

Exploring social connection between men in suicide prevention initiatives

Prepared for
Suicide Prevention Community
Council of Hamilton

In
December 2023

By
Syed Mahamad
Noor AL Omran
Ayma Iqbal
Brandon Iturralde
Ayushka Tiwary

Contents

- Executive Summary 2
- Introduction 3
 - Background..... 3
 - Purpose..... 3
 - Report structure 4
- Methods and Limitations 4
 - Phase One: Interviews with men’s mental health experts 4
 - Phase Two: Interviews with men’s mental health initiatives 5
 - Limitations..... 5
- Findings: Phase One..... 5
 - Current state of men’s mental health and suicide risk..... 5
 - The importance of social connection between men 6
- Findings: Phase One..... 7
 - Goals and impacts of men’s mental health initiatives..... 7
 - Success factors of men’s mental health initiatives 8
 - Amplify Lived Experiences and Voices 8
 - Activity-based..... 9
 - Appropriate Language and Presentation..... 9
 - Approaches to Maximizing Engagement..... 10
 - Challenges and considerations 10
 - Funding and Financial Sustainability..... 10
 - Measuring Success..... 11
 - Recruitment and Continued Engagement 11
- Key Takeaways and Next Steps 12
- Bibliography 16
- Appendices 17
 - Appendix A: Description of men’s suicide prevention organizations and initiatives 17
 - Appendix B: Phase 1 Interview Questions 22
 - Appendix C: Phase 2 Interview Questions 23
 - Appendix D: List of Relevant Resources for the SPCCH 27

Executive Summary

Middle-aged men are more likely to die by suicide than any other demographic, necessitating efforts to support the mental health of at-risk men. Previous research has shown that suicide prevention programming can be an effective tool to combat male suicides, when implemented successfully. As a non-profit organization working to build a community-based initiative that fosters social connection among men, the Suicide Prevention Community Council of Hamilton (SPCCH) was interested in investigating different models of men's mental health programming and their impacts. The McMaster Research Shop partnered with the SPCCH to explore opportunities to foster social connection between men to reduce social isolation, increase healthy help-seeking, and ultimately prevent suicide. To collect comprehensive data on the best suicide prevention strategies we divided data collection in two phases: (1) interviews with men's mental health experts and (2) interviews with men's mental health initiatives.

Through the Phase 1 interviews, we learned more about the gender paradox in the manifestation of poor mental health and suicide rates. Men are "diagnosed at half the rate of women, and they [die by suicide] about three or four times the rate of women" (researcher). Diagnosis of mental health disorders among men is challenging because the symptoms described in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders is gender-based towards women. Interviewees also stressed that man-to-man relationships were the most important component of improving men's mental health and that men were more comfortable connecting in spaces that offered activities.

In Phase 2, we found that successful men's mental health initiatives prioritized the needs and preferences of men by: amplifying lived experience and voices, employing activity-based programming, using intentional language and presentation, and taking steps to maximize men's engagement. Advocacy and awareness efforts were also recognized as crucial to destigmatizing men's mental health and supporting conversations within families and social groups. In addition, the key informants noted the challenges of securing sufficient funding, measuring program success, and retaining participants over time.

We identified Men's Sheds as a successful activity-based initiative but recognize the financial hurdle of securing an adequate location and resources. Buddy Up offers great flexibility and versatility, as the SPCCH can select which suggested activities from Buddy Up's guide to implement. Tough Enough To Talk About It is a workplace presentation targeted at industry workers in Alberta. It can be adapted to Hamilton-specific industries but has limited applicability outside of that demographic. Love Letter to Men is a conference that allows individuals to share their lived experiences with mental health with others. It helps normalize conversations about men's mental health but does not directly foster social connection. Overall, it is essential that the SPCCH develops their initiative with a clear understanding of their intended audience. The next steps for the SPCCH include identifying their target population and then adapting elements of the programs explored to the Hamilton population based on their budget and funding.

Introduction

Background

Middle-aged men are the most at-risk demographic for death by suicide (Statistics Canada, 2019). Suicide prevention is faced with a gender paradox in which women attempt suicide more than men, but men die by suicide more than women (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2022). This is rooted in how men and women are socialized. Research shows that socialization is a key factor that increases men's likelihood of dying from suicide. Men are socialized in a way that promotes emotional detachment and stoicism, causing them to view emotional vulnerability as a weakness and 'unmanly' (Seager et al., 2014; Ogrodniczuk & Oliffe, 2011). These inhibited approaches to emotions increase men's risk for suicide as they're less likely to seek social and emotional support at risk of appearing "unmanly." Men also often choose more violent means of suicide, such as guns, whereas women tend to use less violent means (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2019). To reduce the risk of death by suicide, increasing social connection and comfort in expressing emotions are theorized to reduce the isolating effects of how men are currently socialized, which in turn increases the risk of poor mental health and suicide (Houle et al., 2008; American Psychological Association, 2005) Additionally, research shows that one of the best ways to combat male suicide is centering informal settings in suicide prevention initiatives (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2022). This not only alleviates the awkwardness men may feel about discussing mental health but provides them with an informal outlet where they can foster social connections.

Established in 1980, the Suicide Prevention Community Council of Hamilton (SPCCH) is a non-profit organization which focuses on suicide prevention. The SPCCH consists of professionals, volunteers, and agency representatives who collaborate to raise suicide prevention awareness using education and advocacy (SPCCH, n.d.). One of the SPCCH's current focuses is men's suicide prevention. Specifically, they're interested in supporting initiatives in Hamilton to help foster social connection and create safe male spaces for emotional vulnerability. They reached out to the McMaster Research Shop for help investigating the potential models and impacts of men's suicide prevention initiatives.

