Senate Select Committee on Men's Health 2009

Submission by Dads4Kids Fatherhood Foundation:

Healthy Men, Healthy Families, Healthy Nation

13th March 2009

Whilst the initial frame of reference of this inquiry into men's health is focused on the many medical aspects and deficiencies of men's health, we note the words, 'including but not limited to'. The Dads4Kids Fatherhood Foundation would like to argue from a much broader perspective of men's health and wellbeing and discuss the importance of the social determinants of men's health in Australia.

The Dads4Kids Fatherhood Foundation suggests that healthy manhood is a direct derivative of healthy fatherhood. Healthy men leads to healthy families. Healthy families are the foundation of a healthy nation.

The Dads4Kids Fatherhood Foundation will divide its submission into five parts:

Firstly, Dads4Kids Fatherhood Foundation will examine Men's Health in terms of the community and the importance of marriage, fatherhood and family.

Secondly, Dads4Kids Fatherhood Foundation will give a short history of the Men and Father's Movement and the holistic health policy development for men and fathers to date, with a particular reference to masculine input in such policy development.

Thirdly, Dads4Kids Fatherhood Foundation will provide information on the high cost of fatherlessness affecting both the social determinants and specific health male outcomes.

Fourthly, Dads4Kids Fatherhood Foundation will discuss the shocking reality of Men's Health in Australia as compared with women and the discrimination men endure within the broader system.

Fifthly, Dads4Kids Fatherhood Foundation will suggest a plan for a way forward - a plan for healthy men, healthy families and a healthy nation.

1) Men's Health in terms of Community - 'The Importance of Marriage, Family, Fatherhood and the Extended Family' - a story about a Healthy Community.

> Dr Stewart Wolf was a physician. He studied digestion and the stomach and taught in the medical school at the University of Oklahoma. He spent his summers on a farm in Pennsylvania, not far from Roseto - although that, of course, didn't mean much, since Roseto was so much in its own world that it was possible to live in the next town and never know much about it. "One of the times when we were up there for the summer - this would have been in the late nineteen fifties - I was invited to give a talk at the local medical society," Wolf said years later in an interview. "After the talk was over, one of the local doctors invited me to have a beer. And while we were having a drink, he said, 'You know, I've been practicing for seventeen years. I get patients from all over, and I rarely find anyone from Roseto under the age of sixty-five with heart disease.'"

Wolf was taken aback. This was the 1950s, years before the advent of cholesterol-lowering drugs and aggressive measures to prevent heart disease. Heart attacks were an epidemic in the United States. They were the leading cause of death in men under the age of sixty-five. It was impossible to be a doctor, common sense said, and not see heart disease.

Wolf decided to investigate. He enlisted the support of some of his students and colleagues from Oklahoma. They gathered together the death certificates from residents of the town, going back as many years as they could. They analysed physicians' records, They took medical histories and constructed family genealogies. 'We got busy," Wolf said. "We decided to do a preliminary study. We started in 1961. The mayor said, 'All my sisters are going to help you.' He had four sisters. He said, 'You can have the town council room' I said, 'Where are you going to have council meetings? He said, 'Well, we'll postpone them for a while.' The ladies would bring us lunch. We had little booths where we could take blood, do EKGs. We were there for four weeks. Then I talked with the authorities. They gave us the school for the summer. We invited the entire population of Roseto to be tested."

The results were astonishing. In Roseto, virtually no one under fifty-five had died of a heart attack or showed any signs of heart disease. For men over sixty-five, the death rate from heart disease in Roseto was roughly half that of the United States as a whole. The death rate from all causes in Roseto, in fact, was 30 to 35 percent lower than expected.

