

# NATIONAL HEALTH POLICIES FOR MEN

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## THE EXPERIENCE OF IRELAND

**Men's Health Week Conference**  
*Copenhagen, 6 June 2018*

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*Global Action on Men's Health*  
[www.gamh.org](http://www.gamh.org)



## Issues covered

- Policy and men's health
- The Ireland Men's Health Policy Review
- Lessons learned for Ireland and globally



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## About me

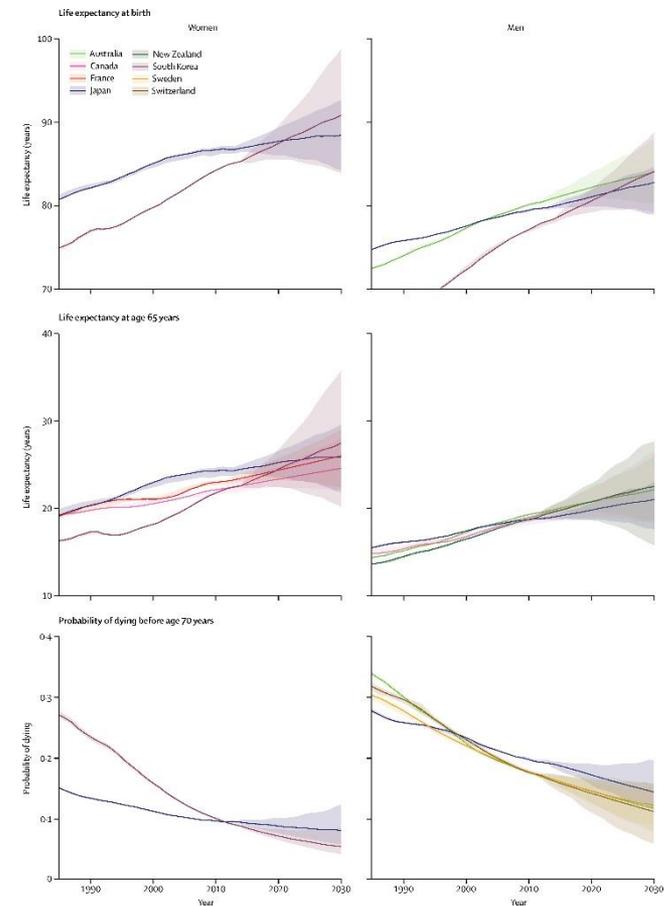
- Working in men's health for 20 years
- CEO of Men's Health Forum England and Wales 2000-12
- Director, Global Action on Men's Health (2013 – to date)
- Independent consultant in men's health (2012 – to date)



## Policy and men's health

# THE ROLE OF POLICY IN IMPROVING MEN'S HEALTH

- Men's health is improving globally without almost any male-targeted interventions