Purpose

The overall purpose of this research project is to identify opportunities to foster social connection between men to reduce social isolation, increase healthy help-seeking, and ultimately prevent suicide.

We conducted this project in two phases (see below for objectives and research questions).

Phase	Objectives	Research Questions
Phase 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand the current state of men’s mental health and suicide risk in Canada • To validate the hypothesis that increasing social connection between men will reduce suicide risk • To identify successful men’s suicide prevention organizations/initiatives and their characteristics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the current state of men’s mental health and suicide risk in Canada? • Based on current research, what are the general characteristics of a successful men’s suicide prevention initiative? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To what extent is fostering social connection an effective way to prevent male suicide?
Phase 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To explore successful men’s suicide organizations/initiatives and their characteristics • To understand how social connection is fostered in these organizations/initiatives • To identify challenges to implementing and sustaining initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the program design, implementation process, and intended outcomes for successful men’s suicide prevention organizations/initiatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How, if at all, do these initiatives foster social connection between men?

Report structure

First, we provide an overview of the men’s mental health organizations and initiatives explored in this project. We then discuss our recruitment process for obtaining interviewees and how we conducted the interviews. Our research findings are organized based on the objectives developed in collaboration with members of the SPCCH.

Methods and Limitations

Phase One: Interviews with men’s mental health experts

The goal of the first phase of the research was to better understand the current state of men’s mental health in Canada, the connection between social connection and suicide prevention, and the kinds of interventions that are hypothesized to be successful in fostering social connection among men. To do this, we interviewed four men’s mental health experts, including two psychiatrists, one researcher, and one community advocate. We conducted the interviews over Zoom (see Appendix B for the questions we asked) and analyzed the resulting transcripts for insights and themes relating to our research objectives.

Phase Two: Interviews with men's mental health initiatives

The goal of the second phase was to understand the models, implementation features/challenges, and intended impacts of a small sample of men's mental health initiatives. The idea was that exploring the potential impact and success factors of existing initiatives could inform the development of a local (Hamilton) initiative. In consultation with the SPCCH, we decided to consider the following organizations and initiatives:

- Movember
- Men's Shed
- Men in Mind
- UBC Reducing Male Suicides (UBC RMS)
- Buddy Up
- Tough Enough to Talk About It
- CALM/Project 84
- Love Letter to Men

As a preliminary step, the team conducted an online scan of these organizations and initiatives to learn more about their program objectives, design, and organizational structure (See Appendix A). Then, we attempted to recruit representatives of each organization for an interview via email. We were able to secure interviews with representatives from all but two of the initiatives (Men in Mind and CALM/Project 84). We conducted these interviews online over Zoom (see Appendix B for the questions we asked) and analyzed the resulting transcripts for insights relating to our objectives.

Limitations

The team identified a few limitations throughout the research project that should be considered. While we contacted 8 organizations through email, we were unable to secure interviews with 2 of these organizations (Men in Mind and CALM/Project 84). Additionally, the scope of our information was limited due to the fact that we only interviewed 5 organizations in Phase 2. Another possible limitation involves the roles of the individuals in Phase 2. Some representatives were unable to answer all the questions posed by the team in depth. This was due to the fact that some questions were unrelated to their position or preceded their time with the organization. This limited the amount of information we were able to gather on certain topics. The length of the interviews was also 30 minutes, which limited the breadth and depth of our discussions.

Findings: Phase One

Current state of men's mental health and suicide risk

In Phase 1, we asked participants to share their knowledge about the current state of men's mental health and suicide risk in Canada. The participants touched on the gender

paradox of suicide, where women are more likely to attempt suicide, but the suicide rate is three times higher in men compared to women. They also suggested that these numbers may be understated, as men's mental health issues are often underreported and "a third of [opioid overdose] deaths are probably suicide" (psychiatrist 1). Psychiatrist 2 emphasized that the age group with the highest suicide rate has shifted from men over the age of 65 to men between 45 and 64. Interviewees also noted that certain subgroups of men are at a higher risk of suicide, including transgender men and Indigenous men.

Interviewees discussed several factors that increase the risk of suicide in men. Of the four interviewed, three emphasized the issues men at risk of suicide encounter in clinical settings. One issue is recognizing depression in men. The researcher we interviewed stated that men are "diagnosed at half the rate of women, and they [die by suicide] about three or four times the rate of women". Psychiatrist 1 explained that the symptoms of depression described in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (which is used to diagnose depression) is gender-based towards women. "Anger, irritability, substance use, risk-taking, over involvement in sports and work, [and] low impulse control" are all signs of depression in men that would not be identified when physicians are screening for depression (researcher). This is underscored by the finding that "63% of [men who die by suicide] had been seen by [their] family doctor in the month prior to their suicide" (psychiatrist 2). Through conversation, the participants also mentioned the following as factors that contribute to suicide in men: struggling to find meaning in life, relationship breakdown, loneliness, and transitions in life (e.g., retirement, losing a partner, etc).

Psychiatrist 1 felt Canada was behind in advocating for men's mental health relative to other countries. They felt that people are generally "tired of raising awareness ... [and] a jump start" was needed to address the issue in Canada (psychiatrist 1). Another participant, however, noted the benefits of raising awareness. They felt that public awareness of men's mental health in Canada has improved, as society was more inclusive and encouraged men to open up about their issues. However, they admitted that the stigma remains at the microlevel, particularly within families and many social groups.