Wolf brought in a friend of his, a sociologist from Oklahoma named John Bruhn, to help him. "I hired medical students and sociology grad students as interviewers, and in Roseto we went house to house and talked to every person aged twenty-one and over," Bruhn remembers. This happened more than fifty years ago, but Bruhn still had a sense of amazement in his voice as he described what they found. "There was no suicide, no alcoholism, no drug addiction, and very little crime. They didn't have anyone on welfare. Then we looked at peptic ulcers. They didn't have any of those either. These people were dying of old age. That's it."

Wolf's profession had a name for a place like Roseto - a place that lay outside everyday experience, where the normal rules did not apply. Roseto was an *outlier*.

Wolf's first thought was that the Rosetans must have held on to some dietary practices from the Old World that left them healthier than other Americans. But he quickly realised that wasn't true. The Rosetans were cooking with lard instead of with the much healthier olive oil they had used back in Italy. Pizza in Italy was a thin crust with salt, oil, and perhaps some tomatoes, anchovies, or onions. Pizza in Pennsylvania was bread dough plus sausage, peperoni, salami, ham, and sometimes eggs. Sweets such as biscotti and taralli used to be reserved for Christmas and Easter; in Roseto they were eaten year-round. When Wolf had dieticians analyse the typical Rosetan's eating habits, they found that a whopping 41 percent of their calories came from fat. Nor was this a town where people got up at dawn to do yoga and run a brisk six mile. The Pennsylvanian Rosetans smoked heavily and many were struggling with obesity.

If diet and exercise didn't explain the findings, then what about genetics? The Rosetans were a close-knit group from the same region of Italy, and Wolf's next thought was to wonder whether they were of a particularly hardy stock that protected them from disease. So he tracked down relatives of the Rosetans who were living in

other parts of the United States to see if they shared the same remarkable good health as their cousins in Pennsylvania. They didn't.

He then looked at the region where the Rosetans lived. Was it possible that there was something about living in the foothills of eastern Pennsylvania that was good for their health? The two closest towns to Roseto were Bangor, which was just down the hill, and Nazareth, a few miles away. These were both about the same size as Roseto, and both were populated with the same kind of hardworking European immigrants. Wolf combed through both towns' medical records. For men over sixty-five, the death rates from heart disease in Nazareth and Bangor were three times that of Roseto. Another dead end.

What Wolf began to realise was that the secret of Roseto wasn't diet or exercise or genes or location. *It had to be Roseto itself.* As Bruhn and Wolf walked around the town, they figured out why. They looked at how the Rosetans visited one another, stopping to chat in Italian on the street, say, or cooking for one another in their backyards. They learned about the extended family clans that underlay the town's social structure. They saw how many homes had three generations living under one roof, and how much respect grandparents commanded. They went to mass at Our Lady of Mount Carmel and saw the unifying and calming effect of the church. They counted 22 separate civic organisations in a town of just under 2,000 people. They picked up on the particular egalitarian ethos of the community, which discouraged the wealthy from flaunting their success and helped the unsuccessful obscure their failures.

In transplanting the *paesani* culture of southern Italy to the hills of eastern Pennsylvania, the Rosetans had created a powerful, protective social structure capable of insulating them from the pressures of the modern world. The Rosetans were healthy because of where they were *from*, because of the world they had created for themselves in their tiny little town in the hills.

"I remember going to Roseto for the first time, and you'd see three-generational family meals, all the bakeries, the people walking up and down the street, sitting on their porches talking to each other, the blouse mills where the women worked during the day, while the men worked in the slate quarries," Bruhn said. "It was magical."

When Bruhn and Wolf first presented their findings to the medical community, you can imagine the kind of scepticism they faced. They went to conferences where their peers were presenting long rows of data arrayed in complex charts and referring to this kind of gene or that kind of physiological process, and they themselves were talking instead about the mysterious and magical benefits of people stopping to talk to one another on the street and of having three generations under one roof. Living a long life, the conventional wisdom at the time said, depended to a great extent on who we were - that is, our genes. It depended on the decisions we made - on what we chose to eat, and how much we chose to exercise, and how effectively we were treated by the medical system. No one was used to thinking about health in terms of community.