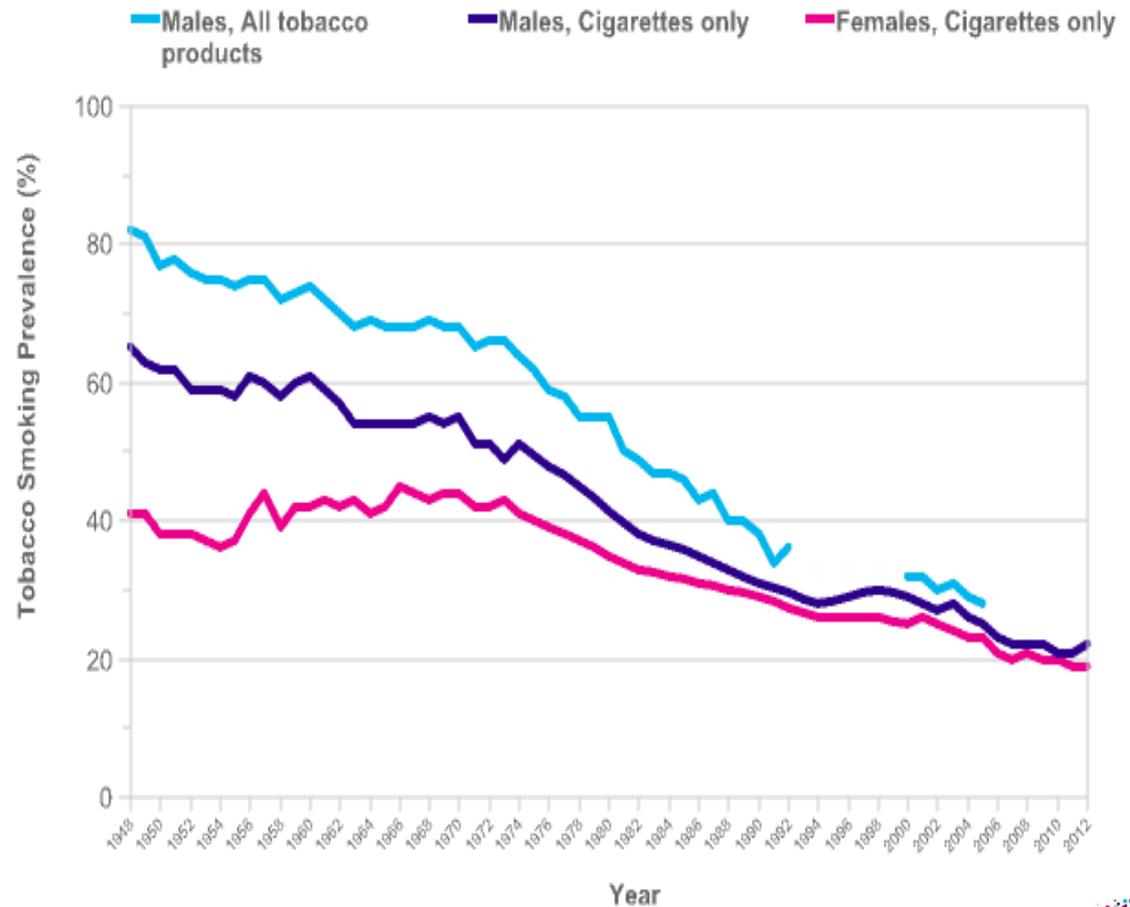
*The Lancet* 2017;(389)1323-1335  
DOI: (10.1016/S0140-6736(16)32381-9)

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## Policy and men's health

- Progress can be made by non-sex-specific public health measures (e.g. tobacco control)

### Smoking Prevalence, Great Britain: 1948-2012



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- Now an increasingly shared view that health policies and practices should take account of sex and gender differences
- Prof Sir Michael Marmot among those arguing that men's health should be addressed through policy and practice
- Marmot believes national governments in Europe should develop strategies that 'respond to the different ways health and prevention and treatment services are experienced by men [and] women ... and ensure that policies and interventions are responsive to gender'
- In UK, Marmot has called for greater policy focus on men's health
- Global Health 50:50 report argues: 'Inadequate attention and action on gender norms prevent global health organisations from delivering results that leave no one behind.'
- WHO-Europe developing a men's health strategy for the 53 countries in the region
- UNAIDS Blind Spot report recommends a range of gender-sensitive policy and practice responses

***But does this mean that a specific men's health policy (MHP) adds any additional value?***

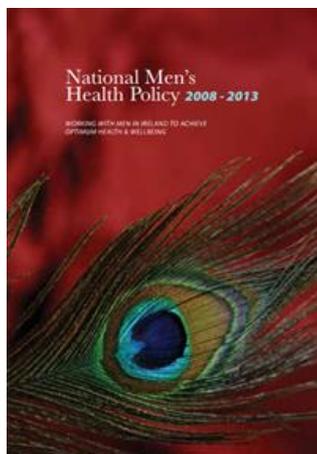
## Policy and men's health

- Specific policy on men's health now called for by:
  - Men's Health Forum (UK)
  - BMA Northern Ireland
  - European Men's Health Forum
  - Danish Men's Health Society
  - Men's Health Caucus/APHA
- MHPs already introduced in:
  - Australia
  - Brazil
  - Ireland
  - Iran (?)