The importance of social connection between men

Each participant of Phase 1 reiterated the importance of social connection between men in improving men's mental health. The mental health advocate singled out man-to-man relationships as the most important component of improving men's mental health. They elaborated that social connections between men can help break down barriers and facilitate honest and vulnerable conversations. They also emphasized that male friendships tend to be social or recreational, and that it can be challenging for men to develop friendships with other men who are willing to share and discuss their emotions. The other three participants pointed out that men connect differently than women. "Guys connect when it's not about connection" (researcher), suggesting that men don't tend to plan social gatherings around the purpose of emotional conversations. Rather, the

interviewee suggested that men prefer to interact while completing an activity. Anecdotally, the interviewee noticed that when men gather around a particular activity, there may be very little verbal communication in the beginning, but silently working together can be a powerful bonding experience that leads to deeper connections over time.

One participant noted it is difficult to definitively prove that fostering social connection leads to a reduction in suicide risk (see *Measuring Success*, p.11). Theoretically, fostering social connections would reduce loneliness and isolation, which would in turn reduce the risk of both depression and suicide. Overall, the participants of Phase 1 validated the hypothesis that social connection between men may reduce their risk of suicide.

Findings: Phase One

In this section, we describe the goals, impacts, success factors, and challenges associated with men's mental health initiatives that arose through our interviews in both Phase 1 and Phase 2. However, the majority of this section includes information collected in Phase 2, as these topics were more relevant to the representatives of the men's mental health initiatives.

Goals and impacts of men's mental health initiatives

In the Phase 2 interviews, all participants acknowledged that social connection was an important consideration in the development and delivery of their initiative. For instance, Movember has developed a Social Innovators Challenge program. This program provides support to initiatives that focus on "addressing isolation and loneliness" with the understanding that building stronger social connections can "reduce depression, anxiety, and potentially suicide" (Movember representative). Buddy Up's "main goal is to promote authentic conversations ... to reduce the stigma around men's mental health and suicide" (Buddy Up representative). Their campaigns suggest men engaging in activities with other men will lead to stronger connections. They also have a considerable online component, where engagements over social media are promoted and tracked. Men's Sheds also operates on the belief that social connection occurs through engaging in activities together. Sheds are developed based on the mutual interests of its members, and their membership can lead to the following benefits: "feel[ing] more supported and less isolated, lonely and depressed", "practic[ing] better self care", "[having] a longer, fuller and healthier life", and having an enhanced "sense of purpose and self worth" (Men's Sheds Ontario, n.d.).

Love Letter to Men and Tough Enough To Talk About It do not directly foster social connection between men, but recognize its importance. Love Letter to Men strives to create a space for men to connect but is still in its early stages and has mostly focused on normalizing conversations about men's mental health. Tough Enough To Talk About

It is a workplace presentation designed to improve mental health literacy, which is likely to improve social connection between men, though this has not been identified as an aim of the program.

Success factors of men’s mental health initiatives

Throughout all nine interviews, an overarching theme emerged: understanding the needs and preferences of men was essential to the success of the initiative. One participant in Phase 2 emphasized adopting a gendered lens, where the initiatives are designed with “men in mind to be able to address their needs and be tailored to the way that they want to be receiving programs” (Movember representative). Although “men” is a broad category, the participants noted that there were characteristics of initiatives that would positively affect most, if not all, men. We outline these success factors below and in Figure 1, recognizing that all stem from the common theme of understanding men, their needs, and their preferences.

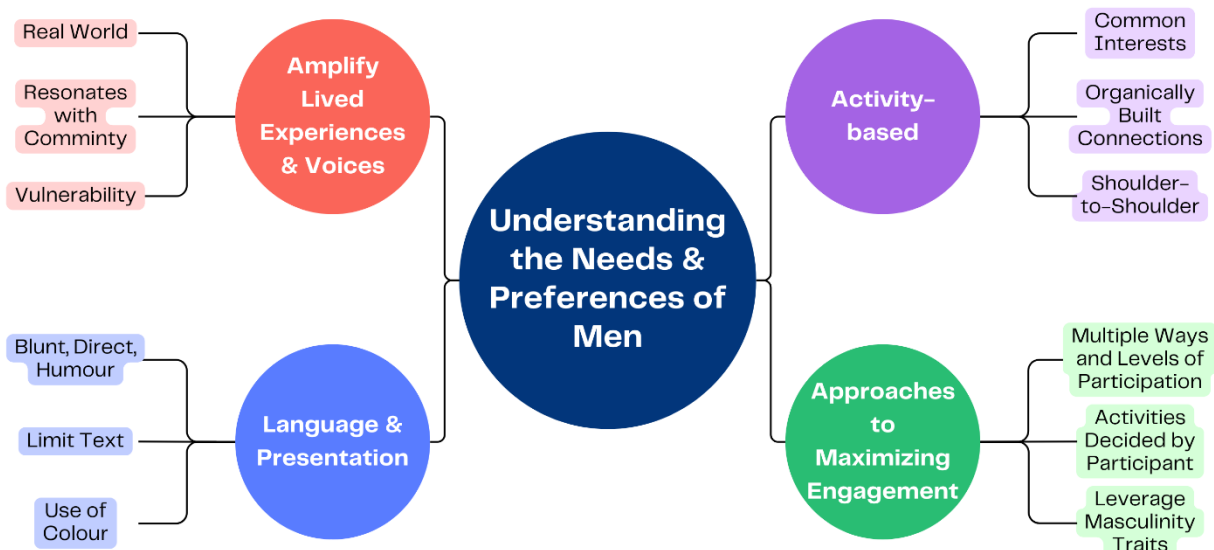


Figure 1. Success factors of men’s mental health initiatives identified through key informant interviews, with the overarching theme of understanding the needs and preferences of men.

