



THE MEN'S TABLE
MEN SERVING MEN

THE MEN'S TABLE RIPPLE EFFECT

**Stories of individual and
community wellbeing from
the voices of women**





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Acknowledgements

The Men's Table acknowledges and pays respect to past and present Traditional Custodians and Elders across the country. We recognise the continuation of the cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples which embody connection to Country and community. Connection is central to Men's Table's purpose and we are grateful to be able to learn about First Nation's continuous culture of care for Country and community.

We acknowledge those with lived and living experiences of mental health challenges, and suicide and substance misuse, and the people who support them. We value the ongoing contribution of The Men's Table community who share their stories of joy and pain with us towards the vision of Healthy Men, Healthy Masculinities and Healthy Communities.

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Foreword

Since 1896, the National Council of Women has been raising awareness of the rights and responsibilities of women and children as citizens and encouraging their participation in all aspects of the community they live in.

As I listen to the voices of the women telling their stories about the ripple effect that The Men's Table has had on them, I genuinely celebrate the positive impacts felt by not just these women but their husbands, partners, fathers, and friends.

Gender-based roles are changing and disappearing in our work landscape, yet gender norms around behaviour and expectations have not kept up. Concepts of masculinity versus femininity continue to be portrayed as singularly male and strong versus singularly female and soft. As the pro-women movements march on to empower and enable our sisters and daughters, little work has been done to ensure that our brothers and sons kept pace with these changes or our expectations of them.

In promoting 'Healthy Men, Healthy Masculinities, Healthy Communities', The Men's Table's initiative tackles the scarcity of positive male role models, the diminishing of men's roles as breadwinners and the challenges for men to establish their identity beyond work. At the same time, statistics around depression, mental health, suicide, isolation, and homelessness are skewed towards men whilst domestic and sexual violence against women and children is still alarmingly high. If additional government policies and societal awareness have not succeeded in eradicating these problems, we need to turn to community-led groups to provide alternate solutions.

Over the past 12 years, The Men's Table has successfully helped their members off the couch and ended mindless bar banter around sports and politics. It has provided men with the opportunity to gather, to learn, to listen and to model healthy masculinities. And importantly, it has given women and children the relief and joy to be able to enjoy their fathers, partners, husbands, and friends. The Men's Table is helping men understand their rights and responsibilities as good citizens. Their members' participation in all aspects of our community will create the positive ripples that we so desperately need in our society for all of us – men, women and children.

Chiou See Anderson

President – National Council of Women of Australia

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Overview

The mission of The Men's Table is Healthy Men, Healthy Masculinities and Healthy Communities.

The Men's Table Ripple Effect report builds upon our previous evaluation projects about the positive impacts of The Men's Table on the lives of men who sit at Tables. We are committed to learning and improving what we do through an ongoing program of internal evaluation.

In this report, we hear the voices of significant women in the lives of men who sit at Tables: spouses, intimate partners, sisters, daughters, friends and workmates. We see how the positive impacts of The Men's Table ripple out beyond the lives of men who sit at Tables to the women in their lives, their families, friends, communities and broader society.

We wanted to hear from these women as many men are sitting at Tables because of a woman in their life. We wanted to better understand why women refer men to The Men's Table and other gender based groups that they cannot participate in themselves.

In our 2022 Annual Table Survey, 81% of men said that their relationships with the people around them improved as a result of sitting at a Table. This figure increases to 90% for men who have been sitting at a Table for more than a year.

As outsiders to the experience of sitting at Tables, women have a unique vantage point to verify those impacts on relationships and to see the broader impacts of our work. Through this project, we wanted to better understand the impacts of the Men's Table through the eyes of women.

The Men's Table Ripple Effect Investigation

We spoke to women about their experiences of The Men's Table as outsiders to the experience of sitting at a Table. We invited women who are connected to male Table members to participate in our Women's Say survey and follow up interviews. The majority of women who participated were partners.

We acknowledge that the partners and families who have been

It took three years to try to convince him to go to The Men's Table. ... I kind of persisted with bringing it up every so often, but not really pushing it. It's up to the person. ... 12 months on he's really actively involved in a group and he goes every month. We're really happy. I'm really happy for him. A couple of times he's actually said to me 'thank you for introducing me to The Men's Table'.

Woman (partner of man at Table)

surveyed and interviewed in this project are women and recognise that this project does not represent voices of male partners and family members.


In our most recent 2023 Annual Table Survey, 7% of men at Tables indicated that they do not identify as "straight" (heterosexual). The presence and contribution of people with diverse sexual orientations in our community is welcomed and valued. We are keen to seek input from gay, bisexual and queer men at Tables and male partners in future research and evaluation.

The ways that men express masculinity impacts upon the people in their lives. As women are impacted by masculine social norms,

we sought to hear their voices. In this report, women describe the importance of healthy expressions of masculinity and related individual and community wellbeing outcomes.

Healthy Men embodying Healthy Masculinities can build Healthy Communities which send positive ripples out to the whole of society.



A group of people, seen from behind, are standing on a hillside and forming a large heart shape with their hands raised against a vibrant sunset sky. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm glow over the scene. The sky is filled with soft, orange and pink clouds. In the foreground, the silhouettes of the people's heads and shoulders are visible. The overall mood is peaceful and celebratory.

I think it's really important, especially with this younger generation, to make sure that we're reinforcing the idea of positive masculinity and showing that what used to be known as signs of weakness – talking, being emotional, being vulnerable, crying, just wanting to be heard – is actually what it means to be a healthy individual in society.

Woman (daughter of man at Table)

About The Men's Table

Men's Tables are groups of local men who meet once a month over a simple meal in a private room to share with each other the highs and lows of their lives. At The Men's Table, men can talk about how they're really feeling. They **Go Beyond Banter**. Tables are formed upon a set of guidelines, called the Fundamentals, which all men are introduced to prior to becoming a Table member.

Ben Hughes and David Pointon founded The Men's Table organisation in 2019 inspired by their own experiences of sitting at a Table since 2011. They knew that being part of a Table had benefited the lives of the men sitting at their Table. Once other Tables began forming, they soon discovered that The Men's Table had positive impacts reaching out to the wider community.

"As a preventative, low-cost, community-led initiative and endorsed by The Mental Health Commission, The Men's Table's aspiration of creating a national network of Tables will not only help individual men but have a cascading effect into their families, communities and Australia at large."

- Malcolm Turnbull in the Foreword to The Men's Table Model of Care report (Pointon et al., 2020).

Men come to Tables from all walks of life. According to the women in their lives, 82% of men who come to The Men's Table are seeking a support network and are wanting to be part of a community, 75% are seeking 'real' conversations, 66% are seeking connection and friendship, and 60% are seeking to contribute to the lives of other men.

Men say they come to us looking for friendship and connection, for a support network at a time when something big has happened for them, when they are struggling with the bumps and scrapes of life, or when they have recently moved to a new area.

The Men's Table provides safe places for men to talk and share openly and to foster friendship and connection as antidotes to the widespread experiences of social isolation and loneliness.

For more information on our prior research and evaluations:

- **Model of Care (Pointon et al., 2020)**
- **Couch to Community (Pointon et al., 2021)**
- **Community through Adversity (Pointon et al., 2022)**

It's positive for me to know that my partner is feeling more engaged in life and is meeting decent men through The Men's Table.

Woman (partner of man at Table)



Key findings

As a result of this investigation we highlight the following key findings which make up The Men's Table Ripple Effect:

When he first joined The Men's Table he was basically just wanting to connect with a group of men and just have a dedicated space for talking about what's going on in their lives, and for that to be a really intentional space.

Woman (partner of man at Table)

The Men's Table does so much more good than what you could ever imagine.

Woman (partner of man at Table)

- 1. Healthy masculinities are visible at Tables.**
- 2. Women say that the men in their lives are getting benefits from The Men's Table.**
- 3. Women say that they too are getting benefits from The Men's Table despite not being Table members.**
- 4. Women see The Men's Table Ripple Effect carrying further out into the community, beyond the direct impact to their own lives.**
- 5. Through enabling healthy masculinities and building healthy communities, women see The Men's Table contributing to broader social change.**

1

Healthy masculinities are visible at Tables.

Women affirm that Men's Tables are safe places where men can go beyond surface level conversations to unburden themselves by sharing the highs and lows of their lives. Through their monthly meetings, men show up for themselves and for other men through open sharing and active listening. At Tables, men are engaging in compassionate, open-hearted and nonviolent communication. Healthy Tables have a palpable sense of care. Women see how groups of men at Tables become trusted comrades over time.

The Men's Table offer safe places for men to move beyond restrictive masculine stereotypes. At Tables, healthy masculinities are visible. After 1 year or more of a man in their life sitting at a Table, 46% of women observe healthier expressions of masculinity in the man in their life. This is affirmed by the experiences of men, with nearly 2 in 3 men (62%) who have been at a Table for more than 1 year saying that they are seeing and learning healthy masculinities.

He realises his struggles are not unusual. That he can talk about them without being seen as weak.

Woman (partner of man at Table)

His whole outlook on life itself has changed. You know with cartoons, you have black and white and then all of a sudden, after the magic, it goes from black and white and doom and gloom to vibrant and happy colours. The Men's Table has been like that for us.

Woman (partner of man at Table)

2

Women say that the men in their lives are getting benefits from The Men's Table.

Half of the women (49%) have seen positive changes in the man in their life. They explain that men are better able to express, share and identify emotions and are thereby developing emotional fluency. Men are seeking and providing emotional support for other men. Men are being present with their whole selves, with their hearts and their heads, with their muscles and their tears.

82% of men experience an improvement in their ability to share feelings and be vulnerable as a result of sitting at a Table, with one in two women (50%) also observing this improvement. 60% of women have seen an improvement in a man's mental health. They see that men are more socially connected and engaged in other interests and activities. Women now also better understand the crisis in men's health.

3

Women say that they too are getting benefits from The Men's Table despite not being Table members.

Women are also experiencing improved mental health and improvements to their own social lives. One in two women (49%) have seen positive impacts to their relationship with the man in their life as a result of him sitting at a Table. Women are noticing improved communication and more emotional availability from men. Relationship benefits increase over time, with 83% of women noting improved and enriched intimate relationships with a man who has been at a Table for over a year.

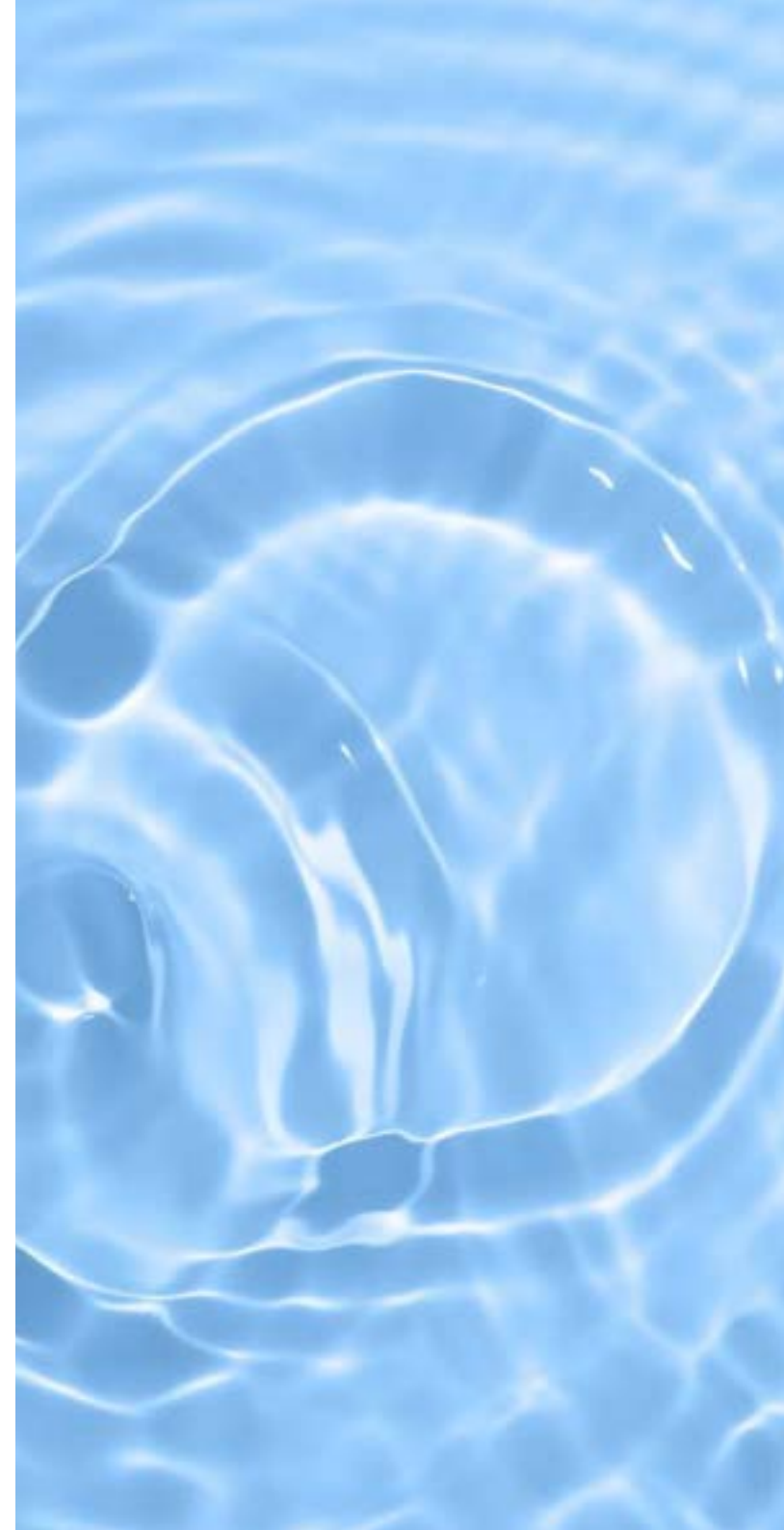
The positive way men communicate at Tables carries across to their other relationships, with one in four women (24%) reporting healthier family relationships.