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## Review of Ireland's National Men's Health Policy



- Commissioned by Ireland's Health Service Executive (HSE).
- Purpose: to consider the overall implementation of the National Men's Health Policy and to inform the future direction of men's health policy implementation in Ireland aligned to the key themes of *Healthy Ireland*.
- Particular attention to be paid to governance and implementation strategies, inter-Departmental collaboration, and priority areas of men's health for future work.
- Review completed March 2015.
- Available at:  
[www.mhfi.org/policyreview2015.pdf](http://www.mhfi.org/policyreview2015.pdf)

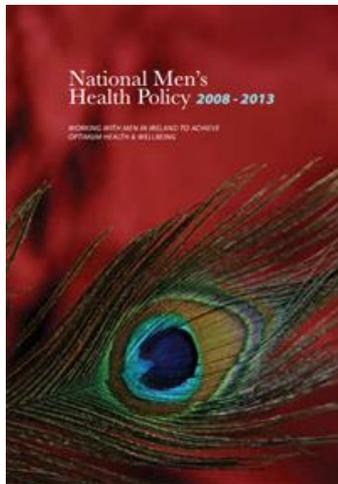


# Ireland



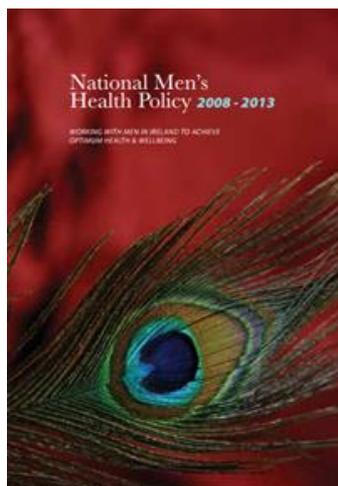
Ireland population: 4.6 million

## Methodology



- Pragmatic approach
- Literature review
- In-depth interviews (29)
- Online survey (181 responses)
- Survey of key policy stakeholders (11 responses)
- Focus group meeting with men (Larkin Centre, Dublin)
- External expert advisory group

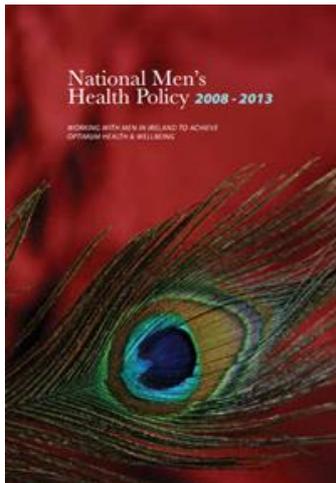
## Findings



### THE NATURE OF THE IRELAND POLICY

- Based on extensive consultation and research
- Not based on the 'medical model'
- A social determinants approach
- Advocated a 'whole-system' response
- Highlighted prevention
- Advocated community development
- Recognised masculinities and male socialisation
- Did not blame men
- Aimed to support men to become active agents in own health

## Findings



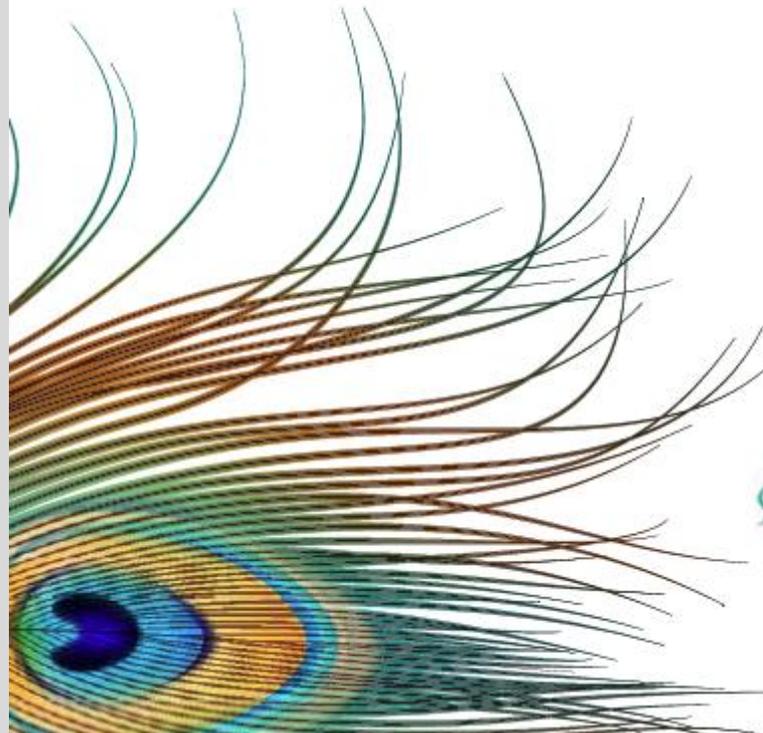
## DID IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

- Raised profile of men's health and provided framework for action
- Promoted an increased focus on men's health research in Ireland
- Developed health promotion initiatives that support men to adopt positive health behaviours
- Built social capital within communities for men
- Facilitated development of men's health training programmes
- Created momentum for Healthy Ireland – Men policy launched in 2016.

