

School for Public Health Research

## Public Health Evidence Briefing

Building the evidence for cost-effective public health practice

### Older men, social activity and health & wellbeing

- Finding ways of improving health and wellbeing, and reducing the social isolation of older men is an important challenge for public health.
- This scoping review aimed to assess evidence for the effect of Men's Sheds (groups for men to come together for practical activities) and other gendered social activities.
- Some limited evidence was found of the impact of these activities on older men's physical and mental health.



# The effect of social isolation on mortality is considerable but less attention has been given to the benefits of social activity for older men.

## Key issues

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- The state of older men's health is a greatly overlooked public health challenge.
- Although men report better health than women, mortality rates for older men are higher.
- Loneliness and social isolation can contribute to poor physical and mental health, poor recovery from illness and early death.
- Compared to older women, older men use fewer community based health resources and are less likely to join in community based social groups.

## What we did

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*Men in Sheds* originated in Australia with over 80 Sheds in the UK and Ireland. Sheds provide a space to meet, socialise, learn new skills and engage in meaningful activity with other older men.

The review included all published research and reports focused on *Sheds* and gendered social activities. The scoping review was undertaken by NIHR SPHR researchers and the Centre for Ageing research, Lancaster University in collaboration with York University and Age UK.

## Findings and implications

- NIHR SPHR researchers found some limited evidence for the effects of gendered activities on health and wellbeing.
- Elements of successful interventions included accessibility, range of activities, local support and skilled coordination.
- There was little evidence on their acceptability for men from different ethnic groups, or with specific health conditions.

## What next?

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The review found few studies conducted in this field and those available were of variable quality. None of the studies measured impacts on physical health using validated measures.

Larger and more robust mixed method studies are needed to build the evidence base for social activities, and their effects on health, wellbeing and older men.

## References:

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Milligan, C., et al., 2016. Older men and social activity: a scoping review of Men's Sheds and other gendered interventions. *Ageing and Society*, 36(05), pp.895-923. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X14001524>

## SPHR Contact/Find out more about this study at:

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Visit <http://sphr.nihr.ac.uk/ageing-well/home/> for further resources and publications related to the SPHR Ageing Well research programme.

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