Going to The Men's Table has helped him grow. His relationships with our children have improved. He's been able to connect on a deeper level and that has allowed a lot of the hurt from the past to heal. It's good for our son because these men are role models for our children. ... I heard from one of my kids that my partner now speaks to them about how he's feeling. The Men's Table has helped my partner a lot.

Woman (partner of man at Table)

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 and our marriage.

Woman (partner of man at Table)



4

Women see The Men's Table Ripple Effect carrying further out into the community, beyond the direct impact to their own lives.

The experience of positive mutual support from The Men's Table equips men to contribute positively not only to their families but also to their communities. 52% of women report that men are more engaged and involved in their communities, with acts of service increasing over time.

Men themselves affirm this, with over half (53%) saying in the 2023 Annual Table Survey that they contribute more actively to communities around them as a result of being at a Table. Women describe how enhanced social connectedness from men's engagement in Tables enriches communities. This is echoed by men, with 87% of men who have been Table members for more than 1 year feeling a sense of community belonging as a result of sitting at a Table.

There's almost an aura of calmness about him. He looks forward to the meetings. I've not seen him be like that. The anticipation is palpable.

Woman (partner of man at Table)

He's happier and he's more involved in the community generally, and men's issues particularly.

Woman (partner of man at Table)

There has been a positive improvement in his overall mental health. There are less angry outbursts, less periods of feeling alone or feeling like he can't talk to anyone about his problems. We have a better relationship within our marriage. He has more positive self esteem, he feels like he belongs. He says he feels like other people understand him as other men share at the Table and they validate each other's feelings.

Woman (partner of man at Table)

5

Through enabling healthy masculinities and building healthy communities, women see The Men's Table contributing to broader social change.

The modelling of healthy masculinities at Men's Tables helps men to learn emotional regulation, which is an important factor in countering male violence towards themselves, towards other men and towards women. As a result of The Men's Table, one in ten women (10%) are experiencing less anger and/or violence and 13% are experiencing less dismissive and demeaning behaviours from the man in their life.

Women say that young men can learn healthier versions of what it means to be a man through men at Tables modelling healthy masculinities.

Healthy masculinities promoted at The Men's Table can benefit all genders across generations

In The Men's Table Ripple Effect report, we see that healthy masculinities practised and learned by men at Tables send positive ripples out to women and partners, families, close relationships, communities and to broader society. We are making a tangible contribution to transforming restrictive masculine stereotypes and narratives of how a man should be and act. These changing stories of masculinity are helpful and healthy for men, and for the people around them.

A few times my husband has actually said 'it's really great, The Men's Table, it saves lives.' And I thought, 'Yes, I agree'.

Woman (partner of man at Table)

When he comes back from his Table he seems very grateful to be part of something that's doing good for humanity and society.

Woman (partner of man at Table)

He's a better man for having this experience.

Woman (partner of man at Table)



Healthy masculinities are vital to healthy societies. Through supporting men to express healthy masculinities, The Men's Table are building healthy communities.

The Men's Table are supporting men's health and sending positive ripples out to the whole of society.

Summary and key statistics

The Men's Table is in a unique position to contribute to individual and community wellbeing and broader social change. Healthy masculinities are visible at Men's Tables. Through providing safe places for men to express themselves and connect with other men – *Going Beyond Banter* – we are addressing the crisis in men's mental health, and social and emotional wellbeing.

Our work also benefits women and families, and supports healthy communities. Long term Tables are self-sustaining, with many benefits of men's engagement with Tables increasing over time. Through providing safe places for men to free themselves from restrictive masculine stereotypes, The Men's Table is sending positive ripples out to the whole of society.



90%

of men who have been at a Table for a year or more say their relationships have improved



43%

of women say that the man in their life is more emotionally available when he has been a Table member for a year or more



87%

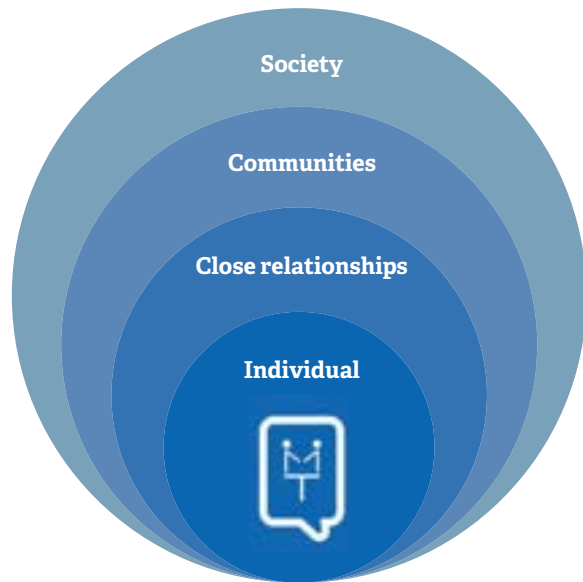
of men who have been Table members for a year or more say that they feel a sense of community belonging



10%

of women experience less anger and/or violence as a result of a significant man in their life sitting at a Table

Summary and key findings



Healthy masculinities are visible at Tables

The Fundamentals create psychological safety at Tables

Tables are safe places for men to express themselves and connect with other men

Expressions of healthy masculinities increase over time in men at Tables

The Men's Table is addressing the crisis in men's mental health

Positive changes in men increase over time

Men are more socially connected

Men are better able to share feelings and be vulnerable

Men are more engaged in other interests and activities

Men experience improved mental health

Table membership contributes to reduced risk of substance misuse and suicidal ideation

The Men's Table benefits women and families even though they are not Table members

Men are equipped to contribute positively to their close relationships and families

Men are more emotionally available and have better communication and relating skills

Positive impacts on relationships improve over time

Family harmony is strengthened

Women experience improved mental health and better social lives

Women have greater awareness of men's health matters

The Men's Table is building healthy communities

Tables foster respect for diversity

Men have increased community involvement which increases over time

Men demonstrate more acts of service which increase over time

Women are also more involved in their communities

Men feel a sense of community belonging

Men at Tables become active in getting more men from the 'couch to community'

The Men's Table is creating positive ripples out to society

Through promoting healthy masculinities, we are supporting the strategy for ending violence against women and children, and promoting gender equality

Young people are role modelled healthier versions of masculinity

Healthy masculinities promoted at The Men's Table can benefit all genders across generations



Background: From healthy men to healthy communities

In 2020 we developed our Model of Care (Pointon et al., 2020) which presented The Men's Table as a preventative men's mental health initiative. Our goal is to help men form positive and supportive relationships with other men.

The Men's Table fosters community building and connection. We deal a lot with isolation and loneliness, with men who get 'stuck on the couch'. I've been that man for various reasons in my life. I've had times where I've just got stuck on the couch and I did not know how to get off. The only thing that The Men's Table asks men to do is to commit to turning up and adhering to the Fundamentals.

Ben Hughes - The Men's Table Co-founder

Positive male peer relationships foster social connectedness and community belonging.

The Men's Table offers a simple and lowcost preventative men's mental health program based upon principles of mutual peer support.

Now with four evaluation projects completed and four years of talking with men, women and partners, we understand a lot more about where we are positioned in the mental health system: we are a community led and community building initiative.

We now understand that The Men's Table is in a unique position to contribute to individual and community wellbeing and broader social change.

Promoting healthy masculinities

The consequences of restrictive masculine stereotypes are well

documented to include relationship breakdown, social isolation, physical and mental health challenges, and increased suicide risk in men (Burrell et al., 2019), as well as contributing to the incidence of violence, including violence against women and children (Our Watch, 2021).

We see consistent examples of healthy masculinities in the ways that men engage at Tables by adhering to the Fundamentals and with support from The Kitchen (the organisation's head office). Persistent engagement is an essential characteristic of the model. Tables are self-sustaining and provide many benefits which increase over time.

The Fundamentals are an evidence based set of guidelines co-designed with Table members which create a sense of psychological safety for men at Tables and support healthy Table functioning. The Fundamentals promote a culture of care and safety with the essential ingredients of connection, trust, reciprocity and listening without advice giving.

To create change, men need to see and experience other versions of masculinity. Healthy masculinities encompass the behaviours and mindsets of men that support greater health, relationship building and contribution to others.

Healthy masculinities represent inclusive rather than divisive ways to behave and think as a man which support and promote individual and community health and flourishing.

The Men's Table helps us understand ourselves, it helps us understand others, it helps us understand life.

Man at Table

The 5 key principles of the Fundamentals facilitate healthy masculinities:

Healthy masculinities enable men to embody their whole selves: their hearts and heads, their muscles and tears.

1. Through **'Going Beyond Banter: we don't just talk about footy and shit'**, men practise open hearted sharing, compassionate active listening and nonviolent communication, whilst avoiding 'fixing' each other. Men build emotional intelligence and fluency through more reflective and less superficial ways of communicating.
2. **'Commitment to community'** invokes reciprocity, with Table membership a two-way street. Men enact dependable traits of showing up regularly to serve themselves and other men by embracing the diversity of men at their Table and fostering a sense of community belonging and purpose.
3. By creating **'safe and confidential'** Tables, men cultivate attitudes and actions of care, and recognise the value of safe emotional places supported by confidentiality and listening with compassion.
4. Practices surrounding **'membership matters'** involve men in enhanced social connectedness and community participation being present to the lived experiences of other Table members, and welcoming and farewelling new and departing members.
5. With **'everyone leading'**, men have embodied experiences of egalitarian group structures where all Table members take turns and share responsibility for the healthy functioning of their Table. Table dynamics transcend traditional, and often damaging, forms of masculine hierarchy.

Supporting individual and community wellbeing

The field of mental health and psychology has traditionally focused on individuals and the influence of immediate factors that contribute to individual wellbeing (Kloos et al., 2021).

A community view of mental health advocates that wellbeing is more than the absence of pathology and that mental health challenges do not need to be pathologized in every case (National Mental Health Commission [NMHC], 2022).

“Mental health and wellbeing needs to be acknowledged as a community issue. This involves supporting community organisations to take an active role... The ‘local community solutions’ approach of Vision 2030 recognises that the wellbeing of communities is also a determinant of the wellbeing of people within that community. Taking this holistic view values the important role of communities, and the families and individuals they comprise,

in addressing mental health and wellbeing” (National Mental Health Commission [NMHC], 2022, p. 20 & 22).

Fostering social connectedness and community building at Tables – as small closed communities – can have flow on effects to other relationships and communities: families, workplaces, sporting and community groups, online communities, and localities, as well as broader society.

Here, communities are seen as “sets of relationships among persons at many levels—whether tied to place or not” (Kloos et al., 2021, p. 15). Being part of a community means feeling connected.

Social connection is both a preventative and treatment strategy for physical and psychological health (Martino et al., 2017). A sense of connection and community belonging are universal phenomena and are basic human needs: meaningful participation in activities that foster a sense of connection and community belonging support wellbeing (Haim-Litevsky et al.,

2023). Once a person establishes connectedness and belonging to any community, there is a beneficial effect on their wellbeing (Haim-Litevsky et al., 2023).

The Men’s Table offers a lifetime of connection and belonging with a trusted group of peers.

The Men’s Table is a low cost and accessible preventative peer program which can reduce demand for acute mental health services. Men’s participation at Tables can be a form of early mental health intervention through mutual peer support, which promotes help seeking behaviours (Pointon et al., 2021).

It almost doesn’t matter what community you’re in, as long as you’re in a community.

Ben Hughes - The Men’s Table Co-founder

In terms of mental health support, going to a psychologist or psychiatrist is one on one whereas The Men’s Table is about coming together. It’s like a forum which is important because it creates a community feeling.

Woman (partner of man at Table)

To get psychological help is painful, and it’s not cheap. It’s not cheap at all.

Woman (partner of man at Table)

THE MEN'S TABLE

“Community can be defined in many ways, but when simplified down to its most important element, community is all about connection. Community is not just an entity or a group of people, it’s a feeling. It’s feeling connected to others, feeling accepted for who you are and feeling supported. Having connection can help us feel wanted and loved.” (Gilbert, 2019, para. 2)

The Ripple Effect Framework

We adopt an ecological perspective, a widely used community psychology theory, as a theoretical framework to structure our findings. An ecological levels analysis (Kloos et al., 2021), adapted from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, enables us to see the impacts of The Men's Table across interrelated levels of society.

We look at individual, close relationships (microsystems), communities (organisations and localities) and societal levels (macrosystems). These levels are nested: the closer the level is to the individual, the higher the contact with and influence on the individual; the further away from the individual, the less immediate the influence is on the individual yet the broader the impact (Kloos et al., 2021).

Taking an ecological perspective allows us to view individuals and society holistically, and is therefore aligned with policy and research approaches in mental health and gender equality sectors (e.g. Department of Social Services, 2022; Our Watch, 2021; NMHC, 2022; White Ribbon, 2023). It shows how individuals exist within networks of social relations and focuses on interactions and interdependencies between the levels of analysis. Through an ecological perspective, we can look at contextual factors.