Wolf and Bruhn had to convince the medical establishment to think about health and heart attacks in an entirely new way: they had to get them to realise that they wouldn't be able to understand why someone was healthy if all they did was think about an individual's personal choices or actions in isolation. They had to look beyond the individual. They had to understand the culture he or she was part of, and who their friends and families were, and what town their families came from. They had to

> appreciate the idea that the values of the world we inhabit and the people we surround ourselves with have a profound effect on who we are.[1]

The above story of Dr Stewart Wolf highlights the social determinants of health and the life-giving effect of positive family relationships is taken from the breakthrough book by Malcolm Gladwell called 'Outliers'.

It is recognised now by the worldwide scientific community that being married will prolong your life. Concurrent with this research it has been shown that having several close friends, having strong family relationships, going to church, having pets, saying prayers, having an active social life are key social determinants of long life for both men and women. That is, good health is related to good relationships and good relationships are sustained by a supportive and unified community, which is made up of supportive and unified families. Unified families are held together by the bonds of matrimony. Marriage is one of the many key determinants of good health. Healthy men come from healthy families in a healthy community. Health is body, soul and spirit and should always be understood in the context of caring and loving relationships.

2) Australian History of the Men and Father's Health Movement
a. Introduction
b. The 12pt Plan
c. National Strategic Conference on Fatherhood

2a. Introduction
History of the Men & Father's Health Movement & Background on the Dads4Kids Fatherhood Foundation.

Men are the largest minority group in the nation of Australia at 49.4%. They are slowly realising this, which is allowing men and fathers to speak up on behalf of their own ilk. The women's movement dates back to the 1860s in both England and America with the beginnings of the Suffragette Movement. Since the beginnings of the women's movement, women's life expectancy, as compared with the gap between men's life expectancy, has doubled for the better. Men now lag behind women by 5 years. In the 1800s and early 1900s women's health was neglected but the women's movement and pro-women male advocates must take credit for the huge improvement in women's health over the last one hundred and fifty years.

Thankfully some of the early leaders of the men and father's movement began to voice their concerns about the poor state of men's health, although their main focus was the restoration of the inherent dignity of manhood. Seeds of the men's movement were laid down by men such as Dr Edwin Louis Cole, author of 'Maximised Manhood' in the 1980s and Robert Bly in the early nineties who was author of 'Iron John'. The men and father's movement joined forces in the 1990s and also linked in with the Burgeoning 'Men's Health & Wellbeing Movement'.

> Twenty-eight years ago, child psychologist Michael Lamb, accurately described fathers as the ‘forgotten contributors to child development’. To quote from the Father Facts, 4th edition, ‘Indeed, for much of the twentieth century, psychologists, childrearing experts and popular culture largely assumed that when it came to child development, fathers were of secondary importance to mothers and perhaps even unnecessary. Increased rates of divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing over the past

four decades marginalised fathers even further, as unprecedented numbers of children grew up in father absent homes'. Dr Wade Horn, the editor of the Father Facts book and probably the most well researched social scientist on the issues surrounding fatherhood, says that a family without a father is a lot like a car without one of the front wheels. It can still be driven, but it is pretty hard to steer. The same analogy can be given in the importance of mothers. A mother's contribution to family life is vital and irreplaceable. In study after study around the world it is shown that children do best with a warm continuous relationship with both their biological mother and father.

However fathers are no longer being ignored. Family scholars the world over have produced a large body of evidence from thousands of independent studies on the important contribution that fathers make to children and to the success of the family unit.