Amplify Lived Experiences and Voices

Part of understanding men is recognizing they value authenticity, including the lessons learned from lived experience. During the Phase 2 interviews, the representatives of Movember, Tough Enough To Talk About It, Love Letter to Men, and Men’s Sheds explicitly mentioned the importance of incorporating an element of lived experience into their initiatives. According to one participant, “nobody wants to come listen to an expert [i.e., academic/researcher]”, and including someone with lived experience makes “it much more personable and real world” (Love Letter to Men representative). Buddy Up bases its entire program on facilitating authentic conversations between men. Their

programming is developed through consultations with an advisory committee and a research committee to ensure the campaign and suggested activities “resonates in the communities ... [and] the content [they] are putting out is current and relevant [both in terms of community needs and research]” (Buddy Up representative).

Activity-based

As noted in our findings from Phase 1, men tend to open up while completing activities shoulder-to-shoulder rather than through face-to-face conversations. The participants of Phase 2 reiterated this notion. We gathered through multiple interviews that men often struggle to open up right away. Having a common interest or participating in an activity together allows them to slowly and organically build relationships to the point where they are comfortable speaking about deeper topics. Men’s Sheds is the most notable organization that leverages the positive impact of talking while doing. Members of a shed “develop a trust in the group of guys that they’re working with on projects [and] they may talk about things like they feel depressed, or they feel ... lonely” (Men’s Sheds representative). Another important aspect of initiatives being activity-based is that the activity should relate to a practical need or interest. For example, in a story shared by the representative of Men’s Sheds, one member of the shed opened up to the others about needing to learn how to cook after the passing of his wife. This led to several other men sharing that they did not know how to cook, which ultimately led to that particular Shed developing its own cooking program. In our interview with Movember, we learned about various initiatives that are centered around sports and other activities that men enjoy. Building these initiatives off existing interests of men have led to greater engagement. Similarly, combining initiatives with “familiar environments ... like pubs, barbershops, sporting environments” (Movember representative) is an effective way to reach men. Recognizing the benefit of coupling activities to discussing one’s mental health, Buddy Up’s Build Up campaign is based on the belief that authentic conversations and deep connections happen while working with others.

Appropriate Language and Presentation

The use of appropriate language is strongly tied to authenticity. Across both phases, all participants acknowledged that men tend to communicate differently than women. A participant in Phase 1 stated, “whatever the initiative is, the lens has to be how do men communicate, which does tend to be ... more blunt and direct and with more humour” (psychiatrist 1). As discussed above, men respond differently to academic experts compared to individuals who have had real-life struggles with mental health.

Consequently, the facilitators of the Tough Enough To Talk About It workshop are specifically trained on what terminology to use to develop and sustain engagement with the audience. Clinical terms for mental health issues tend to carry more stigma, and using more digestible language and less technical jargon helps men become comfortable with the concept of mental health. Another participant noted that political correctness could be a hindrance to authentic conversation, emphasizing the need to engage men at a level at which they are comfortable communicating. The representatives of both Movember and Buddy Up discussed the importance of limiting

text and using colour in a way that appeals to men. The Canadian Journalism Forum on Violence and Trauma (2020) produced a guide about reporting on mental health in media, which includes language best practice guidelines. This guide should be consulted when developing a men's mental health initiative.

Approaches to Maximizing Engagement

According to the Movember representative, “the hardest part of developing and delivering programs to men is getting them to show up, remain engaged, and continuously participate in the program”. One of the Phase 1 participants suggested creating a “menu” of options to participate in an initiative. We learned through our Phase 2 interviews that this is what Buddy Up has done. It offers various methods of participation with different levels of engagement, ranging from creating social media posts about Buddy Up to implementing the Buddy Up Guide within one's workplace. Buddy Up also ensures that their materials are representative of men of different demographics to increase engagement. The Love Letter to Men representative mentioned that they encouraged local watch parties for the conference with the expectation that “a lot of folks ... would show up because it's virtual [and] they can be somewhat anonymous” (Love Letter to Men representative). Men's Sheds are also flexible in what their participants do, as some have workshops and others create spaces for participants to engage in activities of their choosing (e.g., drinking coffee together, completing jigsaw puzzles, woodworking, etc). On engaging men and sustaining participation, the representative of Men's Sheds compared grassroots sheds (i.e., started by a group of men) to sponsored sheds (i.e., started by an institution, such as a senior's centre). They explained that sponsored sheds “inevitably fail [because] ... they tell the men when they're going to meet, what they're going to do, how they're going to do it” (Men's Sheds representative). The key to the success and longevity of grassroots sheds was that the participants decided on how their shed would operate, which ensured the program aligned with their preferences and therefore maximized engagement.

The participant from Movember mentioned two additional factors to improve engagement: 1) creating a non-judgmental environment where participants are comfortable to be and express themselves; and 2) establishing a consistent schedule for the program. Both the researcher in Phase 1 and the Movember representative recommended leveraging positive masculinity traits to improve participation. For instance, men are more likely to participate if they believe they are helping someone through their participation. This could include giving back to the community, teaching others new skills, or attending events to support someone else.

Challenges and considerations

Funding and Financial Sustainability

Sourcing sufficient funds was a common challenge among all organizations and initiatives interviewed. Love Letter to Men (and its parent organization, Alberta Men's

Collaborative) is currently operating without a budget. Up to this point, they have relied largely on others donating their time and expertise. A lack of funding is hindering the full potential of their programs and plans; however, they are considering developing partnerships with sponsors to ensure the program continues. This is an approach that Buddy Up has taken, as it has formed partnerships with several regular funders. In addition, they rely on fundraising and donation to ensure their sustainability. Initially, Tough Enough To Talk About It faced financial issues as a non-profit. However, in the last 2 years, they decided to operate as a social enterprise, charging corporations for their workplace presentation. The funds obtained are then invested back into the program to ensure its continued operation. Within Men's Sheds, each shed has the freedom to secure funding in a way suitable for that particular community. Many rely on sponsors to provide space and material for the activities. Other sources of funding include grants, donations, and operating as a social enterprise by selling the material they produce.