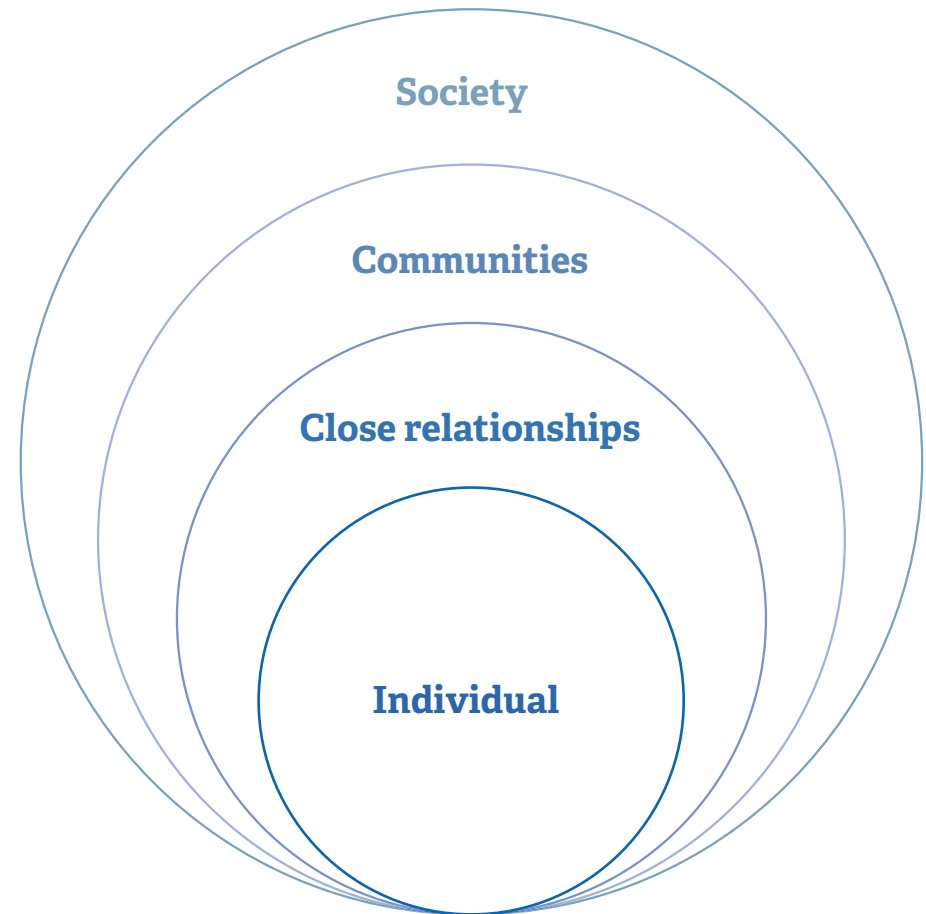


Fig 1. Adapted model of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and Kloos et al. (2021) ecological levels of analysis - the structure of this evaluation report.

Individual level:

The totality of the lived experience of a person encompassing their background, experiences, values, behaviours and emotions. Each person is nested within a network of relationships and social contexts at multiple levels. In this report, we see the individual level as a man at a Table.

Close relationships level:

People that individuals frequently interact with which form microsystems, such as families, which are greater than the sum of individual members. We see the close relationships level as the women and partners, families and friendship networks in a man's life, including other men at a Table.

Communities level:

Clusters of relationships across organisations and localities. We see the communities level as the workplaces and classrooms, sporting groups, religious and other community and local place based groups where men engage, including Tables. This level also encompasses contact between local clusters of Men's Tables and a growing community of men at Tables.

Societal level:

Other levels are influenced by multiple macrosystems in society including populations, cultures and belief systems, governments, media, and social movements. We see the society level encompassing the broader impacts of changing the narratives of male gender norms at the growing national footprint of Men's Tables.

All levels of society are interrelated; they influence, and are influenced by, each other. Relationships and relational skills within and between levels can foster social change.

Evaluation methodology

In November 2022 we invited women who are connected to men who are Table members to participate in our Women's Say survey. We received 92 responses with 23 women then participating in follow up interviews held between December 2022 and February 2023. We also held a Women's Webinar focus group in December 2022 which yielded rich insights on the perceived benefits of The Men's Table.

Data from men from Annual Table Surveys from 2022 (216 responses from men at Tables) and 2023 (577 responses from men at Tables) and other marketing materials and testimonials have also been drawn upon to compare and contrast with the experiences of women.

Thematic analysis as described by Braun (2022) was conducted on the qualitative data from interviews and extended survey responses adopting an ecological level of analysis theoretical framework (Kloos et al., 2021).

Pseudonyms are used throughout the report to protect the identity of participants. The women who participated in this project were invited to give feedback on an earlier draft of this report and check the accuracy and validity of the report in accordance with their experiences.

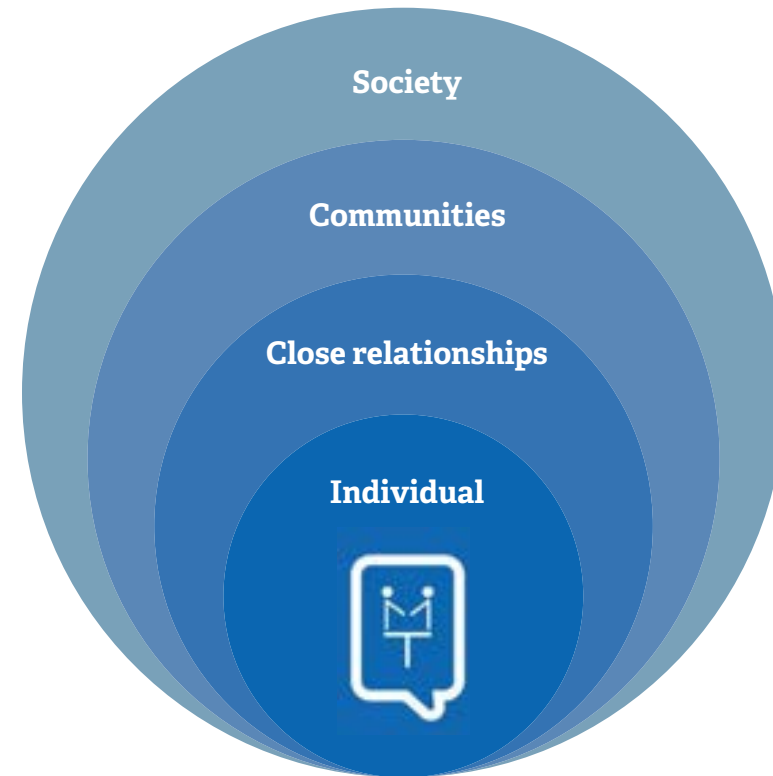
We look at the perceived impacts of The Men's Table across the ecological levels of analysis. In the findings we foreground the voices of women as outsiders to the experience of sitting at Tables and show how their experiences relate to those of men from Tables¹.

¹Full data available upon request.



Findings: The Men's Table Ripple Effect

Healthy masculinities promoted and learned at Men's Tables can send positive ripples across the levels of analysis: individual, close relationships, communities and society.



Healthy masculinities are visible at Tables

Men's Tables create psychological safety for men to express themselves and connect with other men.

Everyone needs to have someone they can safely share their inner experiences with in order to sustain their wellbeing. The Fundamentals embody healthy conversational norms to facilitate open, safe, and trusted connection and communication.

Around a quarter of men say that they have no-one to share their private worries and fears with most or all of the time (Quinn et al., 2021).

Women describe the importance of the Fundamentals in creating psychological safety at Tables.

"He doesn't tell me a lot that goes on and I don't ask, because that's part of it."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

"He's very closed about what is said at his Table which is excellent because that's the premise: what goes on at the Table stays at the Table, except what it opens in yourself."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

83% of men at Tables say that their Table is a safe place to share and be heard. Women affirm that Men's Tables are safe places for men to model and express healthy masculinities:

"I have seen him be very brave and take a significant step to walk into a room of strangers to begin talking about how he feels and about the struggles he was and is facing. He has an outlet that is independent and non judgemental, an outlet that is supportive but doesn't try to fix his problems, an outlet that is safe for him to be him. He is dedicated to very few things in life but The Men's Table is one of them. The Men's Table is genuinely starting to help him rebuild his life and allow him to learn about who he is."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

"The Men's Table has been extraordinarily helpful. The opportunity for my partner to go and have a conversation in a safe space where people aren't actually trying to fix him, they're just listening, is really helpful. Certainly for us."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

"The Men's Table allows space for men to learn how to be vulnerable and accept vulnerability as a strength rather than something to shy away from, especially in this culture where men are supposedly not meant to cry or that it's not manly to show your emotions."

Woman (daughter of man at Table)

Men can struggle to create safe places, or safe relationships, where they can disclose their emotional experiences to other men because of perceived masculine norms (Mahalik et al., 2007; McKenzie et al., 2018). The Men's Table offers safe places for men to move beyond restrictive masculine stereotypes. At Tables, healthy masculinities are visible. Men express a diversity of individual expressions of characteristics of healthy masculinities.

31% of all women see healthier perceptions and expressions of masculinity in men as a result of The Men's Table. This increases over time to 46% when a man has been at a Table for more than 1 year.

"He always comes back from his Table talking about being able to sit down and talk with these men and form great relationships and change the definition of what positive masculinity means, which has inspired me."

Woman (daughter of man at Table)

Men affirm this, with 54% saying that they are learning and seeing healthy masculinities at Tables. This improvement increases over time to 62% of men who have been at a Table for more than 1 year.

"There's a rule that says there's no fixing. There's no alpha behaviour. I think it's fantastic. Then men don't feel like they need to prove themselves or that they're not good enough compared with other people."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

Summary of healthy masculinities

The Men's Table provides safe places where healthy masculinities are promoted and learned. Healthy masculinities mean that men can show up and be present with their whole selves – their hearts and heads, their muscles and tears – by having real conversations that **Go Beyond Banter**. The embodiment and expression of healthy masculinities increases over time and carries over into the way that men live their lives outside of Tables.

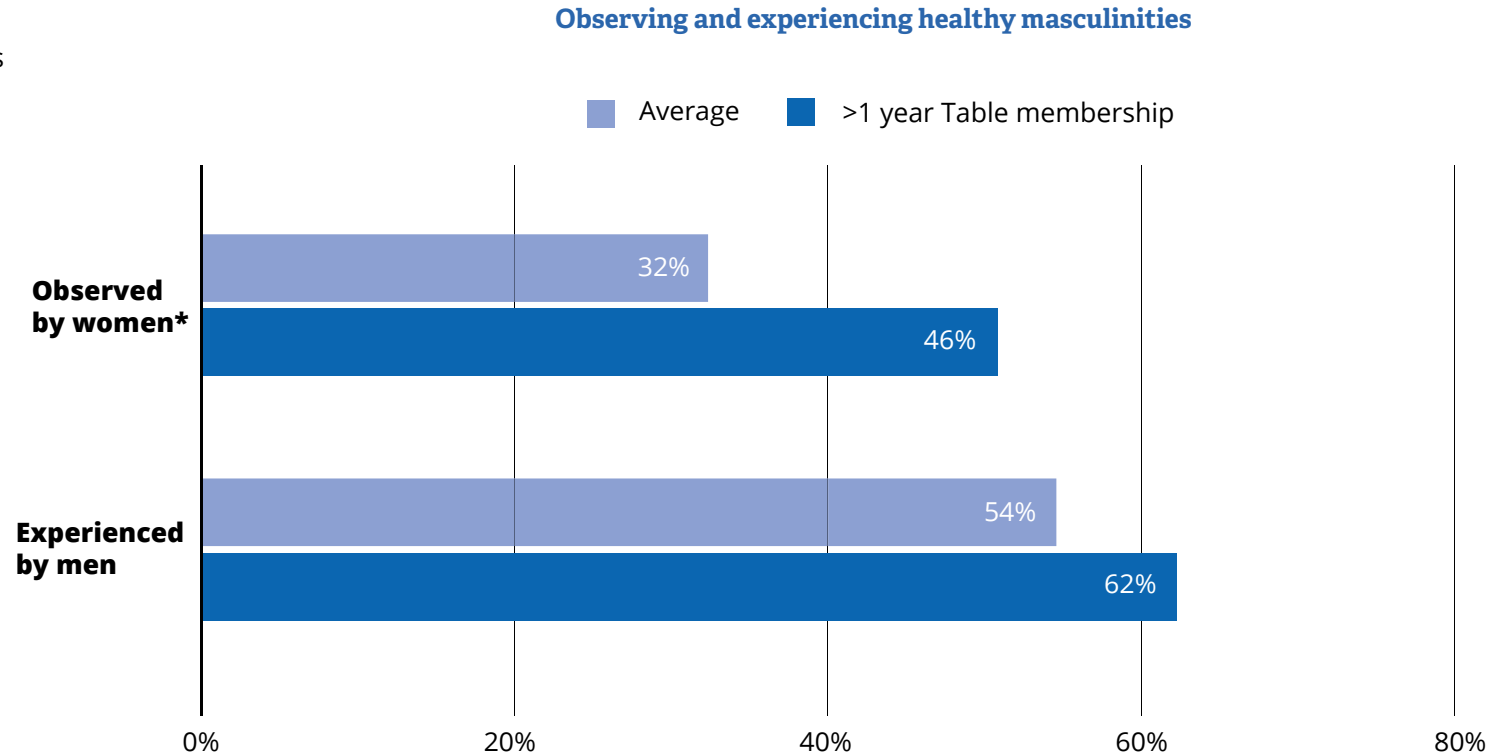


Fig 2. The expression of healthy masculinities increases over time for both men and women (*increase over time is statistically significant $p < .05$).



CLARA'S STORY

THERE ARE MEN CRYING OUT FOR HELP

“I’m on the cusp of a newer generation and it is true right now that there is a lot of light on the importance of feminism and women being equal in society and I’m absolutely a driver for that. But I feel as though the idea of masculinity is not as known.