NATIONAL MEN'S HEALTH ACTION PLAN

## HEALTHY IRELAND - MEN HI-M 2017-2021

Working with men in Ireland to  
achieve optimum health and wellbeing



Infheachtas le na Seirbhíes Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

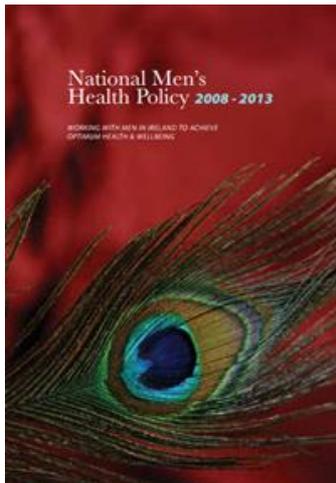
## Findings



But less progress on:

- Developing national and local implementation structures or monitoring and evaluation systems
- Developing gender-sensitive clinical and preventative health services
- Initiatives for men as husbands/partners, fathers and carers
- Initiatives in schools and colleges
- Targeting workplaces
- Improving access to sport, recreation and social spaces
- Not possible to measure impact on health outcomes (mortality or morbidity)

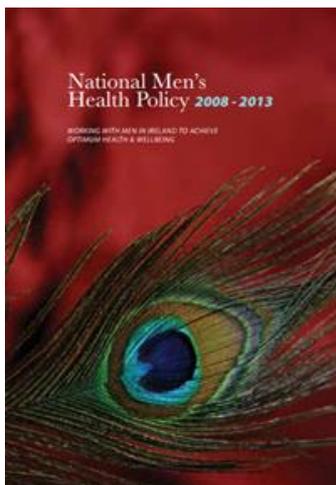
## Findings



## BARRIERS IN IRELAND

- Insufficient high-level political and executive support
- Limited inter-Departmental and inter-sectoral working
- Policy implementation group not sufficiently diverse
- Very little funding
- Policy over-ambitious (10 strategic aims, 118 action points)

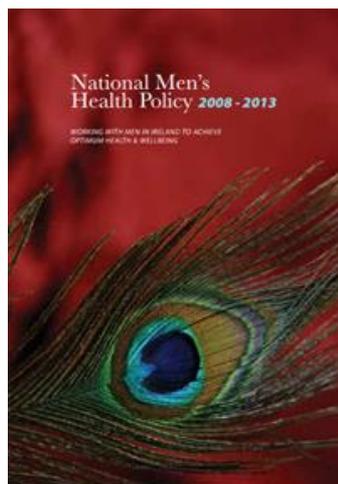
## Findings



## OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF IRELAND POLICY

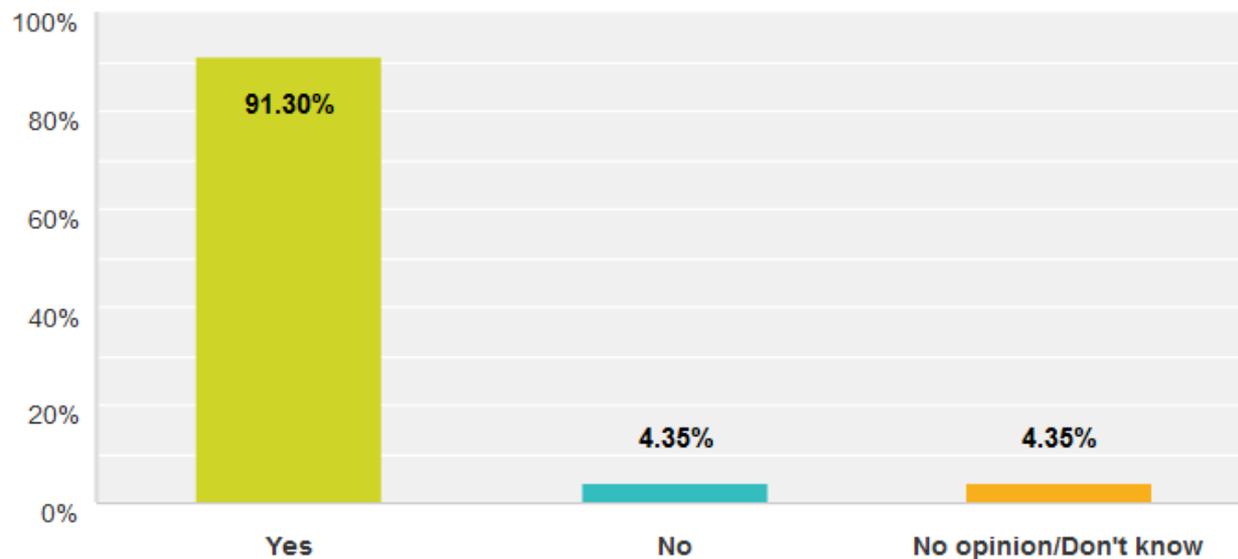
- 'A particular source of inspiration for other countries' (BMJ)
- 'A significant landmark' (European Commission's state of men's health report)
- 'Has had a big impact internationally and inspired others to think about men's health' (Prof John Oliffe, Canada)
- 'Initiatives at this level are very much welcomed and are a tribute to the campaigning work of men's health organisations as well as to the foresight of the governments concerned' (BMA Northern Ireland)
- 'The NMHP has been profoundly important in the relatively short history of "men's health" in Ireland and also internationally' (Ireland Men's Health Policy Review)