Movember is distinct from the other organizations mentioned. As a well-established global organization that acquires funds through fundraising campaigns and other methods, Movember offers the Social Innovators Challenge open grant rounds to which anyone from the general public can apply. This creates an opportunity for community-based men's mental health initiatives to obtain funding and expand their impact.

Measuring Success

All participants recognized the importance of measuring success, especially when it came to securing funding. However, there were differences in how they felt success could be measured. Psychiatrist 1 in Phase 1 explained that measuring suicide prevention is difficult and consequently most research focuses on reducing suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. This participant also advocated for more upstream measures of success, including connection, sustained engagement, satisfaction, and well-being. The researcher interviewed in Phase 1 expressed a similar idea. They insisted that the demand for an initiative is evidence of its success. According to this participant, one should "never underestimate the value of a testimonial" (researcher), as they can be more convincing to funders than statistics. Among the Phase 2 interviews, the representative of Men's Sheds echoed these thoughts, preferring to measure success by looking at the number of men attending, the consistency of attendance, the number of new sheds, and the total number of operating sheds. The representatives of Movember, Tough Enough To Talk About It, and Buddy Up noted that they are engaged in formal research and evaluation but did not provide details. However, both Tough Enough To Talk About It and Buddy Up measure success by the number of men participating in their programs.

Recruitment and Continued Engagement

In addition to the points made in *Maximized Participation*, a key component to ensure continued engagement is the selection of suitable leaders. Often, leaders have to volunteer considerable time to ensure the smooth operation of the initiative. In our

interview with the representative of Men's Sheds, they discussed that leaders are essential to deescalating and diffusing situations. Moreover, identifying such leaders can take time and may require keeping an eye out for potential candidates at activities outside of the initiative.

Key Takeaways and Next Steps

Based on the findings discussed above, we have provided the following key takeaways and recommended next steps for the SPCCH moving forward.

- **Sharing lived experience is a critical factor** in destigmatizing meaningful engagement and fostering vulnerable conversations among men. This suggests the potential effectiveness of implementing a peer support model for a men's mental health initiative in Hamilton. Such a model can empower men to cultivate safe and trusting interpersonal relationships with others who share similar experiences, thereby increasing the likelihood of their engagement in any programming. Identifying community champions who are willing to share their personal struggles could be an effective way to market a future initiative.
- **Finding simple ways to connect in familiar environments drives engagement.** The success of Men's Sheds caught our attention due to its simple premise – middle-aged men are more likely to talk about their mental health when involved in emotionally neutral (and stereotypically masculine) activities, such as fixing things. There exists an extensive range of activities that men can partake in while simultaneously incorporating elements of emotional connection and dialogue. The SPCCH could support the development of a new group, such as a men's hiking group, or seek to capitalize on existing male-centric gathering spaces, like a sports group. The goal should be to get men talking, perhaps starting with casually engaging or lightly emotive conversational prompts like "four life events that changed me" or "one big challenge I faced this year" that have the potential to lead to deeper emotional engagement.
- **Advocacy and awareness campaigns are still valuable and needed** to spark conversations that destigmatize mental health and promote healthy help-seeking behaviours. While it's likely outside the scope of the SPCCH to develop their own campaign, the organization should consider the ways in which they can amplify the impact of existing campaigns with wide reach, such as Movember. For example, the SPCCH could work with regional partners to develop educational interventions as part of the annual Movember campaign to help people navigate difficult conversations with those in need of support.
- **Knowing your audience is key.** This point seems obvious, but it was continually emphasized in our interviews. Since emotions are traditionally perceived as non-masculine by middle-aged men, programs and initiatives must align with alternative aspects of men's identities to be seen as personally meaningful and relevant. For instance, the campaign "Tough Enough to Talk About It" merges a call to action for men to discuss their mental health with traditional masculine ideals of overcoming fears and rising to challenges. However, it's important to

note that such language, while effective for one demographic, might not resonate with others, especially younger generations of men, who seem to be more open-minded of differing interpretations of gender, making terms like “tough” less appealing. The SPCCH has specified their demographic as middle-aged men, but further refinement, such as targeting specific industries (e.g., “blue-collar”), cultures, or racial-ethnic groups could enhance the specificity of an initiative.

We essentially see three avenues for the SPCCH that leverage these findings: 1) Support the development of a novel initiative, 2) Replicate an existing successful initiative, or 3) Explore a hybrid approach that combines elements of both. During our interviews, the challenge of funding and ensuring financial sustainability emerged (unsurprisingly) as a major concern. Partnering with an established mental health organization that’s funded as a service (e.g., CMHA) could be a sustainable way to establish a program. Otherwise, securing initial funding for a pilot initiative may be relatively straightforward; sustaining support beyond that period may pose a challenge. Integrating a robust evaluation plan into the initiative would be crucial, as it can generate data on program outputs and outcomes, making a compelling case for future investment.

Taking a [developmental evaluation](#) approach could help scale an evaluation to the size and budget of an initiative while concentrating on high-impact indicators and measures indicative of its value. In the case of suicide prevention, interviewees reinforced the link between fostering social connection and reducing suicide. With the inherent difficulty in tracking changes in mental health or suicide prevention, demonstrating a program is fostering social connection could suffice to prove the initiative’s value. Alternatively, a qualitative approach, incorporating testimonials and in-depth feedback from a small number of program participants could be a cost-effective way to signal the program’s value to investors.