Hearing my Dad talk about the importance of men communicating and listening to one another and forming healthy relationships at The Men’s Table has given me a new perspective on masculinity. It has also helped me spread awareness of healthy masculinities because

I’m teaching young kids who are trying to figure out and navigate what it means to be a boy moving into adulthood. I’m trying to take what my Dad is learning at The Men’s Table and spread that out into my teaching.

I think there is a light on women and women’s history because we’re trying to educate younger women and make sure that they understand that they have every right to do what they wish, that times are changing, women are just as important and can be just as successful as men. But there is also the other aspect where empathising with the stories of men can be a bit of a struggle. There are men crying out for help and it’s not as spoken about today.”

Clara (daughter of man at Table)

Clara feels that teaching and learning about the connections between feminism and women’s empowerment as well as healthy masculinities and the crisis in men’s mental health is important.



Individual level

The Men's Table provides safe places for men to connect with other men which can reduce feelings of loneliness. According to the women in their lives, 83% of men came to us looking for a support network or community with 66% looking for a connection and new friendships. This is consistent with the most commonly rated reason men give for coming to Tables - 'looking for connection and friendship'.

We strive to get men who are 'stuck on the couch' out into the community. Conformity to traditional male gender norms is associated with social disconnection and loneliness, which is even more pronounced in regional areas (Bonell et al., 2023). Loneliness can be debilitating and unhealthy, with social disconnection and loneliness increasing as men get older (Arbes et al., 2014; King et al., 2020).

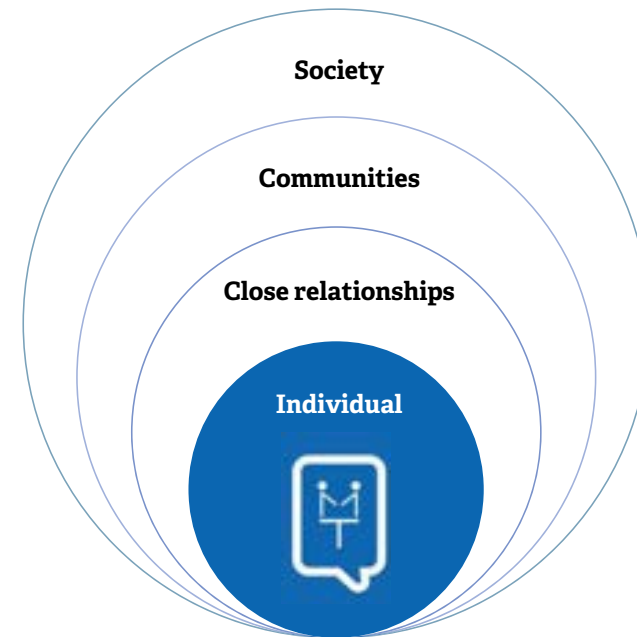
"My partner often says 'I've really got no friends, I have lots of acquaintances, but I don't really have any friends'. He finds it difficult to get out there and meet people. You become very comfortable because life is busy and before you know it you forget, or lose the ability, to understand how to make friends."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

"I nearly died, and we nearly lost our child when I was eight weeks pregnant. One of the striking things at that time was that my husband realised he didn't have anybody to call on because he hadn't created a network of friends. He tried to call family and nobody was answering. While he was sitting out waiting to find out if his wife was dead or not he ended up calling his boss and his boss was drunk at a pub. And so he had nobody. I found that quite tragic."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

Women say that the men in their lives are getting benefits from The Men's Table.



One in four Australians experience problematic levels of loneliness (Endling Loneliness Together, 2020), with men more frequently experiencing loneliness compared with women (Baker, 2012).

“Loneliness itself is not a pathological condition, but rather should be seen as a natural signal to build or regain connections with others. However, for some people, reaching out to develop and, or maintain meaningful social connections may be more difficult” (Ending Loneliness Together, 2020, p. 12).

49% of all women have noticed positive changes in men as a result of The Men’s Table. This increases over time, with seven in ten women (69%) noticing a positive change when a man has been a Table member for more than 1 year.

These positive changes include men having an improved ability to share feelings and be vulnerable, men building social connectedness, and men experiencing improved mental health including less substance misuse and reduced suicidal ideation.

Healthy masculinities counter traditional male stereotypes of emotional stoicism. Half of the women surveyed experience men having an improved ability to share feelings and be vulnerable, which is affirmed by 82% of men.

“The Men’s Table certainly gives him that outlet where he can actually share stuff. And often the verbal word is far better than the internal talk. So by saying something you can sort that stuff out yourself as soon as you verbalise it and hear what you’re saying.”

Woman (partner of man at Table)

“I’ve noticed that he’s leaned in to have difficult conversations that he didn’t have in the past. And it’s hard to have conversations you sort of need to have. To give yourself permission - possibly courage. I’d say that’s some of what he’s received through those dialogues he has once a month at his Table.”

Woman (partner of man at Table)

“One of the things he always says to me is that the great thing about The Men’s Table is that you don’t offer advice, because that’s not what you’re there for. That’s been a real learning curve for him. Now he says ‘it’s not about fixing anything, it’s just about listening and being an ear’. It’s brought him out of his shell that he can share stuff.

Woman (partner of man at Table)



The Men’s Table – Ripple Effect



IVY'S STORY

HE'S BECOME A LOT MORE OPEN WITH HOW HE FEELS

“After COVID lockdown Dad started to realise that a lot of the men he’d known for a long time weren’t open about how they felt or about their emotions and that it’s not something they wanted to talk about. Dad wanted to be able to share how he felt with other men and also had the desire to help and the desire to listen and be there for other men.

The Men’s Table has definitely helped him build deeper connections with more people. There’s a diversity of different types of people from different age groups that he’s connected deeply with. After his Table he spends quite a lot of time reflecting. He’s become a lot more open with how he feels and I really take comfort in the fact that he feels so comfortable to be able to express himself with us. He definitely listens without fixing to a greater extent now and he definitely empathises more. He just tries to be a lot more present whether that be with his grandkids, with me and my siblings or with Mum. He has become a lot more mindful. He’s become a lot more perceptive.”

Ivy (daughter of man at Table)

Ivy’s Dad was seeking connection with men who also wanted to talk about how they are feeling. He has found a diverse group of men who are able to support each other. As a result, Ivy’s Dad is more present and perceptive in his other relationships.



72% of women say that men are building social connection through relationship building at The Men's Table, which is affirmed by 65% of men who experience improved social connection.

"My partner having a social network is amazing. That is something that he hasn't had for probably 25 years."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

"The Men's Table is consistent. It's once a month and is something that always happens. Having that consistent time and space to meet with the other men and talk about what's going on in his life is an opportunity to reflect."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

"The men at the Table stayed with him and let him cry and let him sob. They were there for him so that he didn't feel alone. And he didn't feel stupid for blubbering all over the place. That epitomises The Men's Table, a group of men who are prepared to help other men through crisis."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

"Before my husband joined his Table he was more angry, more irritable, he didn't like me socialising. The Men's Table changed all that. He feels like he has friends, he belongs to a great group of men that he can be open with and vice versa. He realised through sharing with other men that he's not alone and his feelings are not uncommon. He can talk to others about his worries and they understand."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

When men are more socially connected they are more engaged in their lives and in other interests and activities, which enriches their quality of life.

"His happiness has increased dramatically from having those connections."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

"Unless your mind is clear you can't really be calm enough to enjoy a hobby because you might have some anxiety or different feelings that are still troubling you. Now he's

into photography. You need to be present enough to actually stop and see, not look, but actually see the objects in front of you to actually appreciate it. I thought 'oh my gosh, this is from the Men's Table'."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

As a result of The Men's Table, 60% of women say that men have improved mental health and wellbeing. This is consistent with 60% of all men who reported improved mental health and wellbeing as a result of The Men's Table, which increases over time to 70% when men have been at a Table for more than 1 year.

"My partner has had lifelong issues with anxiety and depression. Being part of a Table appears to help him control both and have a more optimistic outlook on life. He has never wanted to burden me with his darkest thoughts so I'm truly grateful he has a place to do what he does and find peace with himself."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

"He's more happy and patient. He also compares himself less to others."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

"Generally he is more settled in his retirement and looks forward to his monthly meeting."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

"I worry less about his mental health because he is starting to be more proactive about doing things socially."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

It has been a great relief to me that he has the emotional support of his peers. He spends less time in his 'cave'.

Woman (partner of man at Table)

The Fundamentals endorse a harm minimisation approach to alcohol use. The Fundamentals guidelines state: “Do not attend a Table under the influence of alcohol or drugs, apart from a drink over dinner”.

Men report dramatic reductions in using substances to cope as a result of their participation at Tables, down from 24% before being at a Table to 9% after joining a Table (Pointon et al., 2021). As a result of a significant man in their life being a Table member, 3% of women reported less substance misuse in the man in their life.

“The men at my partner’s Table hardly drink. I think that’s actually a really good place for him rather than just meeting at a pub where you’re going to drink lots, because he will. He’ll drink until he falls asleep.”

Woman (partner of man at Table)

“I’ve seen an increase in him thinking about his alcohol use. That maybe it hasn’t been healthy, that

maybe he needs to do something about it. He has more insight into why he’s drinking so much and he’s saying ‘I think I’m using alcohol to help me feel better’. Whereas before he just wasn’t even in the headspace to think about what he was doing.”

Woman (friend of man at Table)

52% of men who sit at Tables have a lived experience of suicide. A lived or living experience of suicide is having suicidal thoughts or behaviour, surviving a suicide attempt, supporting someone through suicidal crisis or being bereaved by suicide.

By promoting reflective sharing, social connectedness and community belonging, we support men to live healthy lives as active community members, which means that they are less likely to see suicide as an option when they are under stress and are more equipped to help others. Through providing safe places for meaningful life engagement, we are addressing the crisis in men’s mental health.



In Australia, 1 in 4 people drink alcohol at risky levels (Department of Health, 2019). The 2019 to 2028 National Alcohol Strategy for reducing alcohol related harms is aiming for a 10% reduction in harmful alcohol consumption (Department of Health, 2019).



3 out of 4 people who take their own life in Australia are male (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

There’s a positivity around him that I haven’t seen in many years.

Woman (partner of man at Table)



SALLY'S STORY

I'M EXCITED THAT HE WANTS TO BE ON PLANET EARTH

“My friend had been struggling in his relationships. He just had a lot on his plate and was looking for some support. He'd seen some counsellors and psychologists and he'd not been satisfied, he just hadn't really gotten much out of it.

He has become really quite engaged with The Men's Table and has become quite passionate about it. I've seen a significant reduction in his suicidal ideation. He tried different medications in the past to help with his suicidal ideology and depressive feelings but hadn't found them useful. He seemed so negative,

saying 'what's the point of the medication?' And now he's talking about trying medication again. He's become more open, a bit more vulnerable to sharing what's going on for him.

Being at a Table has deepened our friendship. He'll actually tell me now what is worrying him, what is weighing on his mind and why it's weighing on his mind. We have in depth conversations and he is more expressive about how much he cares about me and my family. He's actually verbalising it.

We used to just hang out and chat but we didn't make plans and now he's suggesting future activities. I feel like that's a bit of a shift in his thinking because he was so negative about there even being a future that he didn't bother making a future. And now we're making plans. I'm glad that he found The Men's Table.

I'm excited to be his friend, but I'm more excited that he just wants to be on planet Earth. I was seriously worried that he was going to just 'exit stage right'. So the fact that he's saying 'let's go on a holiday' rather than 'let's just top myself' is so fantastic. I'm glad that he found The Men's Table. Glad that it's helping him.

Glad that it seems to have given him some positivity about the future.”

Sally (friend of man at Table)

Since joining a Table, Sally's friend is now making future plans. He is experiencing significantly less suicidal ideation and is more proactive with his mental health.



Summary of individual level

The Men's Table provides a safe place where men can share the highs and lows of their lives and listen to others with compassion. Men engage in open-hearted, nonviolent communication and develop emotional fluency. Women see positive changes in the man in their life, with these improvements increasing over time.

Men feel more comfortable sharing and being vulnerable and are more connected and engaged as they move from the 'couch to community' for a lifetime of belonging with a trusted group of peers. The majority of men experience improvements to their mental health and wellbeing, with these benefits increasing over time. A harm minimisation approach to alcohol consumption at Tables promotes more positive relationships with alcohol.

