



Submission cover sheet

Inquiry into men's suicide rates

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**AUSTRALIAN
MEN'S SHED
ASSOCIATION**
Shoulder to Shoulder

SUBMISSION

Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory
Inquiry into men's suicide rates

Australian Men's Shed Association

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Introduction

Australian men die in greater numbers than women from almost every non-sex-specific health problem and preventable cause. Males also experience a greater share of non-fatal burden of disease and years of healthy life lost. We also know that Australian males have a higher incidence of social isolation and wait longer to seek help.

Nationally, men account for three-quarters of all deaths by suicide, yet remain significantly underrepresented in the uptake of traditional mental health services. Community-led models of care such as Men's Sheds are an important, evidence-based part of the suicide prevention landscape.

With their origins steeped in Australia in the mid-1990s, Men's Sheds are now a worldwide initiative operating in 12 countries aimed at the prevention of social isolation. With almost 20 operational Men's Sheds across the ACT and more than 1,300 nationwide, the Australian Men's Shed Association (AMSA) represents a vast grassroots network that addresses many of the risk and protective factors associated with suicide in men. Our programs and services are well-placed to support the ACT Government's goals for prevention and early intervention.

AMSA sits at the heart of the Australian Men's Shed movement. The premise of the organisation's establishment was to centralise resources and minimise duplication to create efficiency for the benefit of Men's Sheds – and to this day AMSA continues to deliver on this foundational purpose. AMSA's operations act as a central hub for Men's Sheds nationally – connecting the public, community, government and corporates with Men's Sheds daily.

Social connection and social identity are a key outcome of Men's Sheds in Australia, and can serve an important role in the prediction of physical health, psychological health, social and environmental relationships, quality of life indicators, and a willingness to accept health advice. Due to their social nature, Men's Sheds are in a unique position in their ability to reach several priority population groups for health interventions and result in proven improvements to the health and wellbeing of participants.

Through Men's Sheds, AMSA supports primary health care delivered through health promotion initiatives and whilst not a service provider, Men's Sheds also offer a community-based resource available to health practitioners for 'social prescribing' – helping patients improve their health, wellbeing and social welfare by connecting them to community services. Through this lens, Men's Sheds are a mechanism through which preventive health action can ensure older Australian males are living well for longer, enjoying life as they age and lessening the burden on Australia's health system.

In addition to the widely recognised health benefits for Men's Shed members, in recent years the role of Men's Sheds has expanded into contributions to community development which is mirrored in AMSA's strategic vision; to support and enhance 'connected communities for better male wellbeing and health'. AMSA initiatives and programs aim to build on the foundations of the Men's Shed as a community hub and asset, empowering Men's Shed members at a grassroots level to reinforce stronger, more inclusive, cohesive and resilient communities across Australia.

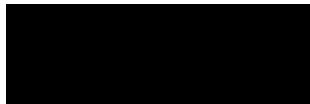
We know from research that men get involved in Men's Sheds at a time when they are in the process of one or more difficult transitions, in terms of work or retirement, relationships with a partner, children or family, health issues or financial status. We also know that suicide risk can peak at these transitional periods.

Typically, men who join and stay engaged with their local shed are retired. Men's Sheds engage older Australian men because sheds are familiar, attractive and culturally iconic, particularly if men have spent much of their younger years working 'hands-on'.

Each Men's Shed develops its own rules and guidelines. The success of the concept lies in the adaptable nature of the Sheds, where the members decide on what activities the Shed will offer and how it is run, with assistance from AMSA.

Men's Sheds provide a 'health by stealth' process where men absorb the messages, but aren't being forced to deal with health professionals. There is an abundance of stories from people who say the Men's Shed has saved their life because they have been able to discuss health problems and other issues, but even more critically found a sense of belonging and purpose in their lives.

AMSA welcomes the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory Inquiry into the high rates of male suicide and strongly supports efforts to identify practical, effective and gender-responsive solutions. We are grateful for the opportunity to provide input into this critical issue.