As a side note, it’s worth exploring Movember’s Social Innovators Program, which offers grants. Movember could potentially serve as a funding source for a future initiative supported by the SPCCH.

Table 1 highlights the potential applications and next steps for the SPCCH based on the four initiatives that we think are the most feasible and relevant to the SPCCH’s goal of fostering social connection between men: Men’s Sheds, Buddy Up, Tough Enough to Talk About It, and Love Letter to Men. Representatives of each of these initiatives also expressed their willingness to provide advice and support to the SPCCH, which would give your organization a head start in setting something up in Hamilton.

Table 1. Recommended next steps for the SPCCH based on the findings from the key informant interviews.

Initiative	Potential target population in Hamilton	Main objective and relevance to the SPCCH	Next steps and considerations for the SPCCH
Men’s Sheds (MS)	All men, tailor to unique interests of target group	Activity-based initiative that has potential to engage ‘blue collar’ men.	Securing a physical location and resources to support activities of interest is the biggest barrier to implementation. The SPCCH should investigate potential shed locations and funding sources, including grants, non-profit organization grants, and Movember’s Social Innovators Challenge.
Buddy Up (BU)	All men	Effective campaign and framework to promote conversations about men’s mental health, reduce stigma, and foster social connection. It can be implemented at the organizational level.	<p>A program similar to BU is more feasible to implement than other designs because it is largely driven by social participation.</p> <p>BU has a detailed guide and plan on getting started with their initiative that is transferable to any region, including Hamilton. BU is not overly prescriptive, which allows the SPCCH to explore these materials to identify elements that can be incorporated into their initiative.</p>
Tough Enough To Talk About It (TETTAI)	Specific to individuals working in industry	Elements of the presentation may be adaptable to men who currently or formerly worked in the steel and heavy manufacturing industries.	If targeting men working in trades or industries in Hamilton, the SPCCH can collaborate with TETTAI to develop a workplace presentation appropriate for this demographic. If the SPCCH prefers to target a broader population, then TETTAI is not the best program to use as a model.

Love Letter to Men (LLTM)	All men (and women)	Conference to bring men and women with lived experiences and expertise together to talk about men's mental health and suicide prevention.	Given that the conference does not directly foster social connection, it should not be the main initiative, but rather an add-on to whichever program model the SPCCH adopts. The SPCCH may consider hosting a watch party in Hamilton for the next LLTM conference.
----------------------------------	---------------------	---	--

Bibliography

- American Psychological Association. (2005). *Men: A different depression*.
- Canadian Journalism Forum on Violence and Trauma. (2020). Mindset: Reporting on mental health.
- Houle, J., Mishara, B. L., & Chagnon, F. (2008). An empirical test of a mediation model of the impact of the traditional male gender role on suicidal behavior in men. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 107*(1-3), 37-43.
- Men's Sheds Ontario. (n.d.). *Nine Benefits of a Men's Shed*. Men's Sheds Canada. <https://www.mensshedsCanada.ca/resources/Nine-benefits-MSO.pdf>
- Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2022). Mental health and suicide prevention in men [Evidence brief]. <https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/>
- Ogrodniczuk, J. S., & Olife, J. L. (2011). Men and depression [Commentary]. *Canadian Family Physician, 57*(2), 153-155.
- Public Health Agency of Canada. (2019). *Addressing stigma: Towards a more inclusive health system*.
- Seager, M., Sullivan, L., & Barry, J. (2014). Gender-related schemas and suicidality: Validation of the male and female gender scripts questionnaire. *New Male Studies, 3*(3), 34-54.
- Statistics Canada. (2019). Deaths and age-specific mortality rates, by selected grouped causes (Table 13-10-0392-01 [formerly CANSIM 102-0551]).
- Suicide Prevention Community Council of Hamilton. (n.d.). *Who We Are*. Suicide Prevention Community Council of Hamilton. <https://spcch.org/spcch-council/>

Appendices

Appendix A: Description of men’s suicide prevention organizations and initiatives

Name	Year started	Objective	Target population	Program design	Organizational structure	Notes
Buddy Up	2020	A call to action for men, by men, to drive authentic conversation amongst men and their buddies to prevent suicide	Men who have risk factors for suicide associated with traditional views of masculinity (e.g., stoicism, self-reliance, reluctance to seek help)	Become a Buddy Up Champion by engaging in any of the following ways <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Participate in campaigns throughout the year 2) Promote on social media and other avenues 3) Learn by watching webinars or hosting an education session 4) Support by donating or 	Overseen by the Centre for Suicide Prevention	

				sponsoring activities		
Love Letter to Men	2022	Bring men together as well as the women who support them	Men and women from any background	Conference that promotes discussion of men's mental health and well-being. It includes resources, insights into gaps in men's mental health, current research, and stories from those with lived experiences	Conference held by The Alberta Men's Collaborative	
Men's Sheds	Mid-1990s (Australia) 2011 (Canada)	Provide men with a chance to do projects they will enjoy in the hopes that it will reduce isolation and improve overall health	All men with a focus on those who are experiencing isolation or loneliness	Provides a safe and friendly environment where men can work on meaningful projects, socialize, and engage in enjoyable activities at their own pace, in their own time, in the company of other men.	Men's Sheds Canada is a not for profit that provides support to sheds operating in Canada. The decision-making power resides in the local shed.	There are Men's Sheds located in several countries around the world. The information here is specific to Men's Sheds Canada.

