



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION  
Mr Michael Pettersson MLA (Chair), Miss Laura Nuttall MLA (Deputy Chair),  
Ms Nicole Lawder MLA (Member)

## Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation in the ACT

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The Men's Table

ACT Government Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation  
in the ACT

February 2024

David Pointon - Co Founders & Director - 1800 636 782 ,

Michael Collins - Regional Director - [michael.collins@themenstable.org](mailto:michael.collins@themenstable.org)

ABN: 80 636 420 301

85/515 Kent St,

SYDNEY

NSW 2000

## Cover letter to Inquiry

The Men's Table has 4 years of survey and evaluation data from men both locally and nationally who have approached and joined our 180+ Tables, where over 2000 men meet in intentional, private space once a month.

Many men arrive experiencing loneliness and isolation with a desire for healthy and meaningful social connection, and measures of the benefits sought and received by men and their families. We have intentionally tailored our new man engagement to increase Social Connectedness, Cohesion and Compassionate Care and Capacity for themselves and others. We request the ACT government to learn from our research ([Evaluation Reports available here](#)) and understand our non clinical and cost effective approach to integrate to policy and aligned organizations.

This programme benefits families with the initial target beneficiaries being men, who we deem to be an at risk population segment that is not catered to - especially outside of youth and aged care programs.

## Context and purpose of submission

The ACT is a territory of 470,000 diverse and often transitory people. Men are uniquely impacted and susceptible to stress, social isolation, and avoidance of engagement with Mental Health challenges. The Men's Table creates a pathway to profound and rapid outcomes at low cost in this at-risk sector of the population.

Our experience shows a healthy man, who is better connected, self directed and emotionally attuned to himself and other men, is better able to develop positive behaviours and awareness that serves themselves; their enduring Table of Men; their nearest and dearest relationships and the communities they sit in.

This submission outlines our desire in partnering with ACT Government, to build upon the work already done with philanthropic, Federal Health and community development funding in ACT since July 2022.

We launched 10 Tables in 18 months in the ACT region, and demand continues to grow.

## What is The Men's Table?

The Men's Table is a fast growing, community building and men's mental health, wellbeing and suicide prevention initiative with positive ripples into families and communities.

At each Men's Table, a group of a dozen local men meet once a month over a cheap meal in a

private room, to listen, talk, and share about the highs and lows of their lives and how they are really feeling.

Tables are established upon a simple structure and sustained through the commitment of each man to show up each month to serve themselves and to serve the other men.

The Men's Table supports men's social, emotional and mental health by promoting healthy masculinities and building healthy communities. With the experience of building 180+ Tables, we have found successful methods of reaching the 'hard to reach' priority population of men.

Two thousand men currently sit at over 180 Men's Tables spanning every State and Territory in Australia, 43% of those in regional/rural locations. Of those men, 53% have lived or living experience of suicide<sup>6</sup> and 82% are 46-75 years old, an age range known to have a higher risk of suicide.

While the program benefits men, there are also positive impacts of improved family health and wellbeing, reduced violence against women, and positive male role modeling for younger men<sup>7</sup>.

## Measurable Outcomes against TOR

1. Reduced suicide risk factors, increased suicide protective factors, reduced self harm
2. Increased social connection for men (reduced Isolation)
3. Decreased loneliness for men
4. Increased help-seeking of men
5. Reduced domestic violence, reduced use of AOD, increased family harmony
6. Increased community belonging and participation, including volunteering

## The need and case for

1. **Suicide prevention** - Men in ACT die by suicide at high rates; 55<sup>1</sup> in 2022, with 3 in 4 suicides being men. This number has risen 40% in the past 10 years. Apart from the tragic impacts, this is a huge cost to the ACT economy; the Productivity Commission estimates the cost at \$558,000<sup>2</sup> per suicide (\$38.8 Mil total cost to ACT).
2. **Preventative men's health and men's mental health** - *Loneliness & social disconnection* are contributors to poor health conditions<sup>3</sup>. A compounding factor is men's help-seeking reticence. Men's Table has a significant positive impact on men's social connectedness
3. **Reducing family violence** - Intimate partner violence contributes to more death, disability and illness in women aged 15 to 44 than any other preventable risk factor, with the combined health, administration and social welfare costs of violence against women estimated to be \$21.7 billion a year<sup>4</sup>. Evaluation data from women shows that The Men's Table reduced anger and violence at home by 10%<sup>5</sup>, and increased family harmony by 24%.
4. **Healthy masculine role modeling for boys and young men** - Incidences of unhelpful role-modeling are on the rise, with significant impacts and costs to future generations relating to attitudes toward women, and repetition of the 3 issues cited above. The Men's

Table Ripple Effect research highlights positive masculine role modeling as a valuable outcome, and a rapidly growing need amongst young men.

5. **Co-design to evidence causal link between Community Wellbeing Measures and the Men's Table Program - Wellbeing Impact measurement, generation and investment Framework** - based on ACT Government desire to measure what matters via its Wellbeing Impact Assessment Framework ... With a focus on upstream wellbeing and preventative health, rather than downstream response and remediation- to evidence need, benefit and social impact vs cost savings

## References

<sup>1</sup> AIHW

<sup>2</sup> Australian Government - *Productivity Commission Inquiry Report June 2020.*

<sup>3</sup> *State of the Nation Report - Social Connection in Australia 2023 - Ending Loneliness Together*

<sup>4</sup> <https://action.ourwatch.org.au/what-is-prevention/what-is-violence-against-women/>

<sup>5</sup> Curtin, N., Pointon, D., Sherman, A., & Cook, L. (2023). The Men's Table Ripple Effect: Stories of individual and community wellbeing from the voices of women. The Men's Table.

<sup>6</sup> A lived or living experience of suicide is defined as having suicidal thoughts or behaviour, surviving a suicide attempt, supporting someone through suicidal crisis, or being bereaved by suicide.

<sup>7</sup> The Men's Table 2023 Annual Table survey data

<sup>8</sup> Curtin, N., Pointon, D., Sherman, A., & Cook, L. (2023).