Individual level - Evaluation responses

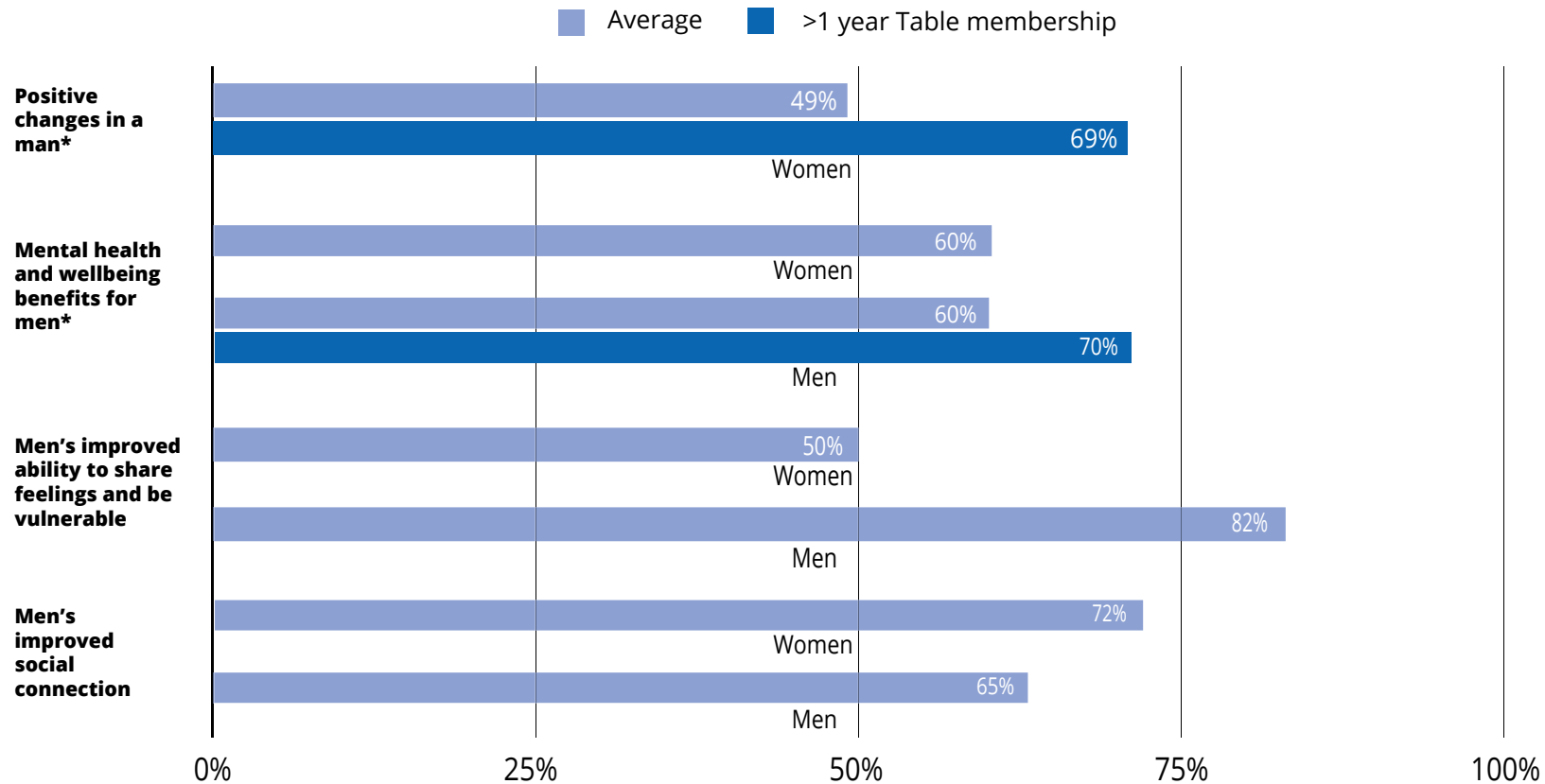


Fig 3. Positive changes in men including improvements to mental health and wellbeing increase over time (*increase over time is statistically significant $p < .05$).

Close relationships level

Relationships impact both physical and mental health. Close relationships keep people happy and healthy throughout their lives (Yang et al., 2016). The Australian Men's Health Forum speaks of a 'mateship crisis' facing Australian men, also referred to as 'malienation' (Stone, 2023). As a result, some men rely on intimate relationships with women to disclose their emotional challenges and for emotional support (McKenzie et al., 2018).

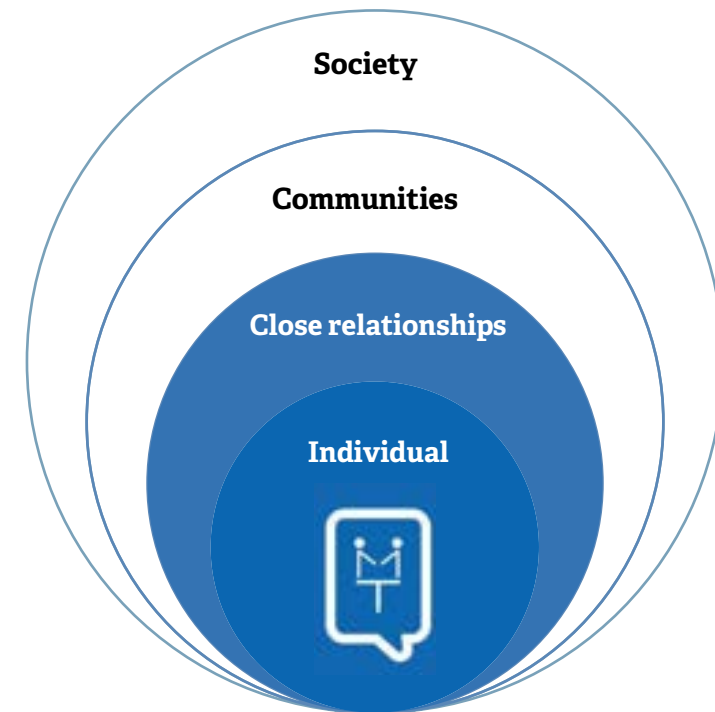
Relationship and family breakdown are major mental health and suicide risk factors for men (Whitley, 2021). In our most recent 2023 Annual Table Survey, 30% of men at Tables indicated that they have experienced an intimate relationship breakdown.

Men improve their close relationships by unburdening themselves in safe places where they can express and share emotions and listen to others do the same. Communication and attunement skills practised at Tables can equip men to engage in stress-reducing conversations with their intimate partners, an essential ingredient to

maintaining emotional connection in relationships (Gottman & Gottman, 2008).

The experience of positive mutual support from The Men's Table equips men to contribute positively to their families and relationships. 81% of all men told us that being part of a Table positively impacts their relationships beyond their Table, increasing to 90% of men who have been Table members for more than 1 year.

Women say that they too are getting benefits from The Men's Table despite not being Table members.



1 in 4

(25%) men have no-one outside of their immediate family they can rely on and 1 in 25 (4%) men have no close friends or relatives (Quinn et al., 2021).



ANDREW'S STORY

I WAS ABLE TO REACH OUT AND RECONNECT WITH FRIENDS

“Sharing my story at The Men’s Table taught me to have the courage to open up with other people in my life. I was then able to strengthen the relationships with my siblings which had been strained for many years.

I was able to reach out and reconnect with friends that I hadn’t seen for decades. I became more confident in my dealings with people. I was more positive in my work and was starting to feel more positive in my life as a whole. I had gone through a massive transformation. My problems were still the same, but I didn’t feel as miserable about them.

I realised that stress and worry only creates more stress and worry. I learned that in life I will always have problems that I can’t control but what I can control is how I react to them.

The Men’s Table wasn’t all of my recovery, but it was certainly the start of my recovery and everything else flowed on from there.”

Andrew (man at Table)

Being able to share his story at The Men’s Table has allowed Andrew to open up to other people in his life and reconnect with his family and friends.



Positive impacts to relationships increase over time. 49% of all women say that they have experienced positive changes and improved relationships as a result of a man in their life being at a Table. This improvement increases to 83% of women when a man has been at a Table for more than 1 year. Long term Tables are self-sustaining and provide ongoing support for men in ways that can continue to enhance and improve relationships.

Relationships are improved and enriched in several ways:

- 30% of all women say that a man in their life is more emotionally available which increases to 43% of women when a man has been Table member for a year or more.

- 23% of women say that there is better communication and relating skills in their relationship with a man in their life.

- 11% of women have more contact with the significant man in their life.

He is happier which is improving his life and in turn improves every relationship he has.

Woman (partner of man at Table)

I don't lie awake at night worrying or researching the best way to help a sad man.

Woman (partner of man at Table)

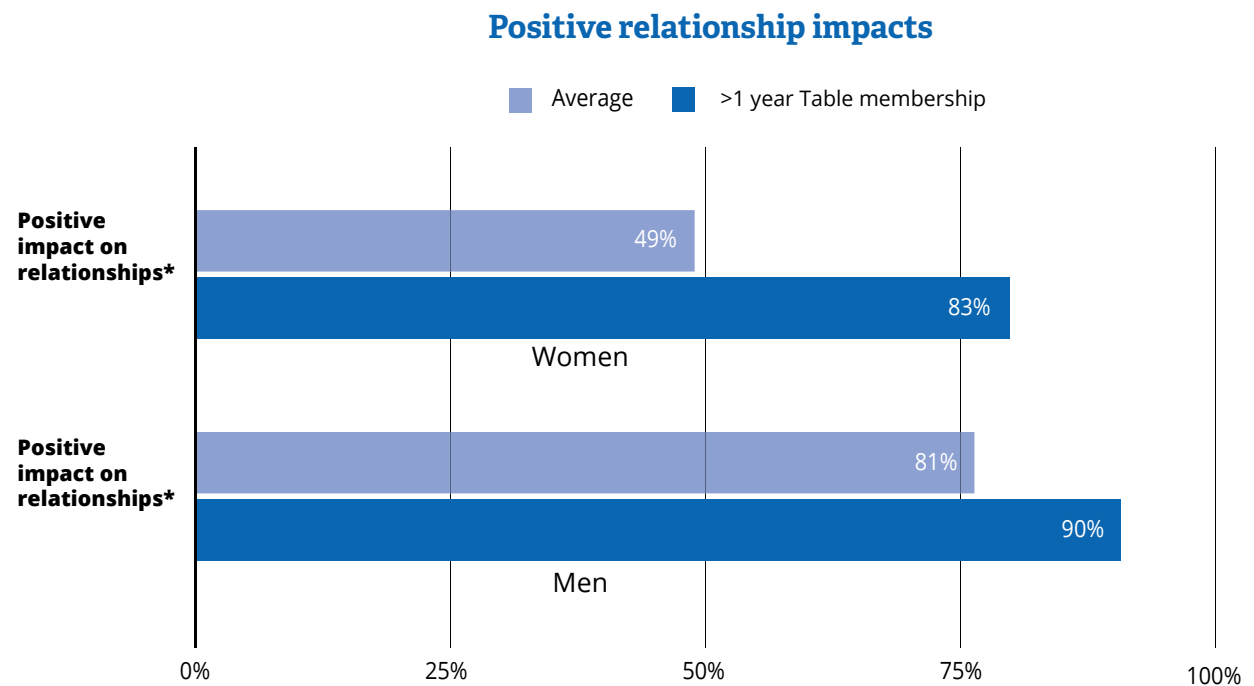


Fig 4. Relationships strengthen over time for both men and women (*increases over time are statistically significant $p < .05$).

“We have more real conversations now. And I would say that that has improved because of his participation at The Men’s Table.”

Woman (partner of man at Table)

“He is more outgoing and more confident in himself. Our relationship is developing as conversations are more open and he is also talking about his feelings.”

Woman (partner of man at Table)

“He communicates more. He releases stress better, rather than letting it build up. During a recent stressful event relating to his daughter rather than shutting down emotionally and plunging into a state of depression, he was contacted by 3 members from his Table following a dinner. He then met up with one of the members and talked things through. He was then able to talk to me about it and we came up with some actions together.”

Woman (partner of man at Table)

The Men’s Table can support family harmony to counter family breakdown. 24% of women reported healthier familial relationships.

“Our family dynamic has benefited from his experience.”

Woman (partner of man at Table)

“I am feeling safer talking to my Dad.”

Woman (daughter of man at Table)

“His adult child with mental health challenges finds him more approachable and happier.”

Woman (partner of man at Table)

As a result of a significant man in their life sitting at a Table, 18% of women have improved mental health.

“I think the benefit to me is about seeing the difference in him. It’s almost a sense of relief. Because he would often say ‘I don’t really have any friends’ which I find quite sad.”

Woman (partner of man at Table)

“I think The Men’s Table has been really beneficial because my partner is a man in his mid 60’s and traditionally they don’t have a lot of close connections and they rely on their wife for it. So he’s enabled to get new friends and new interests. It helps our relationship because it takes the pressure off me having to be his ‘emotional everything’ and it broadens what he does and what his interests are.”

Woman (partner of man at Table)

It helps me to maintain an equilibrium with my own mental health just by my partner listening to what I’m talking about.

Woman (partner of man at Table)

As a result of The Men’s Table, 17% of women have healthier social lives.

“I now feel less guilty about taking time for my interests as my partner now has activities which interest him.”

Woman (partner of man at Table)

“We have a wider and broader social circle with people I wouldn’t necessarily have met or considered engaging with.”

Woman (partner of man at Table)

“My partner being at his Table gives me a bit of free time.”

Woman (partner of man at Table)

As a result of the man in their lives sitting at a Table, women have a greater awareness of men’s health matters.

“I am finding out now that there is a real crisis with men’s mental health.”

Woman (partner of man at Table)



MANDY'S STORY

MY WHOLE MENTAL HEALTH, MY WELLBEING, IS BETTER

“My husband’s whole mindset has changed. He is positive and there’s meaning and friendships in his life. I feel like he feels needed. His whole vibe is different. He seems to be able to cope with a lot of stressors a lot better.

My husband has had issues with some family members and so he has not seen them much. Since he’s had friends that he can talk with and share experiences with, he’s actually worked out a lot of things because we’ve recently reconnected with some members of his family.

It’s really connected us again. We’re really happy. I’m really

happy for him. I’m a lot calmer, like I used to be. I don’t get nervous if I want to meet with my family or my sisters or my friends because he’s got his own friends. I can rest better, my whole mental health, my wellbeing, is better. And I can focus more on the important things.

A few times my husband has actually said ‘it’s really great, The Men’s Table, it saves lives.’ And I thought, ‘Yes, I agree.’”

Mandy (partner of man at Table)

Since joining a Table, Mandy’s husband is more positive and has reconnected with his family. Mandy and her husband are more connected and are both happier and healthier.



Summary of close relationships level

The Men's Table impacts ripple out positively to men's other relationships. Women see that the experience of mutual support from being Table members equips men to contribute positively to their relationships and families. Women experience improved relationships with men, which increase over time. Men are more emotionally available and communicate better. Families are healthier and happier, and women experience improved mental health and better social lives. Through the participation of a significant male in their lives at a Table, women come to better understand the crisis in men's mental health and how it impacts the men in their lives, and the ripple effects on their families and communities.