David Helmers
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Australian Men's Shed Association

Promotion of positive health behaviours among boys and men for suicide prevention

1. Factors contributing to suicide rates

Engagement with medical and health services:

Research confirms that men are less likely to seek help through formal health channels due to stigma, cultural norms around masculinity, and accessibility barriers. Men's Sheds bridge this gap by providing a trusted, non-clinical setting where health promotion is delivered informally and consistently. Through initiatives such as *Spanner in the Works?*, Living Well, and Shed Mates, sheds engage men in conversations about health and wellbeing in ways that are comfortable, male-friendly, and practical.

Risk-taking behaviours including alcohol and substance use disorders:

Men's Sheds offer a structured and purposeful alternative to disengagement and self-destructive behaviours. Activities in the sheds provide routine, camaraderie, and positive role modelling, which mitigate boredom and isolation—known risk factors for harmful substance use.

Social and emotional development:

Men's Sheds foster social connection and identity. They enable men to engage in meaningful projects, develop peer relationships, and rediscover purpose—especially during key life transitions such as retirement, relationship breakdown, or ill-health.

Trends in educational outcomes and participation rates:

While this issue is more relevant to younger cohorts, Sheds provide intergenerational opportunities where older members share skills and life experience with younger men. AMSA's Shed Nights program specifically targets men in mid-life, who may not otherwise engage in traditional shed hours.

2. Promotion of positive health behaviours and supports

Men's Sheds are a proven vehicle for promoting health literacy, increasing help-seeking behaviours, and reducing social isolation among at-risk males. Sheds are particularly effective because they:

- Deliver 'health by stealth' – embedding informal mental and physical health discussions into everyday activities;
- Provide community-based support structures, especially in regions with limited access to formal health services;
- Encourage peer-to-peer support, where men are more likely to share challenges with others they trust; and
- Act as referral hubs – many sheds now work with local GPs, psychologists, Primary Health Networks and suicide prevention networks.

Sheds also reach priority populations identified in the National Men's Health Strategy 2020–2030, including older men, veterans, culturally and linguistically diverse men, and those in regional/remote areas.

Why Men's Sheds Work

Evidence-Based Outcomes:

- Reduce social isolation—a major risk factor for male suicide.
- Improve mental health and emotional wellbeing
- Increase engagement in health checks and help-seeking behaviours
- Build community resilience and cohesion.
- Provide structured activities and roles that contribute to identity and purpose.

ACT-specific impact:

- In the ACT, 17 Men's & Community Sheds support hundreds of men, and their communities, annually.
- AMSA's delivery of the Regional Coordinator Initiative across ACT, funded by the Federal Department of Health, Disability & Ageing has shown outstanding success: 100% of surveyed sheds in NSW/ACT reported that via AMSA, the initiative supported their members' health and wellbeing.
- Sheds collaborate with health services on local health events, suicide prevention activities, and campaigns like Men's Health Week and R U OK? Day.

Recommendations to the Standing Committee on Social Policy

- Recognise Men's Sheds as a proven, grassroots suicide prevention model and embed them in ACT mental health strategies and funding streams.
- Expand funding for existing ACT-based sheds to deliver tailored, evidence-based programs such as Shed Mates, Living Well and Shed Nights.
- Establish a formal partnership framework between ACT Health and Men's Sheds for integrated social prescribing and mental health referral.
- Fund outreach initiatives targeting younger and working-age men in the ACT to broaden reach and relevance (eg. Shed Nights).
- Support data collection and evaluation to measure outcomes and inform best practice in community-based suicide prevention.

Conclusion

Men's Sheds are a uniquely Australian model that respond directly to the risk factors associated with male suicide. In the ACT and across the country, Sheds are already delivering health promotion, peer support, and purpose to thousands of men. With stronger government collaboration and investment, their impact can be scaled to save more lives.

AMSA stands ready to support the Committee in exploring practical, community-driven solutions to this complex issue.