

International Men's Day

Special Interest Matter speech regarding men's health and wellbeing / International Men's Day delivered by Hon. Michael Gaffney (MLC) on the floor of the Legislative Council Chamber (04/11/2025).

[11.33 a.m.]

Mr GAFFNEY (Mersey) - Thank you, Mr President. I would like to again focus on men's health and wellbeing, and in particular, International Men's Day (IMD). IMD is globally recognised on 19 November. This year's Australian theme is supporting men and boys. A key aim of IMD is to highlight various social issues that men and boys face, such as boys struggling at school or men grappling with their mental health. My fellow honourable members may recall that I have referenced IMD and men's health and wellbeing more broadly a number of times in this place, in an effort to highlight the inequity of funding and the underrepresentation of men's health and wellbeing resources in this state.

I'm pleased to say that Tasmania has several grassroots and community-based initiatives that work to reach men. A few have some level of funding, including the Men's Table and Men's Sheds, but the vast majority operate through volunteer passion and commitment. These include Men Care Too, Man Up Tasmania, Tassie Blokes Speak, Building Pathways and Men's Resources Tasmania (MRT).

MRT, a community-based, not-for-profit organisation that actively supports and promotes the wellbeing of men and boys in Tasmania, has recently articulated some real and valid concerns to me. MRT currently convenes the Tasmanian Men's Health Network, which meets bimonthly and is well-placed to play a coordinating role in Tasmanian men's health and wellbeing issues. However, it is evident and disheartening that energy and finances to support their ongoing efforts are dwindling. MRT notes the lack of funding and paid positions mean they cannot contribute local male perspectives into consultation network meetings, forums, expos and events.

Whilst there are indeed men in attendance at these events, they often don't have a male focus or a deeper understanding about the needs and concerns of males, and the policy experience and expertise to bring nuanced and detailed contributions.

The recently held National Men's Health Gathering 2025 in Brisbane, organised by the Australian Men's Health Forum (AMHF), is the largest and only male health-focused conference in Australia. Conference attendees heard from various academics and other experts about the need for:

- (1) state-based men's health policies that build on and fund the work of the national men's strategy.
- (2) state-based strategies to address male suicide; and
- (3) coordinated approaches to grassroots and community-based initiatives that work to reach men.

Mr President, international best practice informs us that one of the key areas to improve men's access to healthcare is by developing male-friendly services. In 2020, the AMHF published a wonderful document - *Making Services Work for Men: A 10-Step Guide to Developing Male-Friendly Health Services*. Indeed, I encourage members and those in the healthcare industry to consider the information in that document, and that can be applied universally to a general population of men as well as being tailored to the diverse needs and preferences of different populations.

We know statistically that males experience poor health outcomes in many areas. The lack of male-focused service in Tasmania further stigmatises men at a time when the call for men to open up, speak up and be vulnerable is only getting louder.

As the Tasmanian government calls for budget submissions and considers its 2026-27 allocations, it is clearly time, and dare I suggest long overdue, for an investment in men's health. Any dollar spent in men's wellbeing is an investment in the community.

One of the ways I'm personally supporting International Men's Day is by hosting a free, family-fun picnic day, 'BBQ at Bellsy', on Sunday 16 November from 12.00 to 2.30 p.m. at Bells Parade in Latrobe. This free community event will have sporting activities, live music, a barbecue lunch, coffee and ice-cream vans, community group displays, health checks, car displays, sword-fighting display, and even a Westie Rescue and Rehoming Tasmania Fun Day.

For those who are not aware, Bells Parade is a tranquil and picturesque location situated on the Latrobe inlet of the Mersey River. Indeed, I have many fond memories of my wedding 35 years ago at Bells Parade. However, my wife Mel may wish she had chosen to walk the dog and have a barbecue instead.

In closing, there are many ways in which to recognise International Men's Day, so why not consider how you can support the men and boys in your life? It could be something as simple as reaching out to a loved one, checking in on an acquaintance, or just being there for a young male person who needs guidance or support.