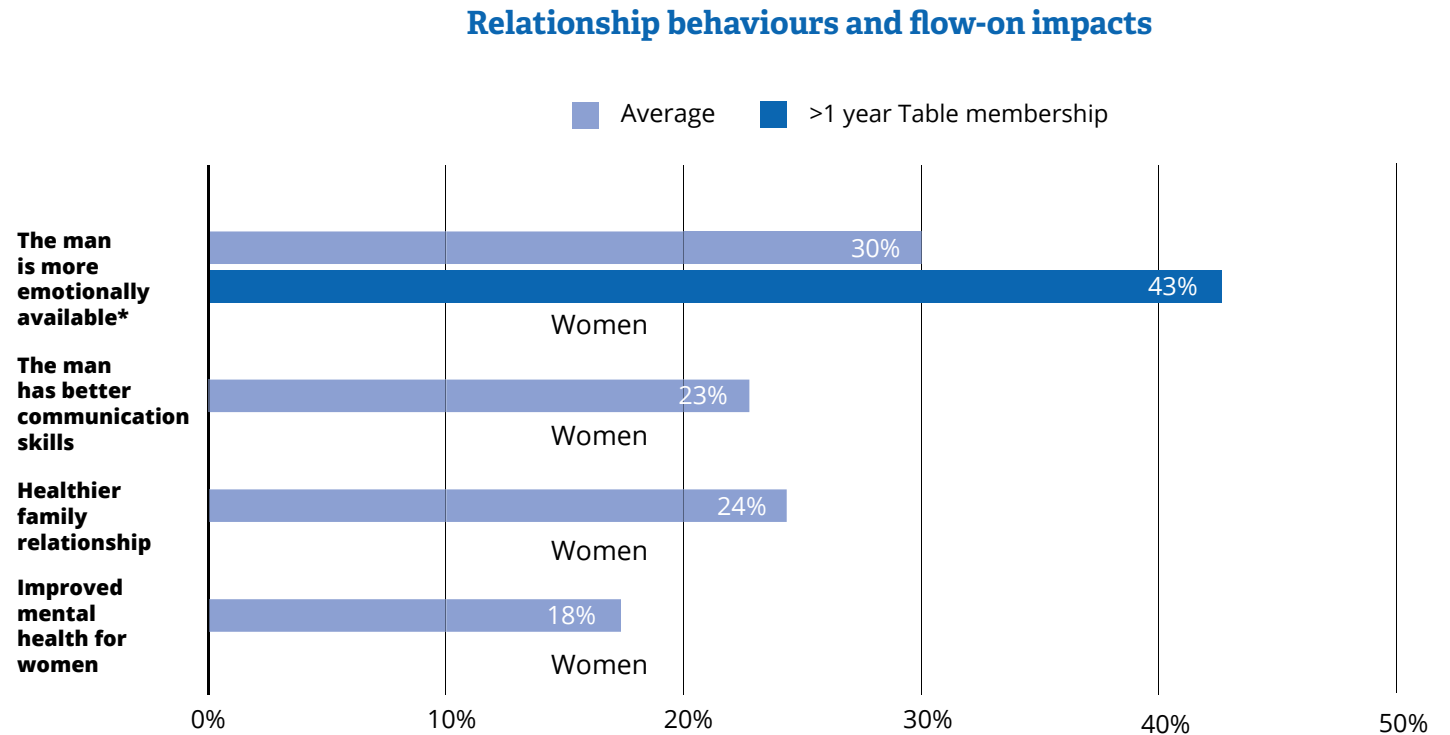


Fig 5. Women report positive improvements in relationships with men (*increase over time is statistically significant $p < .05$).

Communities level

A lack of community engagement impacts both individual and community wellbeing. Social isolation is a pressing social problem which impacts both physical and mental wellbeing (Ending Loneliness, 2020; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). Men are at increased risk of social isolation (Arbes et al., 2014). Being involved in a community can foster belonging and social connectedness which support wellbeing (Haim-Litevsky et al., 2023).

“The more men who can be enabled to engage in meaningful social networks and develop supportive relationships the better their mental and physical health and wellbeing will be” (White et al., 2020, p. 34).

The Fundamentals advocate for a ‘commitment to community’ where men at Tables are asked to show up regularly in support of themselves and other men. The powerful and simple act of showing up and being present for others on a regular basis has benefits.

The Men’s Table offer engagement with a healthy community of men to foster community belonging in

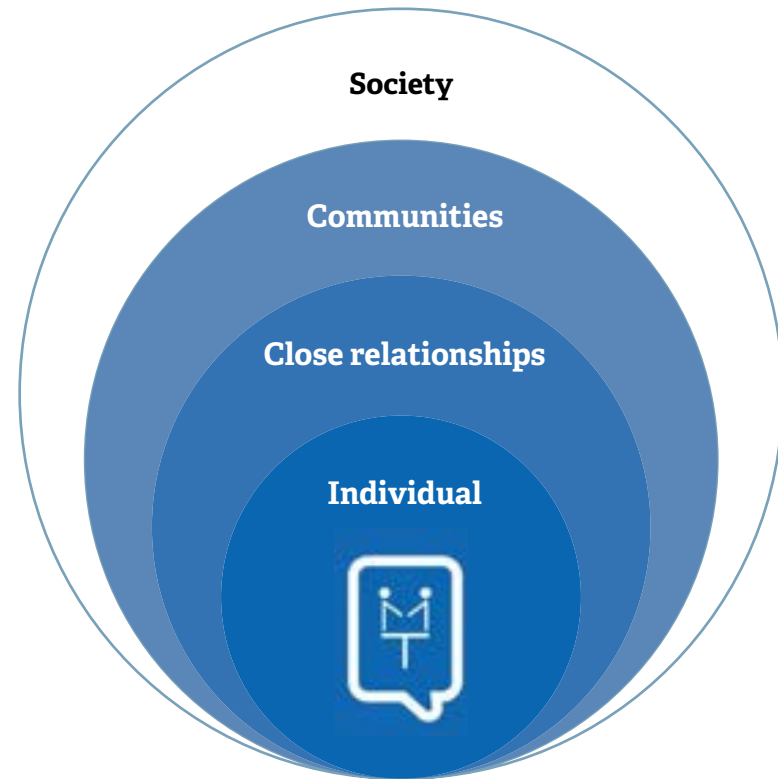
local place-based settings which are open to all men. We are promoting community wellbeing by supporting individuals and relationships through proficient leadership and healthy practices in a satisfying community with a strong mission (VanderWeele, 2019). Healthy men can support healthy communities, and in turn healthy communities can create environments where individuals can thrive.

The Men’s Table supports people feeling “socially connected to their family, friends and community”, and “engaged in social activities” which is vital to the vision of healthy communities in the Vision 2030 for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention in Australia (National Mental Health Commission [NMHC], 2022).

The Men’s Table are doing a fabulous, fabulous thing for the community.

Woman (partner of man at Table)

Beyond the direct impact to their own lives, women see The Men’s Table Ripple Effect beginning to carry further out into communities.



For people to really know us, we need to show up consistently. Over time, what starts out as obligation becomes less about something we have to do and more about something we want to do, something that we can't imagine living without. ... showing up repeatedly is what creates community.

(Studberg, 2023, para. 3)

Fostering respect for diversity at Tables is embedded in the Fundamentals. At Tables, there is a culture of compassion, care and empathy which fosters inclusivity. Our community is diverse, and we want it to continue being more diverse and more representative of Australian society.

In our recent 2023 Annual Table Survey, we gained a snapshot of

some of the diversities of Table members. This baseline data will allow us to continue to evaluate our commitment to fostering diversity over time.

- 1% First Nations
- 3% refugee or recently immigrated to Australia
- 5% veterans or Armed Forces
- 6% English is not first language
- 7% identify as gay, bisexual or queer
- 18% live in regional or rural locations
- 30% divorced or separated

Women affirm that the diversity fostered at Tables means that men engage with other men who they may never have interacted with otherwise:

"There's a diversity of different types of people from different age groups that he's connected deeply with."

Woman (daughter of man at Table)

"I think it's a great strength for men to be able to listen to somebody that they would have never

otherwise had a conversation with. To say, 'I respect you as another man who's got his own children and his own job and has had a life. I don't have to do what you're doing but I can respect the way you're doing it'. I think there's a lot to be learnt from that."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

The Men's Table can facilitate increased social connection with men outside of Tables. 52% of women say that the significant man in their life has increased involvement in his community as a result of being a Table member. 18% of all women say that the man in their life is demonstrating more acts of service, with this increasing over time to 29% when a man has been at a Table for more than 1 year. 13% of women also have increased involvement in their community.

"The Men's Table has made it easier for him to sort of fully enter into a discussion with his book club, which he just loves. I think generally it's just helped him to become more confident."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

"I've noticed his improved leadership within the community and involvement in supporting men in the community with mental health."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

The narrative of 'breadwinner' is a perceived and often very real aspect of men's identity. Men are often positioned as financial providers in families, so their friendships and community connections are often not maintained when their energies are directed to work and families (King et al., 2020). Men's roles as providers means that they often put the needs of others above their own. Women frequently spoke about the importance of The Men's Table for men during retirement in fostering re-engagement in meaningful activity and establishing their identities beyond work.

Sitting at a Table equips men to give back to other communities beyond their Table. 3 in 4 men (76%) say that belonging to a community is a benefit of their involvement in the Men's Table. This improvement increases over time to 87% of men who have been at a Table for more than 1 year. Over half of men (53%) say they are contributing more actively to communities around them as a result of being at a Table.

"We've had people at our house one night when the venue that they were going to for their Table fell through. So they all came here. They were all inside chatting and then when the Table was ready to start I just went upstairs. He loves doing that sort of stuff. He loves helping."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

Men at Tables are active supporters for getting more men to move from the 'couch to the community'. Women describe men feeling a strong purpose in mentoring and contributing positively to the lives of other men.

"When he came home after the first meeting I got from him that he felt that this was the right space for him. He talks about The Men's Table to everybody and anybody. He's very proud of it. And he's certainly an ambassador. Even in the last week he's had probably 10 conversations where he's starting to tell people about The Men's Table."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

As a result of a significant male in their life sitting at a Table, 5% of women reported improvements in their workplace efficiency and/or productivity. These results suggest that positive change can lead to more positive change.

"When he's happy we both do our work better."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

"I can rest better. I can focus more on the important things like work. I'm a lot calmer than I used to be."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

"My partner has struggled with depression and is not typically a good communicator. He also doesn't handle pressure well. Typically, when anything goes wrong in our family, I have to deal with it alone and he just shuts down. Most recently when an issue occurred, he was able to face the issue and deal with it as an equal partner with the help of his Table. This means that I am not as stressed as I am able to share the emotional load of the family, which means I'm happier and more focussed at work and at home."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

Women spoke about the importance of Men's Table social and community gatherings outside of Table meetings to enhance the connection between and amongst Tables of men:

"An outing or activity involving partners could be organised. This need not be a regular outing, as I understand the objective of Men's Table is to get men together, but perhaps once or twice per year would be great."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

"Going away with a group of others and meeting other men was really good for him at The Men's Table weekend away. And it was really good for me having him out of the house and him coming back more upbeat. I think more activities, get aways and overnight trips would be really useful. A chance to meet other men from other areas as well from other Tables."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

He is trying to reach out to males in the community, show them the positives in joining a Men's Table.

Woman (partner of man at Table)

Increasing connection between and amongst men at Tables could strengthen the positive ripple of healthy masculinities promoted at Tables into communities. Coming together in groups of like minded people can reaffirm healthy masculinity norms established at Tables, such as communicating openly and listening actively.

Social identification with other people through 'collective assembly' (large group activities or mass gatherings) has a positive impact on wellbeing through a shared sense of meaning and sense of social connection (Gabriel et al., 2017).

Collective assembly is "an opportunity to feel connected to something bigger than oneself; it is an opportunity to feel joy, social connection, meaning, and peace" (Gabriel et al. 2017, p. 1360).

In our 2023 Annual Table Survey, men at Tables expressed an interest in further opportunities for connection with other men outside of Tables:

- 61% are interested in informal social connections such as eating out, local drinks or barbeques, and activities such as hiking, golf and motorcycling.
- 56% are interested in learning activities with 49% interested in life skills activities.
- 51% are interested in a weekend retreat with men from other Tables.

Social events outside of his Table could help him.

Woman (partner of man at Table)



Summary of communities level

As a result of the strong evidence for benefits to individuals and close relationships, we see a ripple at the communities level emerging. Women see that men are more engaged and involved in their communities as a result of their participation in The Men's Table. Women are also more involved in their communities. Men experience community belonging which strengthens over time. Some women report more workplace efficiency and productivity as a result of a significant man in their life being a Table member. From seeing the positive impacts in their lives and the lives of others, men become ambassadors for The Men's Table. This is encouraged as men also see how The Men's Table is beginning to ripple out to broader social change.

