



Submission cover sheet

Inquiry into men's suicide rates

Submission number: 60

Submitter: The Men's Table

Date authorised for publication: 9 September 2025

To: Standing Committee on Social Policy, Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Email: LACommitteeSP@parliament.act.gov.au

From: The Men's Table

Contact: David Pointon, CEO, 1800 636 782,
hello@themenstable.org

Subject: Submission – Inquiry into Men's Suicide Rates

Date: 25 July 2025

Submission to the Inquiry into Men's Suicide Rates

By The Men's Table

Introduction

The Men's Table is a national for-purpose charity committed to improving men's mental health and wellbeing by fostering peer connection, emotional expression, and long-term social support through community-led groups called Tables.

Each Table is a committed group of local men who meet monthly over dinner to share the highs and lows of their lives. What starts as simple conversation often becomes a lifeline—reducing isolation, supporting resilience, and improving mental and emotional wellbeing. The Men's Table currently supports 2,650 men across 251 Tables in every state and territory, including the ACT.

Our submission draws upon several years of evaluation data, lived experience from Tables, and the powerful findings of our recent Ripple Effect report, which highlights the positive impact of men's participation—on themselves, their families, and the broader community. [We include the benefit and impact analysis data for your review as an appendix.]

Response to Terms of Reference

1) Factors contributing to suicide rates

a. Engagement with medical and health services

Many men tell us that they delay or avoid accessing mental health services. Reasons include stigma, cultural expectations around self-reliance, prior negative experiences, or simply not knowing where to begin

The Men's Table provides a "soft entry" into help-seeking: a safe, non-clinical space where

men can speak openly without fear of judgment. This creates a vital bridge. As one man shared:

“It helps us understand ourselves, it helps us understand others, it helps us understand life.” Participation often increases openness to engaging with professionals over time. The Table does not replace formal care—but it gets men talking before they reach crisis point.

b. Risk-taking behaviours, including alcohol and substance use

Many men may use alcohol or substances to cope with emotional pain they cannot express. In our experience, these behaviours often reflect deeper disconnection and distress. Tables provide a constructive, caring alternative—a place where pain can be voiced and heard without resorting to numbing.

A woman in relationship with a man at a Table put it this way:

“His whole outlook on life changed... from doom and gloom to vibrant and happy colours. The Men’s Table has been like that for us.”

c. Social and emotional development

Our social norms often discourage men from expressing emotion. This leads to deficits in emotional literacy and limited capacity for vulnerability. Men come to Tables with few tools for processing grief, stress, or change. Over time, however, they grow:

- 82% of men report improved ability to share feelings and be vulnerable
- 62% of men who’ve been at a Table for more than a year say they are seeing and learning healthier expressions of masculinity
- 50% of women observed improvements in men’s emotional availability

This growth is not only visible to men themselves—it’s affirmed by their partners, children, and families.

d. Trends in educational and workforce engagement

While not the direct focus of our work, we note that feelings of purposelessness following job loss, retirement, or disengagement from education are frequently mentioned by men. The Men’s Table offers a consistent source of identity, belonging, and purpose that is not tied to career or status. Many Men identify life transition as a reason for attending a Men’s Table .. and that can be work related , relocation, relationship or life stage.

Another woman partner of a Table member said:

“Going to The Men’s Table has helped him grow. His relationships with our children have improved. That has allowed a lot of the hurt from the past to heal.”

2) Promotion of positive health behaviours among boys and men

a. Increased access to mental health services

The Men's Table model complements formal care by normalising help-seeking and building emotional readiness for therapy. One man told us:

"The Men's Table saves lives."

Help seeking behaviour and willingness to seek medical supports

- 49% are more likely to get a medical checkup
- 54% are more likely to seek professional help for Mental health when needed
- 87% said their Table supports their mental health and wellbeing
- 70% are able to help men at Table if they talk about suicide

Many Tables have men joining because of gentle encouragement by women in men's lives—spouses, daughters, sisters—who intuitively recognise the need for relational support before a crisis.

b. Socialisation opportunities

Men come to Tables seeking authentic connection. Our current and recent evaluation data shows men are coming to us for various reasons

- 82% of men come seeking support and community
- 75% are looking for "real conversations"
- 66% seek connection and friendship
- 60% want to contribute to the lives of others

Tables meet this need by fostering deep, structured, regular connections. These are not casual gatherings, but trusted relationships built over time.

The benefits we hear from men include

- 82% of men say they feel they belong to a community
- 71% of men reported being less lonely
- 64% said it has been positive for relationship outside their Table

c. Emotional supports

Through regular meetings with the same men, emotional trust grows.

- 81% of men report improved relationships after joining
- That rises to 90% for men who've been attending for over a year.
- 49% of women report improved relationships with the man in their life.
- 24% of women saw improvements in family relationships.

As one partner reflected:

“I really feel that if we didn’t make a change our marriage would not have survived. The Men’s Table was an important step in maintaining our relationship.”

3) Other Related Issues

a. Community-led, preventative models are essential

The current system often only engages men in crisis. The Men’s Table reaches men before the cliff edge. We support:

- Ongoing investment in non-clinical, peer-led initiatives.
- Recognition of the value of relational consistency and long-term community care.
- Inclusion of community-driven early intervention as a formal part of suicide prevention strategies.

b. Transforming masculinity benefits everyone

Tables foster healthier masculinities—visible not only to men, but to their partners and families:

- 46% of women observed healthier masculinity in the men in their lives.
- 83% of women in relationships over a year with a Table attendee reported improvements in intimacy.
- 52% of women said men became more engaged in the wider community.
- 13% observed reduced dismissiveness and demeaning behaviour.
- 10% experienced less anger and/or violence.

This echoes prevention goals outlined in the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children. As one woman powerfully put it:

“My partner is breaking the cycle of how his Dad was with him... Women can give all the support we can, but it’s different when you have a community of men like The Men’s Table... then it becomes a generational stop.”

Conclusion

The Men’s Table contributes to suicide prevention by putting in place protective factors; focussed not on pathology, but on fostering more intimate and regular connection, emotional expression with trusted peers, and an attitude of care—month after month, meal after meal. These ripples of wellbeing travel far beyond the men themselves. They strengthen marriages, fatherhood, workplaces, communities—and the next generation.

We urge the Committee to consider:

- Expanding investment in non-clinical, peer-based supports, and

- Including The Men's Table as part of the ACT's formal suicide prevention infrastructure
- Elevating community-based solutions that foster healthy masculinity and long-term belonging, on a par with Medicalised , clinical and crisis response approaches to Suicide prevention.
- Acknowledging the positive Ripple Effects of community wellbeing initiatives beyond Suicide Prevention in the wider health and Social cohesion and belonging space

We would welcome the opportunity to present in person to further discuss these findings and share stories from men and families across the ACT whose lives have been transformed.

Warm regards,

David Poynton

CEO

The Men's Table

1800 636 782 | hello@themenstable.org | www.themenstable.org