Some sheds focus on a single activity, and others may have many.						
Movember	2003 (in Australia) 2007 (in Canada)	Improving overall mental health and helping men establish better social connections to reduce the risk of suicide	All men with a focus on those who are experiencing isolation or loneliness	Raise funds to support various mental health and suicide prevention programs. Collaborate with community programs and aid them in implementation, scaling, and evaluation.	Global organization governed by board of directors	Movember has campaigns for several men's health issues, one of which is mental health. The information here is specific to Movember's work regarding men's mental health in Canada.
Tough Enough To Talk About It	1999 (as Men at Risk)	To equip employees with tools to create a safer workplace, and to reduce the	Individuals working in the trades, industry, oilfield, and agriculture	90-minute workplace presentation to address mental health in the workplace – starting	Overseen by Resource Centre for Suicide Prevention in Grand Prairie	Originally only focused on men, but now include anyone working in the trades, industry,

		stigma of mental health in the trades, industry, oilfield, and agriculture		conversations that may save lives		oilfield, and agriculture
UBC Reducing Male Suicides (RMS)	2020	To work across UBC to spread and share knowledge to de-stigmatize men's mental illness and suicidality, reduce disparities in care, and lead effective male suicide prevention interventions globally	Several research projects targeting men in general and specific subgroups	No community initiatives have been developed and implemented	Research cluster organized by UBC consisting of 13 members from various institutions across Canada, the United States, Switzerland, Australia, and New Zealand	The representative of UBC RMS that we interviewed was included in Phase 1.
Men in Mind	2021 (pilot)	To upskill therapists in engaging men in therapy and responding effectively to	Therapists treating men	Five guided modules, 8 hours long, involving videos, reflective exercises and practical worksheets to	Developed by UBC RMS and funded by Movember	No one from this organization was interviewed

		their depression and suicidality		explore how best to engage four male clients in a course of therapy		
Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM)/Project 84	1997 (CALM) 2018 (Project 84)	CALM: Taking a stand against suicide. That means standing against feeling shit, standing up to stereotypes and standing together to show life is always worth living.	General public	<p>Provoke conversation, run life-saving services, and bring people together so they reject living miserably, get help when they need it and don't die by suicide</p> <p>Project 84 was a campaign launched by CALM. To recognize the fact that 84 men die by suicide every week in the UK, 84 sculptures were created and placed high above the capital, calling on all to take a stand against suicide</p>	Board of Trustees/Directors responsible for the strategic direction and policy. Advisory Boards are appointed as required.	<p>No one from this organization was interviewed</p> <p>This program operates in the UK only</p>

Appendix B: Phase 1 Interview Questions

Main questions:

1. Can you provide an overview of the current state of men's mental health and suicide rates in Canada, highlighting any significant trends?
 - a. What are the key factors contributing to the high rate of suicide among men in Canada, and how do these factors differ from those affecting other demographic groups?
2. How important is social connection between men in improving men's mental health? What are some ways or strategies to increase social connection between men?
3. Can you share examples of successful programs or initiatives aimed at promoting men's mental health and reducing suicide rates? What lessons can be learned from these initiatives for broader implementation?
 - a. How do you measure the effectiveness of initiatives that foster social connection?

Only for informants based in Hamilton:

4. Are there issues or trends unique to Hamilton that should be considered or addressed in a men's suicide prevention initiative?
5. When developing an initiative, it can be helpful to partner with an existing community organization. Are there community organizations that you would recommend that SPCCH partner with to facilitate the development of a men's suicide prevention initiative in Hamilton?

Additional question (if time permits):

5. What are some of the unique challenges in engaging men in mental health support and suicide prevention efforts, and how can these barriers be effectively addressed at both the individual and systemic levels?

Appendix C: Phase 2 Interview Questions

MOVEMBER

Main questions:

1. Can you describe your role and involvement with Movember Canada?
2. Can you provide an overview of Movember Canada's initiatives, programs, or partnerships focused on men's mental health and suicide prevention? How has the organization's approach evolved over the years to address these critical issues among men in Canada?
 - a. What role does Movember play in these partnerships (e.g., sponsorship)?
3. In what ways would you recommend that supporting organizations could engage with Movember to help advance men's mental health and suicide prevention?
4. Movember Canada has a track record of engaging men effectively in their programs. What practices have you found to be most successful in sustaining men's participation and engagement in your initiatives over time?
 - a. What challenges have you encountered in men's participation and engagement over time? How did you resolve these challenges?
5. Can you elaborate on the significance of social connection between men and its role in reducing suicide risk among men in Canada?
6. Could you share some specific strategies that Movember Canada has implemented to encourage men to reach out and connect with others when they're struggling with their mental health?

BUDDY UP

Main questions:

1. Can you describe your role and involvement with Buddy Up?
2. I am interested in learning specifically about how the initiative has fostered social connection among men.
 - a. What strategies to foster social connection have been successful?
 - b. What are some challenges you encountered when striving to foster social connection? How did you overcome them?
 - c. How do you sustain engagement with champions over time? Do you have any specific strategies?
3. I see that you summarize how many promotional materials are shared every year on social media. How is the impact and success of Buddy Up measured, especially in terms of evaluating the wider impact on men in the community?
 - a. Follow-up: What are some strategies to ensure that social media activity initiative translates to real-world improvement in men's mental health and suicide risk? (only ask if clarification is needed)
4. We want to learn more about the organizational structure and resources required to sustain the initiative. Could you describe the organizational structure of Buddy Up?

- a. What are the main sources of funding and support for the initiative? How do you secure this support?
 - b. Can you share insights into the allocation and management of financial resources within the organization to ensure sustainability?
5. What advice would you have for SPCCH in setting up a local Buddy Up Program?