The Dads4Kids Fatherhood Foundation was founded 2002 and has been privileged to play an important role in the process of cultural change in Australia regarding fathering. The vision of Dads4Kids Fatherhood Foundation is to inspire men to a greater level of excellence as fathers. The goal of Dads4Kids Fatherhood Foundation is to encourage more committed, involved, responsible and loving fathers, who are connected to their children in a positive way. Over the last decade, authors such as Steve Biddulph, Daniel Petrie and Dr Bruce Robinson have laid the foundation for the restoration of manhood and fatherhood in Australia. Father-friendly publishers such as Finch publishing and others have led the way by publishing books about our society's masculinity crisis, father-friendly parenting and the need for change. The Prime Minister, John Howard, in June 2003, called for the restoration of fatherhood. . Both Mark Latham and the Minister for Children, Hon Larry Anthony, helped launch The 12pt Plan on 26th June 2003. In February 2004, Mark Latham, Opposition Leader, in a speech to the National Press Club, addressed the crisis in masculinity in Australia and stressed the importance of fathers This bi-partisan approach to the restoration of fatherhood in Australia by the leaders of the major political parties has hastened the process of change, especially in the last few years.

Beginning in 2002 the Fatherhood Foundation has produced annual public service TV advertisements promoting the importance of fatherhood and has achieved wide airplay on the majority of Australian television stations. The total value of television campaigns and billboard advertising over the last few years organised by the Fatherhood Foundation with the kind help of advertisers would approximate to over 3 million dollars. In 2004 the Fatherhood Foundation successfully completed the first 'Good to Great' Fatherhood Mentoring Course for the 21st Century. The Fatherhood Foundation also put together a proposal to make this available on a national basis with government assistance. Over this time the Fatherhood Foundation has inaugurated groundbreaking research compilations on the effects and cost of fatherlessness to the nation of Australia. Fathersonline, a weekly inspirational email for fathers has grown exponentially since its inception in August 2002. This weekly email ezine for busy dads is available by signing on at www.fathersonline.org In February 2003 the Fatherhood Foundation organised the first Fatherhood Forum at Parliament House, Canberra. The 12pt Plan was birthed at that forum and became the foundational document for the 'responsible fatherhood movement' of Australia. The preamble of The 12pt Plan identified that the quality of relationships between Australian mothers and fathers will determine the destiny of Australia, hence the need to support and revitalise marital relationships and secure marriage in Australia as an institution that provides a greater social good, and is the foundation link for involved and committed

fatherhood. The 12pt Plan also articulated the case for a National Men's Health Policy.

It might be noted that many other groups outside the parliament had been advocating for a National Men's Health Policy since the 1990s. Professor John Macdonald and Michael Woods from Western Sydney University had developed comprehensive policies for men's health but many in government either did not know about their health policies or simply refused to listen. It might also be noted that Brendon Sullivan, President of Men's Health & Wellbeing Tasmania and Don Bowak, President of Men's Health & Wellbeing NSW took an active role in the formulation of The 12pt Plan, along with Paul Whyte, Sydney Men's Network. Paul has been active in the men's movement since the early 1980s. Other organisations such as Men's Information & Support Centre which first commenced in 1982 in Adelaide have been pioneers for a National Men's Health Policy for many decades along with many other groups too numerous to name.

In August 2003 the inaugural National Strategic Conference on Fatherhood (NSCF) was held at Parliament House, Canberra with keynote speaker Adrienne Burgess, author of Fatherhood Reclaimed ©1997. Both The 12pt Plan and the strategic summary of the NSCF are printed here with corrections and minor editing to facilitate readability.

The Fatherhood Foundation, whilst having the privilege of playing an important part in the restoration of fatherhood in Australia wishes to acknowledge the hundreds of men's and fatherhood groups around Australia which have played a key role in that change. We would like to honour the many politicians who remained strong and steadfast despite the enormous pressure to bow to political correctness in the area of fatherhood. The process of healing has been accelerated by brave journalists within the media world who have also made a stand for truth and the renewal of family in our fragmented society. Many men and women too numerous to name have shown great courage in supporting the restoration of fatherhood in Australia. Men's health issues have always been front and centre within the men & father's movement.

