

Men's Health Export from Australia

The Men's Awareness Network (MAN) which began developing programs for men in Castlemaine Australia back in 1994 and is now Nationally recognised as the Centre for Advancement of Men's Health (CAMH), has been invited to develop its Programs in British Columbia Canada in May. The Centre headed by Bernard Denner who is recognised as one of Australia's leading figures in the promotion of men's health has lead the way in providing innovative Men's Health Programs across rural Australia from his base at the Hepburn Health Service Daylesford Victoria.

The first major Men's Health Night, developed by Bernard Denner, was held in his home-town of Castlemaine, a Central Victorian town with a population of approximately 7,000. The night attracted over 270 men to listen to and discuss the issues of men's health with local GPs and Community Health Service. This night was a precursor to the popular Men's Health Night.

Out of this first night grew the phenomenon of Men's Health Nights. An ABC TV Documentary focussed on another local town Daylesford, famous for its Spa Water. The Daylesford Men's Health Night, attracted over 210 men from a smaller population of only 4,500 and featured in the Beyond Productions ABC Documentary "The Problem with Men".

The ABC Documentary led to a surge in Men's Health Nights across rural and urban Victoria and then across the border into South Australia, Northern Territory, New South Wales and Central Rural Queensland. This work still continues today with a focus on providing resources and project management for Health Services across Australia. The Man Model Program of Men's Health Promotion has attracted over 9,500 men across Australia in the last 3 years with thousands more attending other alike nights based on the Model.

Bernard has continued to highlight the advantages of promoting the value of better men's health to Governments and Health Departments through his presentations at Conferences. His invitation to speak to a Federal Parliament House of Representatives Parliamentary Committee on Men's Health is testament to his high regard in matters of men. His published Papers in National Health Journals and his website Mannet.com.au that attracts up to 95,000 hits per month also provides an opportunity for the Health Industry to better deal with and understand the issues of men beyond just mortality and morbidity.. Bernard speaks to men of all walks of life, Indigenous and Non Indigenous, from the cities to some of the most remote areas of outback Australia. He is also constantly been asked to speak on all matters related to men's health on radio talkback around Australia.

In May of this year, the rural health region in the British Columbia Province of Canada is adopting the MAN Model Health Promotion Program, based on the success of the CAMH Programs across Australia and has asked Bernard to share his experiences with Canadians.

After a visit to CAMH in April 2000, by the Medical Health Officer from the North Okanagan Regional Health Service, Canada closely watched the progress of his Programs and the work offered by the Centre.

"Health promotion programs in Canada have focused on a variety of issues and target groups including women, children, aboriginal people, visible minorities, and the economically disadvantaged; but there have been few programs developed specifically for men. Most people here assume that men, by virtue of their economic advantages in society, must be correspondingly healthy. Those of us who look at health statistics know, however that being male is a risk factor for premature mortality from infancy through to old age.

There is increasing recognition of this issue, but little yet in the way of programming. I was most impressed with what I saw taking place at the Center for Advancement of Men's Health during my visit to Australia last year, and was pleased that Bernard Denner expressed an interest in coming here to help us put men's health on the map. We have established a partnership with the Rotary clubs to sponsor a series of men's health nights here and to learn more about the MAN Model during Bernard's visit to our Region in May. The timing is excellent for us and we are very excited about this international collaboration with Australia. We'll do what we can to bring Bernard up to speed on ice hockey before we send him home," said David Bowering M.D. MHSc., Medical Health Officer, North Okanagan Health Region British Columbia Canada

Canada's status of male health is similar to the Australian Health Status figures for early mortality and morbidity around heart disease, cancer, suicide and accidents especially for rural males. The rural area of North Okanagan, where the Program will be developed initially, also finds the Government unwilling to support men's health, in the same way they support women and children's health.

"Canada wants our Program to have the same impact as it has had here in rural Victoria and across the rest of Australia. They believe we can bring the same passion and expertise to their country, to influence the outcomes of men's health for Canadian men and boys, as has been achieved here, especially in rural Victoria. We will also offer the opportunity to schools to adopt our Lifeskills Program which helps adolescents address their risks associated with "growing up" and Health Practitioners to attend our Understanding and Engaging Men Sessions." said Bernard Denner.

The Federal and State Governments here in Australia have been very slow in recognizing the value of the MAN Model and other Preventative Men's Health Programs, and the benefits of good health for men and their communities. It is only recently that Governments have discussed the importance of developing Men's Health Policy and Strategies to deal with common men's health issues.

At the recent 6th National Rural Health Conference held in Canberra a major recommendation by the Conference Delegates was that:

'The Conference recommends that the Department of Health and Aged Care (DHAC) fund research on men's health which draws on the methods and strategies developed by the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health (ALSWH). At the same time DHAC continue to provide funding for the ALSWH and that its results be further promoted. There should also be the development, within two years, of a National Male Health Policy that encompasses all Australian males'.

"I hope that the States and Federal Health Ministers and their Departments take notice of the overwhelming support of Delegates from the National Rural Health Conference and the peak body National Rural Health Alliance for male health reforms and initiatives. The recommendation also had the support of the Women's Health Study from Newcastle University. A National Male Health Policy is urgently needed in order to meet the challenge and to address and understand male issues for all Australian males," said Bernard Denner.

I hope to send the same message to Canadian Health Authorities and the Government of the importance of good health for all men and the value to families.

"Limited funds are available for Men's Health and organizations interested in tackling the issues of men's health in the community are frustrated by the lack of money. This may be, in part, due to the lack of real Policy by Governments that provides the structure for health funding and without Policy, Governments cannot fund properly." Said Bernard Denner

"With the support of Rotary in the North Okanagan Region and the foresight of Dr Bowering and the work of his team I hope that men turn up to the Men's Health Nights to demonstrate their interest in their health and wellbeing. We may then be able to encourage a greater participation by men to their health as we have achieved here in Australia. It will also send a message to Health Authorities that men are interested in their health, we just need to provide them with the better opportunities to deal with their issues." Said Mr Denner

The Men's Health Nights first conducted in Central Rural Victoria Australia has impacted across Australia and hopefully will impact across Canada. ***"Who said men were not interested in their health. You just need to give them the opportunity in a way that is comfortable for them."***