Additional questions (if time permits):

6. Describe the structure of your advisory committee. What type of backgrounds do members have?

TOUGH ENOUGH TO TALK ABOUT IT

Main questions:

1. Can you describe your role and involvement with Tough Enough to Talk About It?
2. I am interested in learning specifically about how the presentations, and the initiative overall, have fostered social connection among men.
 - a. What strategies to foster social connection have been successful?
 - b. What are some challenges you encountered when striving to foster social connection? How did you overcome them?
 - c. How do you sustain engagement with men throughout the presentations?
3. How is the impact of Tough Enough to Talk About it measured, especially in terms of evaluating the wider impact on men in the community?
 - a. Follow-up: I understand that you host presentations to address men's mental health. How do you ensure that the men continue to use the information they learn throughout their lives?
4. We want to learn more about the organizational structure and resources required to sustain the initiative. Could you describe the organizational structure of Tough Enough to Talk About It?
 - a. What are the main sources of funding and support for the initiative? How do you secure this support?
 - b. Can you share insights into the allocation and management of financial resources within the organization to ensure sustainability?
5. I understand that Tough Enough is taught to students at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology. Could you elaborate on how this partnership was developed and sustained?
 - a. Prompts: Who was initially contacted? Please provide an overview of the process.

Additional questions (if time permits):

6. You host presentations for more traditionally "masculine" workplaces, such as those in the Trades, Industry, Oilfield, and Agriculture industries. Do you find that there is more stigma surrounding men's mental health in these fields?
 - a. If so, how do you address this stigma?

MEN'S SHEDS

Main questions:

1. Can you describe your role and involvement with Men's Sheds Canada?
2. We are interested in learning specifically about how you have fostered social connection among men. We understand that Men's Shed strives to improve its members' physical and mental health through "activities men will actually join". It sounds like this is essential to fostering social connection.
 - a. Could you elaborate on the process of identifying and setting up activities that men will join? What other strategies have been successful at fostering social connection?
 - b. What are some challenges you encountered when striving to foster social connection? How did you overcome them?
3. How is the impact and success of a typical Men's Shed measured, especially in terms of evaluating the wider impact on men in the community?
 - a. What are some strategies to ensure the initiative translates to real-world improvement in men's mental health and suicide risk?
4. Could you describe the organizational structure of the initiative?
5. We would also like to learn about resources required to develop and sustain a Men's Shed. I understand that it is possible to secure financial support through Start-Up Grants offered by HelpAge Canada. Apart from this source of support, how have Men's Sheds around Canada been able to develop and sustain their sheds?
 - a. Follow-up: From my understanding, Men's Sheds is a grassroots movement, so individual Sheds generally rely on volunteers and participants to start and sustain the Shed. How does Men's Sheds find individuals willing to take on this task?
 - b. Can you share insights into the allocation and management of financial resources within the organization to ensure sustainability?
6. How do the local Sheds acquire space to operate, meet, and work on projects?
 - a. Please identify examples of organizations that help sponsor Sheds or provide space for them.

Additional questions (if time permits):

7. Many of the studies and anecdotes we came across concerned middle-aged and older-aged participants. In what ways have Men's Sheds sought greater engagement with a younger demographic?
 - a. What strategies have been employed to make Men's Sheds appealing to this demographic?

LOVE LETTER TO MEN

Main questions:

1. Can you describe your role and involvement with both the Alberta Men's Collaborative and A Love Letter to Men conference?
 - a. Can you provide some insight on the motivation and background behind the A Love Letter to Men conference?
2. I am interested in learning specifically about how the Alberta Men's Collaborative has fostered social connection among men.
 - a. What strategies to foster social connection have been successful?
 - b. What are some challenges you encountered when striving to foster social connection? How did you overcome them?
3. How does the collaboration between experts and individuals with lived experiences, and the larger conversation promoted by A Love Letter to Men support men at risk of suicide?
 - a. How is the impact and success of the conference being measured, especially in terms of evaluating the wider impact on men in the community?
4. We would also like to learn about the organizational structure and resources required to sustain the initiative.
 - a. Could you describe the organizational structure of the initiative?
 - b. What are the main resources needed to ensure the operation of the initiative? (e.g., specialized staff)
 - c. What are the main sources of funding and support for the initiative? How do you secure this support?
 - d. Can you share insights into the allocation and management of financial resources within the organization to ensure sustainability?

Additional questions (if time permits):

5. What are the future plans for sustaining this conference and possibly expanding the initiative to make other types of resources or support networks more accessible for participants?

Appendix D: List of Relevant Resources for the SPCCH

Initiative	Resources & Support for the SPCCH
Men's Shed	<p>Men's Sheds Canada toolkit and guidance provided on their website to assist beginners with the fundamentals of starting and operating a shed.</p> <p>https://www.mensshedsCanada.ca/ShedsAndActivities/StartingAndRunningAShed/</p>
Buddy Up	<p>The Buddy Up Guide for participants looking to get started.</p> <p>https://www.buddyup.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Buddy-Up-Guide.pdf</p> <p>The Buddy Up Plan helps participants plan out the activities they wish to complete as part of the program.</p> <p>https://www.buddyup.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Buddy-Up-Plan.pdf</p>
Tough Enough to Talk About It	<p>For further information or guidance, it may be beneficial to consult members of the organization.</p>
Love Letter to Men	<p>Love Letter to Men encourages individuals to host watch parties. More information can be found on the following webpage:</p> <p>https://lovelettertomen.com/a-note-from-your-host</p> <p>For further information or guidance, it may be beneficial to consult members of the organization.</p>
Movember	<p>Movember's active funding opportunities are listed on their website. More information can be found on the following webpage:</p> <p>https://ca.movember.com/about/funding</p> <p>For further information or guidance, it may be beneficial to consult members of the organization.</p>