## Findings



**The National Men's Health Policy came to an end in 2013. Do you think that a new dedicated national men's health policy should be established for the period up to 2025?**

Answered: 69 Skipped: 114



## Wider lessons

### THE IMPACT OF MEN'S HEALTH POLICY IN OTHER COUNTRIES (AUSTRALIA, BRAZIL)

#### Australia

- NMHP similar in scope and approach to Irish policy.
- Significant government money was earmarked for activity in three specific areas of men's health and reference group established to report to a Minister.
- NMHP criticised for omitting measurable indicators of impact and time frames for implementation. Implementation also undermined by lack of clarity about where responsibility for implementation and co-ordination located.

## Wider lessons

### Brazil

- NMHP less ambitious than Ireland's or Australia's.
- Focused on improving men's use of primary care and sexual/reproductive health services.
- Criticised for over-medicalised approach that focused too much on individual responsibility and insufficiently on wider social determinants of health.
- Has reached 1,000+ municipalities and raised awareness of men's health throughout the region

## Wider lessons

### **Noel Richardson and James Smith argue that a specific men's health policy can:**

- Identify men's health as a priority area
- Create a vision and an identity for 'men's health'
- Act as a blueprint and a resource for practitioners and ongoing health policy development
- Provide leverage for expanding men's health work
- Act as a catalyst for increased men's health activity in other areas
- Provide a platform for further action to deliver effective gender mainstreaming which embeds men's health policy within the wider policy landscape



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## Wider lessons

### RECIPE FOR SUCCESS FOR FUTURE NATIONAL MEN'S HEALTH POLICIES

*12 key ingredients:*

- Pre-launch research and consultation as well as engagement with men
- Multi-sectoral buy-in
- Sustained high-level political and executive support for policy and its implementation
- Multi-disciplinary implementation team
- Adequate funding
- Address social determinants, intersectionality, prevention, service delivery issues



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## Wider lessons

- Policy aligned with wider health policies
- Focused objectives and agreed priorities
- Positive view of men and their strengths
- Delivery supported by guidance and training
- Monitoring and evaluation framework in place at outset
- Take account of women's health as part of a gender-sensitive approach to health policy and practice

***Men's health policies are not a panacea but can be central to efforts to tackle health inequalities.***



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## FURTHER READING

- Baker P (2015). Worth the Paper They're Written On? The potential role of national men's health policies. *Eurohealth* 21(4):27-29.
- Global Health 50/50 (2018). *The Global Health 50/50 Report: How gender-responsive are the world's most influential global health organisations?* London, UK.
- Richardson N, Smith JA (2011). National men's health policies in Ireland and Australia: What are the challenges associated with transitioning from development to implementation. *Public Health* 125:424-432.
- Spindler E (2015). *Beyond the Prostate: Brazil's National Healthcare Policy for Men (PNAISH). EMERGE Case Study 1.* Promundo-US, Sonke Gender Justice and the Institute of Development Studies.

**THANK YOU!**

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