



# **RESPONDING TO UNMET NEEDS: THE RESULTS OF THE GLOBAL SELF-CARE AND MEN'S HEALTH SURVEY**

**Presentation by Peter Baker, GAMH Director, to seminar  
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Those of us who work in the field of men's health have known for a long time that most men want to lead long and healthy lives and that they are not the reckless or clueless fools they have too often been dismissed as. That simplistic caricature has been blown away, I hope once and for all, by this new very large multinational survey commissioned by Sanofi. It's very fitting that the survey is being launched to coincide with International Men's Day which takes place on Saturday and also during Movember, which alongside Men's Health Week each June, is the largest annual event raising awareness of men's physical and mental health. This week also happens to be Self Care Week, a well-established UK initiative which is now generating interest much more widely.

Global Action on Men's Health is delighted to have been invited by Sanofi to collaborate on the survey and to take part in this discussion alongside several of our individual member organisations, some of which are here today. Just in case you haven't heard of GAMH, it's a relatively new network of organisations and individuals with an interest in men's health who want to see the issue on the agendas of national and international health organisations. We believe that gender in its true sense, taking account of both women and men, must be taken full account of if there are to be the improvements in public health that we all want to see. We don't want any reduction in efforts to improve women's health, just the opposite in fact; we want more investment in systematic action to improve the health of both sexes and, specifically, to see men's health cease to be a problem that hides in plain sight.

It is, after all, undeniable that men's health is far worse than it need be. From a global perspective, the gap between male and female life expectancy is actually getting wider: in 1980, men's lives were, on average, four years shorter than women's; by 2015, the difference was six years; and, by 2030, the male:female health "gap" is predicted to be seven years. This large difference is not just a problem in low-income countries: in 2015, men died five years sooner than women in the wealthier countries too.

Men also live fewer years in good health. Globally, men can expect a "healthy life expectancy" which is three years below women's. In

the wealthier countries, the healthy life expectancy gap is four years.

The excess health burden facing men has many causes. As a result of male socialisation and the failure of health systems to initiate approaches we know will work, too many men continue to take too many risks with their health – for example, by smoking, drinking too much alcohol, eating a poor diet, driving dangerously and under-using primary care services, including general practice and pharmacies. The nature of many men’s occupations, which exposes them to a wide range of hazards, is also a significant factor.

Poor health is not inevitable for men, however. It is not genetic in origin, except perhaps to a small degree. We now know enough about how to support men to take better care of themselves and improve the accessibility of health services. If I can give just one European example ... Eurofit is now working with professional football clubs in several countries to engage overweight men in diet and physical activity programmes. It uses the branding of soccer clubs and many men’s interest in football to provide a brilliant example of how a male-targeted intervention can make a significant and measurable impact.

To bring about improvements in men’s health, a systematic, multi-sectoral approach led by health policymakers and providers is now required and the development of national men’s health policies would be a very good place to start. We have already seen the significant impact of a national men's health policy in Ireland and

we'd like to see this replicated in many more countries, for the EU as a whole and also globally by the WHO.

We think the Global Men's Health Survey that has been published today – which is the most comprehensive international survey of men's health published to date – can contribute to the momentum for change. The findings that stand out for me include:

- The overwhelming majority of men want to take charge of their health and four men in every five feel as confident as women when it comes to managing their own health. The idea that men are simply hell-bent on self-destruction, reluctant to think about their health or helpless fools is exposed as a myth.
- Men are generally very positive about the value of over-the-counter medicines. 60% of men say they trust OTC medicines as much as medicines prescribed by a doctor. This bodes well for efforts to improve men's self-care.
- Men's trust in pharmacists is improving. 80% of men believe that less serious and chronic conditions like headaches, migraines, nausea and allergies can be dealt with by pharmacists. However, men's actual use of pharmacy services is still at a low level with only 4% of men using a pharmacy as a first option when feeling unwell. But it is clear from the findings that pharmacies have huge potential as a resource for men's health and men's health and pharmacy organisations can work together to make them a service many more men will want to use. We already know from work in

the USA, Australia, New Zealand and Europe that men will use pharmacy services in far greater numbers if they believe they have something to offer them. Health checks and advice on healthy living have been found to be good hooks for men but there is potential to do much more.

- There is significant under-use of digital health services by men. When faced with a health problem, surprisingly few men's first response would be to go online to look up their symptoms and possible treatments. But more than half of all men believe there is plentiful information online to help them choose the right medication so there is huge potential for improvement through reputable websites, social media and apps, especially delivered via mobile platforms. I stress that men must be encouraged to use reputable digital services: there are still too many men being conned by dodgy websites mis-selling dodgy drugs.
- Men remain reluctant to seek help for a number of important sexual health problems, including erectile dysfunction (ED). Even though ED is often a symptom of a potentially serious underlying condition such as diabetes or cardiovascular disease, men remain deterred by embarrassment and a belief that the problem will go away on its own. The survey shows that 98% will seek help for a sexually transmitted infection but far fewer, 62%, will seek help for erection problems. Improving men's knowledge, confidence and ability to access services for the full range of sexual health issues is of critical importance.

Global Action on Men's Health welcomes this new report. It offers important new insights, based on a very large representative sample of men and women across eight countries. It will contribute to the growing awareness and debate about the overlooked inequality that is men's health and, most importantly, to new initiatives to improve the length and quality of their lives. Men's health organisations and others stand ready to work with policymakers and providers on this important agenda and we must act now before men's health outcomes fall even further behind.

Thank you.