Federal and state governments, along with local councils, must form concrete policies that support involved fathering and healthy marriages and better outcomes for men's health. Fathers must join mothers in asking, "How can we balance work and family?" We need to start teaching young people in our schools how to have a successful marriage relationship and avoid the pain and dislocation that comes with divorce. We must provide training and mentoring for men and fathers to advance the cause of 'fathering excellence'. The future of fatherhood in Australia as stated in The 12pt Plan 'depends on all sectors of society including government, business, church, community, faith based and secular charities, social service providers, and many others working together', to promote responsible, involved fatherhood. Healthy fathers will ensure healthy families. Healthy families are the foundation of a healthy nation.

2b. The 12pt Plan

The greatest resource this country possesses lies in the families of our nation. At the same time, the strength of our families depends on the quality of the relationships between its mothers and fathers. The quality of the relationships between mothers and fathers and their children will determine the destiny of Australia. The future of Australia lies in the character of her children. Equipping and supporting fathers and mothers in their relationships helps ensure that our children have the best possible future.

The National Fathering Forum believes that every child has the fundamental right to both a mother and a father. The best way to secure this right is to establish a loving and stable marriage between a man and a woman for life. This long-term relationship facilitates the rights of grandmothers and grandfathers to continued access and valuable input into their grandchildren.

The overwhelming conclusion of current social science research has shown that the best environment for children is a two heterosexual-parent household. The best way to ensure strong families is to support strong marriages. This traditional family unit - a loving father, mother and their children - is the best way to nurture, educate and protect children. This is the best social security system the world has ever known.

However for a variety of different reasons, many fathers do not find themselves in a marriage relationship. Therefore irrespective of their marital status, we want to support all dads to fulfil their role as effective fathers.

Fatherlessness can be defined as the absence of an active, positive father-influence in the lives of children. **Fatherlessness is both a natural and spiritual problem.** It needs strategic and synergistic partnerships that should involve government, business, church, community, faith-based and secular charities and many others working together to strengthen and support Australian fathers.

History

On 10th February 2003, over 35 people gathered for the inaugural National Fathering Forum at Parliament House Canberra. Twenty-five delegates spoke at the Forum. The delegates represented a wide range of Men's Groups, Family Law Reform Groups, Education & Training Institutions, Academics, Social Researchers and Psychologists, Drug Rehabilitation Organisations, Prison Charities, Social Reform Networks, Church Groups, Journalists and Media, Family Focused Charitable Organisations and Fatherhood Institutions. All came at their own cost with the common goal to strengthen and support Australian fathers and 'to turn the tide of fatherlessness' that exists in Australia.

The forum delegates who presented papers are united by the common belief that fatherlessness and family breakdown are major social problems in Australian society. The following Twelve Point Plan was agreed upon by a consensus of the delegates. This policy document puts forward some key recommendations to address these problems.

The National Fathering Forum does not see this Twelve Point Plan as a final document. Rather we see it as the first of many proposals to promote discussion and contribute to a coordinated national solution to turn the tide of fatherlessness and strengthen Australian fathers.

We commend the Parliamentarians from the different parties in both Houses who supported the National Fathering Forum Open Session by their attendance and input on 10th February 2002. We invite further comment and look forward to the National Fatherhood Conference to be held on 18th & 19th August 2003 in Federal Parliament with a National Fatherhood Summit to be held in August 2004.

The Social Problem

One of the greatest challenges facing our nation is the social problems caused as a result of Fatherlessness. Australia's current birth rate of 1.75 births per female has fallen below the minimum population replacement rate of 2.1 births per female. Fatherlessness is a direct factor in this decline.[1, 2 & 3.]

The problem of Fatherlessness has been estimated to cost Australia over $13 billion per year[4]. Bill Muehlenberg in his article titled "*The Facts on Fatherlessness*" (refer Appendix) has identified the following social and psychological problems

- Poverty.
- Lower educational performance.
- Increased crime.
- Increased drug abuse.
- Increased sexual problems.
- Increased mental health problems.
- Increased physical and sexual abuse of children.

