sheds in Ireland have revealed; 90% of Irish shedders believe that attending a shed has improved their health and wellbeing (Carragher, 2013).

Sheds provide an environment - different from the workplace, the home and the pub - where men can simply be themselves, where there are no expectations or social pressures. Lifting those burdens opens the door to better; physical, mental and social wellbeing. Men's sheds are not health services - they're not typical clinical or therapeutic settings but they are an inherently health promoting environment. The shed provides opportunities for peer support, group work and bidirectional learning, while also providing an environment which allows an openness in discussion on topics such as health, which men may feel unable to engage with in other settings (MacKensie et al., 2017; Milligan et al., 2013). The importance of striking a balance between an organisations health agenda and respecting the grass roots nature and ethos of a shed is key to effectively engaging with men's shed members. Health and wellbeing is intrinsically part of the sheds and is perceived as present without the men even thinking about it.

## SECTION 4.

### MEN 'DOING' HEALTH



Research carried out by the Institute of Technology Carlow among men's sheds members to inform this document explored the mediating factors of how men in the sheds 'do' health (Bergin & Richardson, 2017). Of key note was the men's openness and eagerness to engage with health initiatives specifically in the shed environment. The informal environment of the shed was viewed as a crucial component for facilitating men to act on their health as a shed is seen as less threatening than traditional health settings. It was also perceived by many as "taking the hassle out of it". Sheds were recognised as a place to provide a break from worries, comradery, and mental stimulation through activities and conversation. The sharing of common experiences of health issues, check-ups and procedures within the shed were identified as helping to reduce apprehensiveness and take the mystery out of broaching health matters.

The study also found that the theme of peer support and trust played a role in how men 'do' health. Men trusted one another in the advice shared between members. The peer support within sheds helps men to face up to and navigate their way through dealing with health issues which may otherwise be identified as a source of anxiety in their lives. Men are more likely to buy in to health initiatives and act on their health if it comes from the recommendation of a fellow men's shed member. The introduction of health initiatives to the shed is seen by some as presenting an opportunity for the men to engage with health discourse.

## SECTION 5.

### METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT: THE SHED WAY

There are a number of steps that organisations can take to ensure their programmes, services and approach to engagement are 'shed friendly', respectful and inclusive of the needs of men's sheds members;



#### **Create and embed a bottom up, grassroots approach in the development of your health-related activity/service with Men's sheds**

- Provide opportunities for engagement with men's sheds members and Shed Support Volunteers
- Involve the IMSA and men's shed members in the scoping, planning, delivery, implementation and evaluation stages of your activity/service
- Provide opportunities for feedback to and from the sheds
- Methods of engagement should be kept informal to mirror the relaxed environment and tone of the shed



#### **Embrace the Essence of a men's shed by adopting a shed sensitive approach to your activities**

- Ensure the essence and ethos of men's sheds is at the heart of all engagement with the sheds. Namely, the banter, comradery, autonomy, sharing of stories, knowledge and skills
- Apply a strengths-based approach to your activities harnessing the positive health promoting qualities of the shed
- Respect the autonomy of the sheds by offering the members the choice to opt in and out of activities and the opportunity to choose which health-related activities they engage with on their own terms and in their 'own way'
- Programmes, activities on offer should not occlude other activities and dynamics of the men's shed
- Be aware of the way in which male gender roles and common notions of masculinity can affect men's health behaviours in the shed
- Recognise that sheds are not a one size fits all setting



## Effective Communicating with sheds

- Create open lines of communication through use of simple language and the use of an encouraging and nurturing tone
- Establish rapport, familiarity and trust by visiting a shed to facilitate one to one and group discussions with men's shed members.
- Use strong, positive messages that encourage men to engage with your service or programme, and without amplifying shame or blame
- Use case studies to highlight men's experiences, stories, successes, and challenges in addressing their physical and mental wellbeing
- Tailor your messages and content to be male specific and friendly while being cognisant of the way men's sheds members interact
- Explore other ways of communicating with men's sheds outside of email, social media and online surveys etc. IT skillset as well as access to computers and wifi may vary from shed to shed
- Give due regard to health literacy when devising materials. More than one in three men with low literacy need help understanding written information



## Establish Sustainability

- Provide capacity building opportunities within the shed or links with local community and organisations to ensure sustainability of your programme or activity



## Consider training for your staff on how to best engage men with health and social services

- The ENGAGE National Men's Health training programme is a comprehensive 1-day training that aims to increase frontline health care workers and service providers understanding of best practice in engaging men with health and social services. ENGAGE comprises of five units which are as follows;  
**Unit 1:** Overview of Men's Health (including Gender and Social Determinants)  
**Unit 2:** Men's Health and You: Practitioner Values and Support  
**Unit 3:** Guiding Brief Interventions with Men  
**Unit 4:** The Rules of Engagement  
**Unit 5:** Establishing a Men's Development Group and Sustaining Engagement



**For further information on available training days please contact:**

Men's Development Network

Website: [www.menshealthireland.ie/engage-4](http://www.menshealthireland.ie/engage-4)

Email: [engage@mens-network.net](mailto:engage@mens-network.net)

## SECTION 6.

### STRENGTHENING THE EVIDENCE BASE



Feedback and evaluation is an essential part of strengthening the evidence base to inform ongoing practice and engagement in men's health throughout men's sheds across Ireland. While we may feel a programme or intervention is a good idea, evidence needs to be gathered through evaluations to inform the future delivery of such projects, and indeed to establish whether a programme has value or is worthwhile.

An evidence base is also needed to justify future funding for such programmes or activities. Evaluations include many components from showing if the programme has achieved its aims (does the programme do what is said it was going to do?), to whether people adhere or stick with the programme for the full duration and if there was enjoyment in participating in the programme or activity. Evaluations can be composed of many elements including questionnaires, interviews or group interviews known as focus groups.

The Irish Men's sheds Association is committed under the Sheds for Life initiative to support partner organisations to undertake monitoring and evaluation of any men's sheds projects. The IMSA advocates for the full participation of men's sheds members and any other relevant contributors in its evaluation to enhance collaborative knowledge and skills.

Programme facilitators have an important role in ensuring the success of an evaluation and thus have an important role in ensuring the future success of the programmes.

# SECTION 7.

## CHECKLIST



The following is a checklist of the key points from this guidance document for your organisation to consider before engaging with Men's sheds

- Contact the Irish Men's sheds Association
- Arrange a visit to your local men's shed via the Irish Men's sheds Association and Shed Support Volunteer for the county to establish rapport, familiarity and trust
- Apply a grassroots approach and engage the men in the development, delivery and outcomes of your activity/programme
- Respect the autonomy, ethos and culture of the individual shed member, shed and the wider movement
- Allow your approach to engaging with the men mirror the supportive, informal environment of the shed setting
- Apply a strengths-based approach by using strong, positive messages that encourage men to engage with your service or programme, and without amplifying shame or blame
- Strike a balance between bringing health promoting activities and programmes to the shed without corrupting the essence of the sheds. Remember sheds are not health services but they are inherently health promoting!
- Help us strengthen the evidence base for the effectiveness of men's sheds in impacting men's health and wellbeing through feedback and ongoing evaluation

## SECTION 8.

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