Community impacts observed and experienced

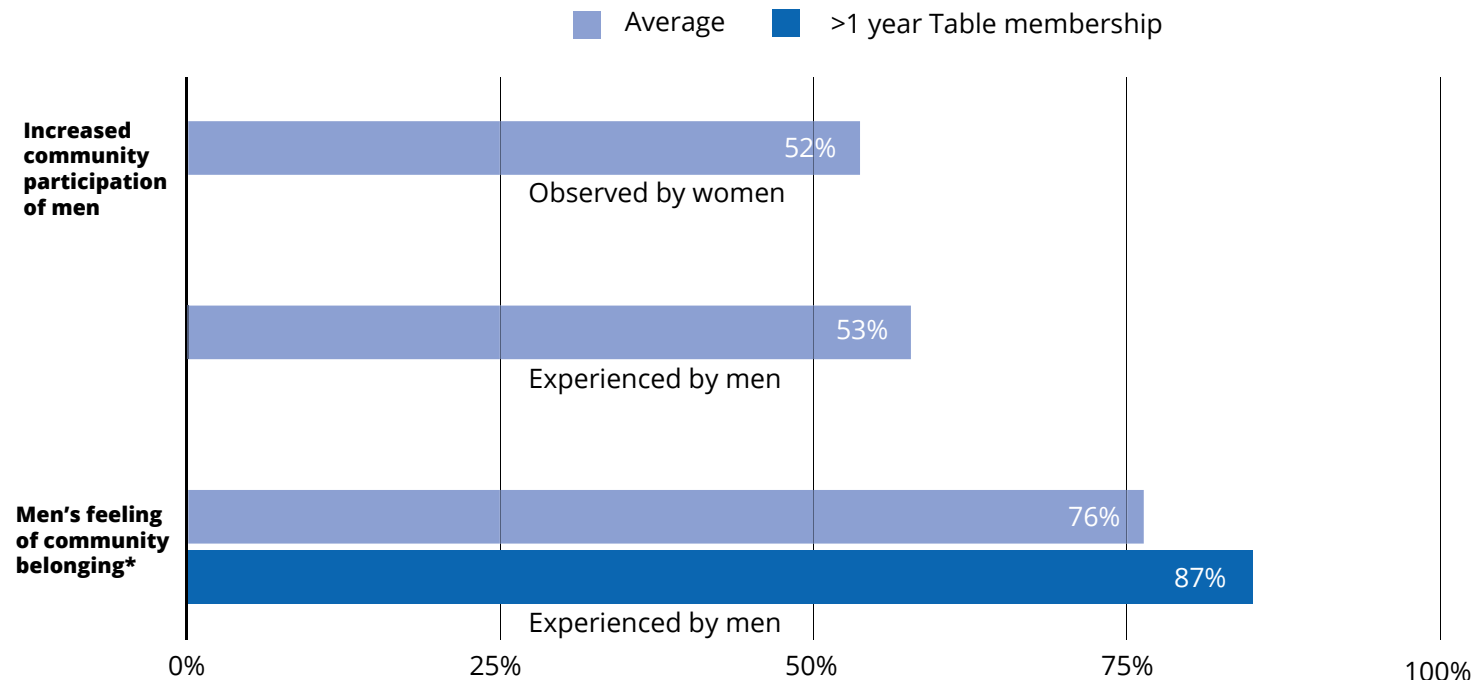


Fig 6. Men are more engaged with and feel more connected to their communities (*increase over time is statistically significant $p < .05$).



ELIZABETH'S STORY

MY PARTNER HAS SATISFACTION THAT HE'S CONTRIBUTING TO SOMETHING

“My partner is nearly 70 and he's come from quite a traumatic childhood. He's only been involved with his Table for less than six months. He was already very aware of men's issues. He sees the need to be involved and he thought that The Men's Table is a good thing that he wanted to be part of and that he has something to offer that could be very helpful to other people.

All power to The Men's Table for providing an environment for self learning and self awareness. The closed group provides a level of safety so that men can develop relationships with a set of people which is very important. The Fundamentals are about being confidential and about keeping people safe. The group operates so that everybody can have their say. There's no compulsion to speak if they don't want to, people can be themselves and hopefully become a little bit more brave in what they want to say and be encouraged to do that.

The Men's Table are taking on the heavy mantle of helping men stay mentally healthier. As a retired person my partner now has a sense of satisfaction that he's contributing to something. He hasn't had another opportunity or venue to do that recently.

It gives me a bit of free time and I feel proud of him for doing that.”

Elizabeth (partner of man at Table)

As a retiree, Elizabeth's husband has gained a sense of satisfaction from contributing to his Table.



Societal level

Ideologies of masculinities are held and perpetuated at the societal level (Kloos et al., 2021). Expressions of traditional archetypes of masculinity are asserted and promoted through a range of social agents and institutes such as peers, media and social norms, and are transmitted across generations (Nielson et al., 2022). Masculinities encompass observable and unobservable actions and worldviews.

We expect the expression of healthy masculinities at the growing national footprint of Men's Tables to create ripples not only within local communities but also out to wider society.

Within the societal level, social norms influence people to behave in ways that are in line with what is considered acceptable in a particular society (Kloos et al., 2021). It is at this level that the influence of male gender stereotypes ripple back inwardly to influence communities, close relationships and individuals.

Through their involvement at Tables, men are modelling healthier masculinities as an emerging

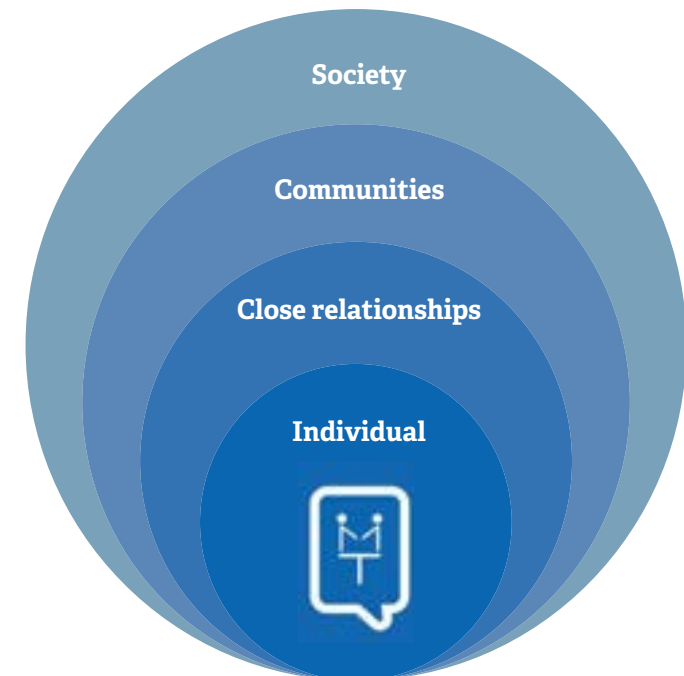
shared social identity. A shared social identity mediates resilience in a community (Drury et al., 2019; Pointon et al., 2022), showing how healthy masculinities support healthy communities and healthy men. Men are expressing and identifying emotions and exhibiting emotional intelligence, engaging in compassionate active listening, and thereby serving themselves and other men in ways that can support all of society.

“Simply put, masculinity refers to attitudes and values, behaviours and practices, and ways to approach interpersonal or social relations through which men express and enact their maleness” (Perales et al., 2023, p. 401).

I think it's just as important trying to put the spotlight on women and encourage girls by saying, 'you can do as you wish, times are changing, women are just as important, we can be just as successful'. But then on the other side of things, there are also men crying out for help and it's not as spoken about today.

Woman (daughter of man at Table)

Through enabling healthy masculinities and building healthy communities, women see The Men's Table contributing to broader social change.



Changing restrictive male gender norms can help to address the crisis in men's mental health and challenge gender inequality. Gender transformative approaches resist gender inequality by transforming harmful gender norms, roles and relations (United Nations Population Fund, 2023).

Our work is aligned with gender transformative approaches through actively promoting healthy masculinities and facilitating positive male peer relations. Adherence to traditional masculine norms impacts upon women (Department of Social Services, 2022). Traditional masculinity norms include notions of male control over women which can influence interpersonal relationships (Mahalik et al., 2003). Women are disproportionately impacted by violence perpetrated by men (ABS, 2023).

Key drivers to violence against women are adherence to rigid male gender norms and male peer relationships that reinforce rigid stereotypes of masculinity (Our Watch, 2021).

1 in 4 women, and one in 14 men, have experienced intimate partner violence (ABS, 2023).

We aim to play a role in promoting more egalitarian and collaborative relationships. Healthy masculinities help men to learn emotional regulation, which is an important factor in countering male violence towards themselves, towards other men and towards women.

We are supporting men in “developing healthy masculinities and positive, supportive relationships with their male peers”, a prevention strategy in the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032 (Department of Social Services, 2022, p. 20).

When he comes back from the Men's Table he seems very grateful to be part of something that's doing good for humanity and society.

Woman (partner of man at Table)

Restrictive masculine stereotypes are drivers of violence. Transforming male gender stereotypes and promoting positive male peer relationships are primary prevention strategies which can help break the cycle of violence against women and children (White Ribbon, 2023).

These values are embedded in the Fundamentals, as one of the points states: “Alpha male behaviour is not tolerated at Tables. This includes bullying, bigotry, boasting, racism and threats; basically any form of exercising power over others”.



“One Table relayed to us in the Kitchen the story of a new member who made a misogynistic comment. He was told ‘We don’t say that sort of stuff here mate’ by the men at the Table. The culture of the Table helped this man to learn that was not acceptable behaviour.”

David Pointon - The Men’s Table Co-founder

Being a Table member facilitates emotional intelligence which can result in men exhibiting less anger and violence in intimate relationships. Emotional intelligence refers to an individual's capacity to notice, understand and express emotions in a healthy and productive manner.

The five dimensions of emotional intelligence are: active listening; a vocabulary for feelings; developing self-awareness; showing empathy as being 'with' others; and managing emotions with self-regulation (Busch & Oakley, 2017).

As a result of a significant man in their life sitting at a Table, 10% of women experience less anger and/or violence with 13% of women experiencing less demeaning or dismissive behaviour from the significant male in their life.

"He's a lot less angry. He used to be extremely angry with me, and also with our daughters."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

"Finding out now that there is a real crisis with men's mental health and transgenerational trauma is pushing me to want to do more to support The Men's Table and other places like this because, slightly for a selfish reason as well, then women wouldn't have to suffer."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

The role modelling of healthy masculinities by Table members can benefit younger generations, as young men's ideals and expressions of masculinity are influenced by their fathers and father figures (Perales et al., 2023).

"We need young men to learn what it is to be a man to change that whole dynamic of what masculinity means."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

"I've seen my son cry and I want him to be able to cry. I want him to cry, I want him to laugh, I want him to experience every possible rainbow of emotions."

Woman (partner of man at Table)

My partner is breaking the cycle of how his Dad was with him, which wasn't healthy at all. We need other men to say 'let's stop this cycle now'. Women can give all the support we can, but it's different when you have a community of men like The Men's Table come together because then it becomes a generational stop.

Woman (partner of man at Table)



SHANNON'S STORY

THE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR DISAPPEARED

“My husband was being bullied at his last job and he eventually went to his doctor and went on worker’s compensation for stress. The case went against him and he felt let down. That was the last straw for him. Agencies weren’t helping him and he was behaving aggressively because of his frustrations.

He found The Men’s Table and decided to join. He found it easier to talk with other men that he doesn’t know well rather than family and friends.

The aggressive behaviour he exhibited before disappeared which was a turning point for him. He started to talk with acquaintances again. He applied for another job and was rejected but he didn’t stew on it like he would have before. He just got on with life.

He has a strong connection with the men from his Table. He comes home very talkative and that is something he hasn’t done before. He is more relaxed and our relationship is more relaxed. He sees positives in life and is now joining more groups and making more connections. He has found a job that he likes and everything is much better.”

Shannon (partner of man at Table)

Shannon’s husband is more relaxed and better able to deal with stress from finding connection and having other men to talk with through The Men’s Table. He is more positive and less aggressive.



Summary of societal level

The Men's Table are defining and promoting Healthy Masculinities in support of Healthy Men and Healthy Communities.

Through promoting healthy masculinities and facilitating positive male peer relationships, we are supporting the strategy for ending violence against women and children, and promoting gender equality.

Our mission of Healthy Men, Healthy Masculinities and Healthy Communities supports all genders across generations.

Societal level impacts observed and experienced

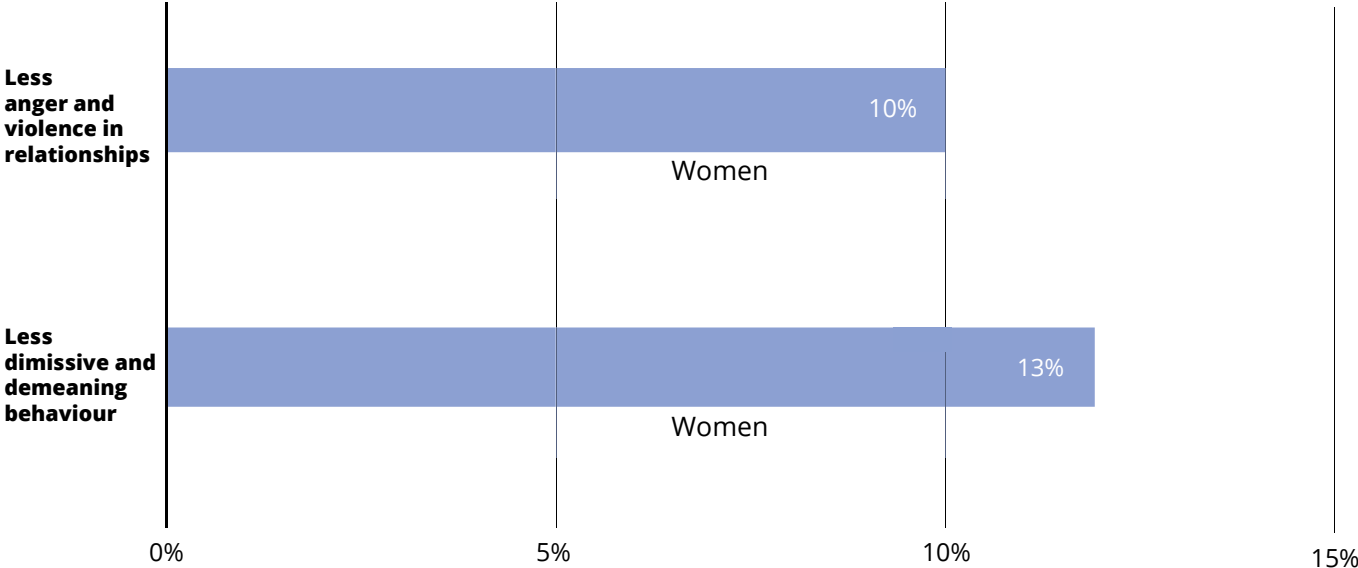


Fig 7. Women are reporting less anger, violence, dismissive and demeaning behaviours from men at Tables.