While not every child who grows up in a fatherless situation will experience either one or any of these problems, there is a much greater statistical likelihood that he or she would.

Studies into the potential impact of growing up without a father in the United States have produced the following statistics in relation to boys.[5]

Boys from a fatherless home are:

- more likely to commit suicide;
- more likely to commit rape;
- more likely to drop out of high school;
- more likely to abuse chemicals;
- more likely to end up in a state-operated institution;
- more likely to end up in prison.

The Socio-Economic Problem

While affirmative action programs have helped women overcome past unemployment problems, there is now a growing crisis in male unemployment. This is particularly prevalent among young and middle-aged men [6]. Male unemployment has two main socio-economic impacts on fatherhood. viz.

- Fathers, and therefore families, are put under severe pressures when dads are unemployed or under-employed.
- Many men in low socio-economic circumstances will not marry and will not have children.

All levels of government need to further address this problem. This can be achieved by removing any inequalities in current male/female employment opportunities and policies that may occur through affirmative action. The best person for the job should be given the employment opportunity regardless of gender.

A Challenge to Fathers

The National Fathering Forum calls on men everywhere to offer their commitment to the ideals of fatherhood. We exhort fathers to make their primary goal in life the care and nurture of their families. We applaud the fathers of our nation who are caring for their families and urge them to become 'the best dads in the word' for the sake of their children.

The National Fathering Forum also encourages fathers who are our political, civic, community and church leaders and all those in the public arena to work towards becoming fathers of excellence. We acknowledge that we need a change in some of our laws and an increased government focus on fathers and families as contained in this Twelve Point Plan.

Through a systematic sporting development programme, Australia has produced some of the best sportsmen and women in the world. We have the best sportsmen in the world, why not the best fathers?

The Twelve Point Plan

The National Fathering Forum has formulated a Twelve Point Plan to strengthen and support fatherhood and turn the tide of fatherlessness in Australia. This is divided into 3 major categories:

I. Government

That all levels of government:

1. Acknowledge the importance of fatherhood by establishing an official body to support and strengthen Australian fathers, such as an Office of the Status of Fatherhood or a Ministry of Fatherhood.

2. Increase funding for father-based family initiatives. The focus of government funding needs to be on prevention rather than on cure in order to achieve long-term cost effective benefits.

3. Address the gross inequity in funding for men's issues compared to that currently available for women's issues. [7]

4. Recommend that a national campaign be initiated to promote fathers and fathering, that is to be run annually.

5. Reduce inequality for low socio-economic fathers by increasing their employment opportunities. [6]

6. Acknowledge that after divorce or parental separation, every child has a fundamental right to equal contact with both the mother and the father, unless there are proven mitigating circumstances.

7. Examine all current and future legislation both federal and state in terms of how it impacts on fathers, marriages, families and children and make adjustments accordingly. This includes such things as the Family Law Act, Tax reform for families, Child Support legislation and much more.

8. Include the word 'father' in government department language along with the word 'mother' – bringing a resultant positive change of attitude within governmental bureaucracy towards fathers [8]. When the word 'parenting' is being defined, it should be emphasised that the word means both mothers and fathers.

II. Education & Training

Education of Boys and Male Adults

9. The National Fathering Forum affirmed the view of a recent report [9] to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training that:

- While at school, more attention must be paid to the differing needs of boys and girls and their tendency to favour different learning styles. One should not be pursued at the expense of the other.

- From primary school through to tertiary education, the nature and importance of fathering should be recognised (and if needed, introduced) within the relevant curriculum standards framework.

- Boys need male role models and mentors who may be both (a) teachers/lecturers, and (b) peers. To facilitate this, there is a need to increase the participation rates of males as educators.

