



Men's Health

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare recently researched the health of Australian men and women and produced some concerning information, particularly about men's health.

The report showed findings that have been seen time and time again. Australian men die at younger ages than women, are more likely to be impacted by disease, and have higher chances of dying from possibly avoidable causes.

Men Health Concerns

When looking at the physical health of men in Australia, the most common conditions were stroke, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, chronic lower respiratory disease, adult-onset hearing loss, prostate cancer, blood and lymph cancer, lung cancer, and colorectal cancer.

In more recent years, however, it has become clear that physical health is not the only space where men are seen to struggle. Australian men of all ages are also more prone to suffering from a range of mental health conditions, including anxiety and depression, suicide and self-harm, dementia, and Alzheimer's.

Of the men in Australia who suffer from such experiences, only 12 percent of adolescent males and 35 percent of adult men actually access support.

The consequences of not seeking treatment are seen to trickle down into additional hardships like substance abuse, suicide, violence, aggression, and family breakdown.

When looking at this confronting data, a very simple question arises... Why?

Key Factors

One of the key factors that continue to put men on the back foot when it comes to mental and physical wellbeing is an avoidable lifestyle and health risk behaviours. Such behaviours involve sedentary lifestyles (participating in limited physical activity), alcohol and other substances, and poor diet.

Another significant contributing factor surrounding the challenges of men's health is social and developmental factors. In particular, how Australian culture traditionally views masculinity and the pressure this then places on men from a young age.

In most Western cultures, men often feel the need to be seen as physically and emotionally independent. This can make them less likely to admit to pain or seek medical advice and more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviours to assert and solidify their masculinity. These behaviours then reduce the likelihood of early diagnosis or treatment and may result in serious health consequences.

Men also rely on their partners and friends for help or advice over professionals. This is due to feelings of embarrassment, anxiety, or a lack of confidence in speaking to their GPs or other professionals. An added issue to this point is that men are also less likely to have strong social networks that provide them with the support they require. This, in turn, lowers their chances of being given the push they may need to access professional support.

But it's not all bad news. Over the last five decades, there has been a significant increase in Australian men's overall health and life expectancy. Recent initiatives such as Men's Health Awareness Month and Movember that put men's health in the spotlight and strive to reduce the stigma surrounding it have shown amazing results – but it doesn't have to be something we focus on for one month a year. Small acts in everyday life are something we can all commit to.

Steps to Take

Have the courage to reach out to the men in your life if you sense something might be off. Let them know that they are not alone. You don't have to get it perfect; just the action itself can mean more than you think. Remember to:

- Normalise how hard life can be and how difficult things can get
- Ask them if they've thought about speaking with a professional but also acknowledge how hard it can be
- Offer a hand in taking the first steps towards caring for themselves
- Check in now and again.

On a more individual level, many practical steps can be taken to improve overall health and wellbeing. Remember, start small and work your way up.

- Engage in activities that you enjoy
- Spend time with family and friends, whether it be in person, on the phone, or virtually
- Eat a balanced diet, focus on sleep, and plan some fun and regular exercise
- Open up to people you trust about how you're feeling
- Find other ways to relax and connect besides alcohol
- Talk to your doctor and book regular checkups.