The Men's Table is creating positive ripples into society

There has been an entrenched and long lasting story through the arc of history about what it means to be a man. This story says that men can't show weakness. That they have to 'suck it up' and do it on their own. That boys don't cry. This story has persisted and many men alive today have been raised and enculturated with this story.

This old story about what it means to be a man has not proven helpful. Indeed it's been a very unhelpful story. Privilege, power and patriarchy so often lead to destruction and suffering.

We hear men express much confusion and uncertainty about being a man; about where men fit in, about how good men can have a voice in a patriarchal society that has privileged few and disadvantaged many people of all gender expressions. The story of masculinity is being questioned.

Transformation requires disruption which is destabilising. Feminism has shone a light on male privilege and patriarchy. The discourse around

'toxic masculinity' can be divisive, with some people not understanding the interconnectedness of gender equality, women's safety and men's health. A path of polarisation can be invalidating and belittling for men (Rettew & Rettew, 2023; Stone, 2023) and has left many men questioning their place in society, compounding feelings of isolation and alienation (Stone, 2023).

Through The Men's Table, men are changing the narrative of what it means to be a man - not just as a story, but as a lived experience. At Tables, men can experience another way of showing up wholeheartedly with embodied experiences of healthy masculinities.

We are supporting men who are wanting to move beyond restrictive masculine stereotypes to come together with other men to talk about how they really feel. There is a growing opportunity to bring together communities of men to shift the narrative. Australian society is ready for this change.

Men do need to talk. Men do need to get things off their chests, and when offered the right places, men are willing and able to do so. A new narrative is emerging where men are both vulnerable and strong. Where men can embody and express the full spectrum of human emotion for themselves and for the people they know. Where there is a "synergy between emotionality and physicality" (Stone, 2023, para. 3).

Our solution

We envisage a world where men are connected and caring towards themselves, others and the planet. Where men talk about their feelings. Where men are in regular practice of sharing and listening in all their relationships. Where men are being served and are serving others. A world where young people see adult men as open-hearted role models. Where men are more engaged and more proactive in their communities.

Many men do not want to live within the pressures of restrictive masculine norms and are living

outside of them already. We can see the transformation of male gender norms taking place at Tables. We are providing safe places for the expression and modelling of healthy masculinities. Tables provide opportunities for men to engage in different types of conversations. The Men's Table allows men to see that healthy masculinities are possible and that other men want this too.

Many men want a different world for their children and for future generations. Some men talk about fearing that their communities wouldn't support them to enact healthier versions of masculinity (King et al., 2018). Being a member of a Table gives men the opportunity to do so.

At Tables, men can try out new ways of engaging with each other without fear of rejection or other negative consequences. Through Tables, the discovery of what it means to be male in modern society can be "less of a lonely soul search and more of an open discussion" (Rettew & Rettew, 2023, para. 6).

We are learning from men at Tables about what embodied versions of healthy masculinities can be and look like, and we are learning more about how The Men's Table can support this change.

The transformation of traditional male gender norms can reduce violence and lead to more care and love in the world. Benefits from men's engagement with The Men's Table flow beyond the men at Tables, through to their households, creating ripples out to the community. Transforming male gender norms can benefit the whole of society. The growing number of men engaging in Tables across Australia are changing the definition of socially accepted ways of being male and helping make healthy masculinities the new normal.

Healthy masculinities promoted at The Men's Table can benefit the whole of society.

Through this report we have demonstrated the beginnings of The Men's Table Ripple Effect. Women are key supporters and referrers to The Men's Table. Our findings demonstrate that women can see benefits to the men in their lives and that there is a flow on ripple effect to the lives of women and out into the community and society.

Healthy masculinities are visible at Tables. The Men's Table benefits men who sit at Tables by creating a community of care that builds men's emotional fluency and social connectedness. The women in their lives benefit as relationships are strengthened through improved listening and communication in men. Women no longer carry an emotional burden as sole supporters of a significant man in their life. The social lives and mental health of men and women are improved. Families are healthier. Being a Table member fosters community belonging and equips men to contribute to others and to their communities.

Through endorsing healthy masculinities and building healthy

communities, we are contributing to social change by creating safe places for men to move beyond restrictive masculine stereotypes and change the story of what it means to be a man.

Healthy Men embodying Healthy Masculinities can build Healthy Communities.

The promotion of healthy masculinities at The Men's Table is supporting men's health and sending positive ripples out to the whole of society.

I've been telling people left, right and centre in different places around the country about The Men's Table. Spread it around, because it's really important. It's really important for society.

Woman (partner of man at Table)

The Men's Table does so much more good than what you could ever imagine.

Woman (partner of man at Table)



The Men's Table - Ripple Effect

Further investigation

The Men's Table are committed to ongoing learning and improvement through research and evaluation. As a relatively new program established in 2019 we have identified areas for further inquiry through insights gained through the Ripple Effect investigation.

Areas for further investigation include:

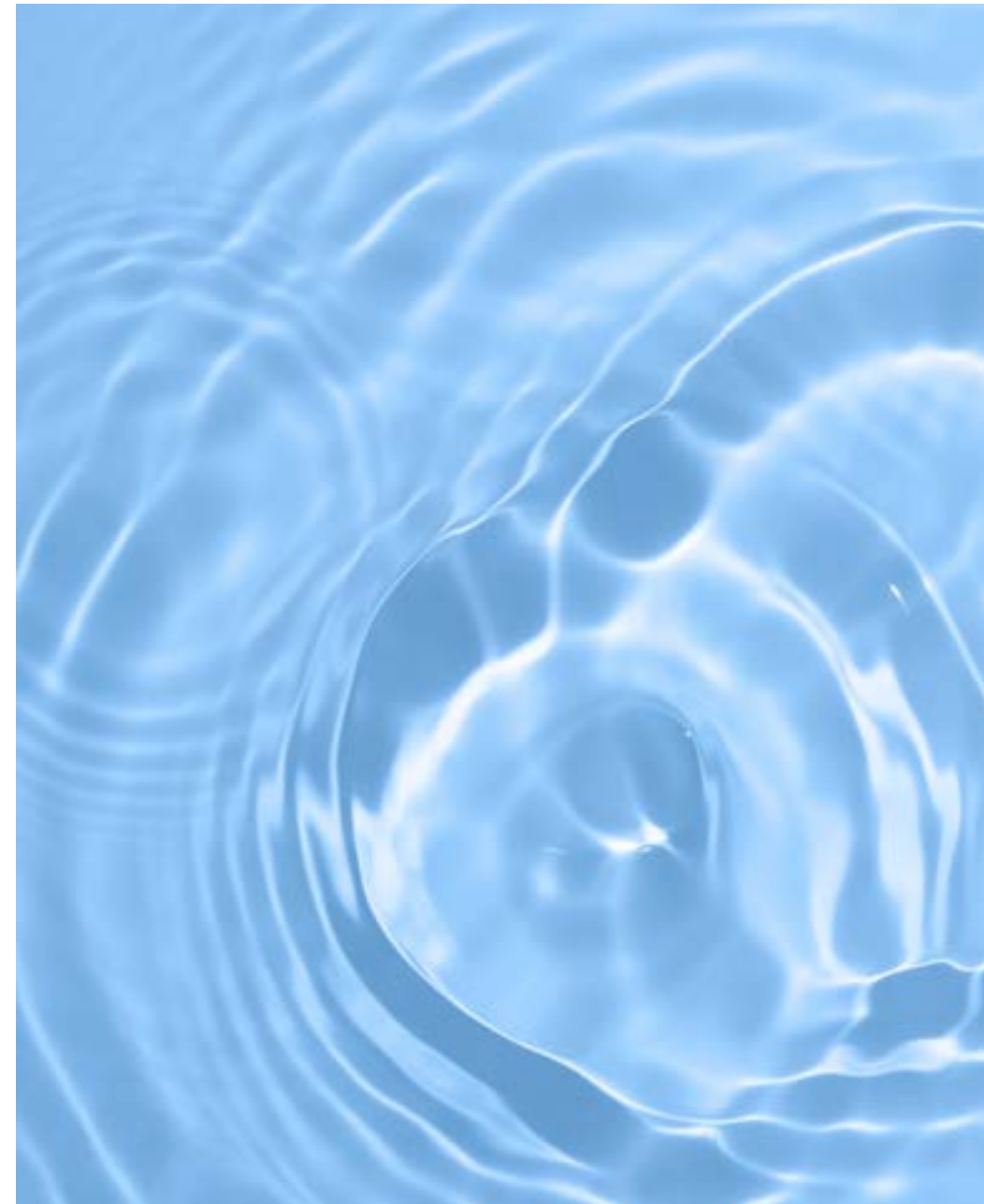
- embedding support for diversity and inclusion across the organisation and Table program;
- developing a social impact measurement framework and updated logic model through insights gained from program delivery, research and evaluation to date;

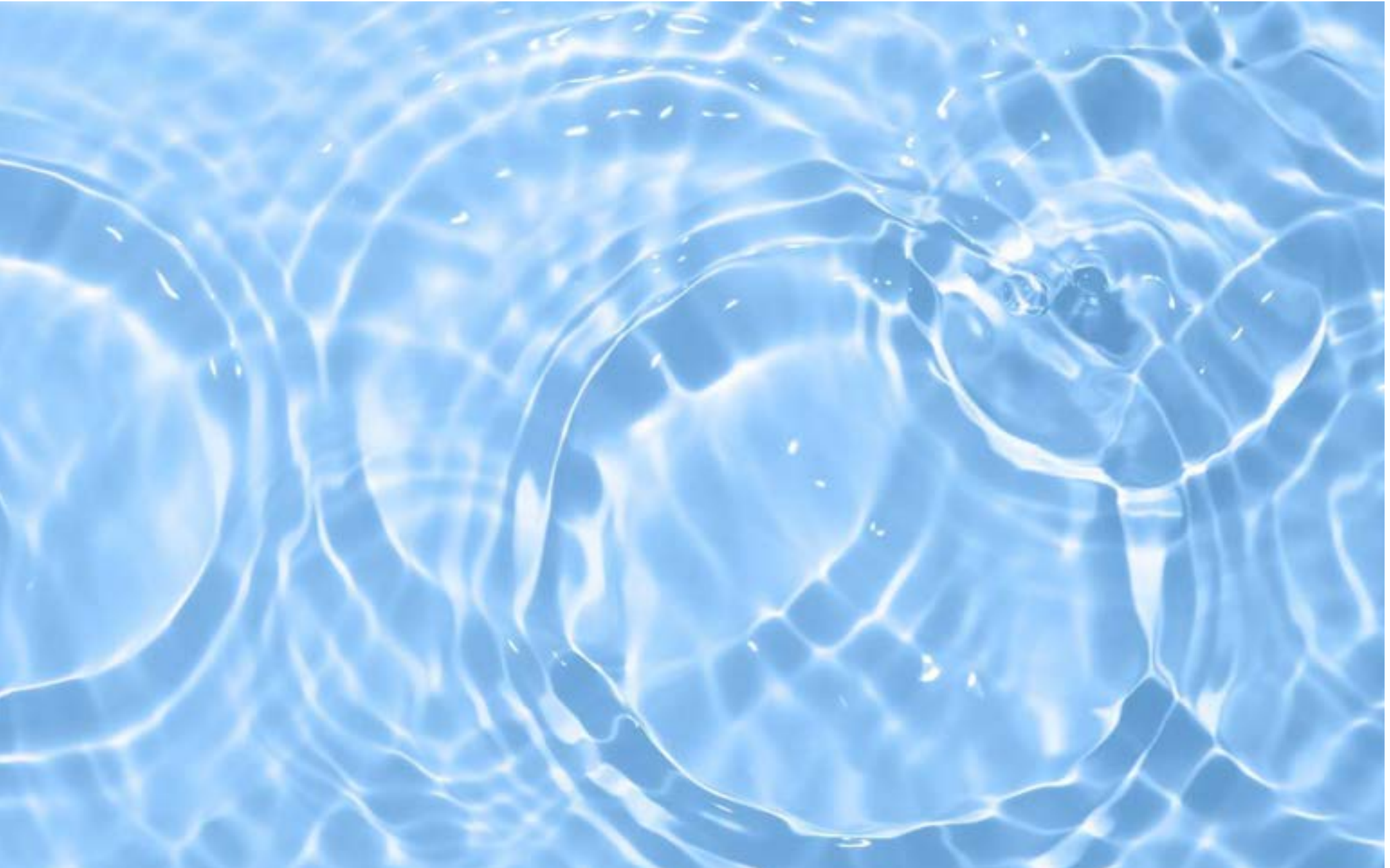
- enhancing the safety, integrity and fidelity of Table program;

- enhancing the Table program and other Men's Table programs such as Community of Men activities through ongoing co-design by inviting men with lived experiences of suicide to share their experiences with us;

- and implementing and evaluating quality assurance processes.

We are also committed to further understanding the impacts and outcomes of The Men's Table Ripple Effect.





The Men's Table - Ripple Effect

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THE MEN'S TABLE
MEN SERVING MEN