10. **Education of Fathers**

Fathers, at various stages, need to be equipped and empowered through education programmes that will enable them to acquire the relevant knowledge and skills that they need to be effective parents.

The National Fathering Forum believes that:

- Just as boys benefit by men positively modelling appropriate behaviour and respectful relationships with other men and women, fathers also benefit from the support they can receive from mentors in their communities.[10]

- There is a need for education programmes that focus on strengthening the father/mother relationship due to the effects of marital quality on fathering and child adjustment.[8]

III. Fathers' Health and Well-Being.

11. Being male is associated with a number of health disadvantages.[11,12] For males, this results in higher rates of:

- Hospital admissions for most injuries and illnesses
- Death by unnatural causes such as suicides and accidents
- Undiagnosed mental illnesses
- Higher rates of suicide
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Addictive anti-social behaviours
- Addictive gambling problems

The National Fathering Forum seeks to promote fathers' health and well-being and to reduce the health disadvantage of being male. This needs the assistance of the Government through increased government-funded initiatives.

12. The National Fathering Forum emphasised that a large number of deaths, injuries and illnesses that men experience are preventable. In addition, the health and well-being of men and fathers is closely associated with social and economic disadvantage such as unemployment. This requires responses from both the government and non-government sectors.

The National Fathering Forum supports the national strategies for the prevention of: suicide, accidents, substance misuse and gambling addictions. We urge that these strategies be implemented with greater emphasis to the unique needs of men and fathers.

Forward Programme

The National Strategic Conference on Fatherhood was held on August 18th & 19th, 2003 in the Federal Parliament, Canberra. We had hoped to hold, in August 2004, a National Fatherhood Summit at Parliament House to further promote public discussion and positive change. We need government assistance to bring together key stakeholders at a national fatherhood summit and until that is forthcoming we are unable to complete this much needed project. Letters of support for a national summit would be welcomed.

All enquiries should be directed to the Fatherhood Foundation, PO Box 440 Wollongong, NSW. 2520 or info@fathersonline.org

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2c. National Conference on Fatherhood

National Strategic Conference on Fatherhood

On 18th & 19th August 2003, men and father's groups, family law reform groups, pro-family charity groups, government agencies and service providers, leaders and representatives from women and mother's groups; the total number of delegates represented a wide cross-section of the Australian community. The speakers included Adrienne Burgess from the UK, Hon Larry Anthony, Minister for Children, Hon Paul Calvert, President of the Senate, Robert Kelso, Brendan Sullivan, Bettina Arndt, Pru Goward, John Hogg, Mark Latham, later to become leader of the Opposition, Hon John Anderson, Deputy Prime Minister, Richard Fletcher, Ron Williams, aboriginal leader, Hon Ross Cameron, Paul Bartlett, Warwick Marsh and Richard Yiap. Many others, too numerous to mention, contributed significantly to the strategic policy summary as listed below. It might be noted that all these recommendations received an 80% voting approval that on many points was much higher. Almost everyone who came to the conference agreed that the restoration of fatherhood in Australia was one of Australia's most pressing social problems.

STRATEGIES

1. **Mentoring for Men & Boys** – to resource, develop and improve national mentoring programs using existing and new groups for men and boys. Systematic research is needed to evaluate and disseminate the information already learned from existing men and fatherhood groups.

2. **Transitions to Manhood** – to recognise the importance of transitional stages in the life of men and the need to honour these stages. To develop ways of teaching these transitions to all males starting at the primary school level, throughout the course of life.

3. **Honouring Fathers & Promoting Fatherhood** – to recognise, empower and encourage Australian fatherhood by creating positive images of men as fathers and highlighting the importance of their vital role in society.

4. **Legislate for a Rebuttable Presumption** of joint physical custody and equal parenting with 50:50 residence as the starting point. This can be rebutted on the basis of proven mitigating circumstances.

5. **Marriage & Relationship Training** – to establish a continuum of formal education and training and support mechanisms across personal relationships from early childhood to adulthood including equipping people to deal with crisis in their relationships. The starting focus of this process is that we look at the marriage/relationship breakdown processes.

6. **Child Support Scheme Reform** – to replace or modify the current Child Support Scheme with a fairer, more equitable and flexible family support arrangement. Investigate the fundamental premise of the CSA.

7. **Funding for Fatherhood Services** – to obtain funding to establish a national information exchange focused on fatherhood services, programs and resources.

8. **Media & Community Partnerships** – to encourage, at the grass roots level, individuals and organisations to promote a positive image of fatherhood utilising media and community partnerships. This will require long term national coordination.

9. **Positive Education on Fatherhood** – to review all curriculum approaches/materials used in all schools and teaching/training institutions to ensure that they present positive fathering images.

10. **Tax Deductibility for Fatherhood Support Groups**
a. to petition the Government to provide tax deductibility for non-profit charitable organisations that are carrying out preventive & support programs educating men and boys in fathering and fatherhood.
b. to establish Australian Fatherhood Initiative as a tax deductible trust to support programs for mentoring men & boys in fathering and fatherhood

11. **Increase Level of Male Teachers** - Each state education body to have a target of 40% male teachers in each government school and childcare centre by 2010.

12. **Prioritise Men's Health & Wellbeing Services –** to provide specific health and wellbeing services appropriate to men and fathers.

13. **Education Services for Men's Health & Wellbeing** – to establish early intervention and education programs to promote men's health and wellbeing.

14. **Policy, Planning & Practice**
We commend the Australian governments and all members of parliament for taking leadership with initiatives that support and strengthen families. We recommend that knowledge and understanding from programs such as Men and Family relationships be used to influence policy, planning and practice in mainstream services.

Personal commendation and recommendation
from NSCF Delegates to Parliamentarians

We would commend the parliamentarians for their service and sacrifice for the people of Australia and recommend that they take one extra day a month off to spend with their families. This could be called the parliamentarians' family day and could be a way of encouraging other high pressure professions to do the same.

3. The High Cost of Fatherlessness and Links to Poor Health

Fatherlessness is a growing problem in Australia and the Western world. Whether caused by divorce and broken families, or by deliberate single parenting, more and more children grow up without fathers. Indeed, 85 per cent of single parent families are fatherless families. Father absence has been shown to be a major disadvantage to the well being of children. The following is a summary of the evidence for the importance of fathers and the need for two-parent families.

One expert from Harvard medical school who has studied over 40 years of research on the question of parental absence and children's well-being said this: "What has been shown over and over again to contribute most to the emotional development of the child is a close, warm, sustained and continuous relationship with both parents."[2] Or as David Blankenhorn has stated in *Fatherless America*: "Fatherlessness is the most harmful demographic trend of this generation."[3]

Another expert puts it this way: "There exists today no greater single threat to the long-term well-being of children, our communities, or our nation, than the increasing number of children being raised without a committed, responsible, and loving father."[4]

Bryan Rodgers of the Australian National University has recently re-examined the Australian research. Says Rodgers: "Australian studies with adequate samples have shown parental divorce to be a risk factor for a wide range of social and psychological problems in adolescence and adulthood, including poor academic achievement, low self-esteem, psychological distress, delinquency and recidivism, substance use and abuse, sexual precocity, adult criminal offending, depression, and suicidal behaviour." He concludes: "There is no scientific justification for disregarding the public health significance of marital dissolution in Australia, especially with respect to mental heath."[5]

A New Zealand summary of the data based on national and international research conducted over the past two decades also found major positive outcomes for children when fathers are present, and negative outcomes when fathers are absent. The report states:

"The weight of the evidence is that fathers can make unique, direct contributions to their children's well-being. These findings held true after controlling for a range of factors, including mothers' involvement, children's characteristics, children's early behavioural problems, family income, socio-economic status over time, stepfather involvement and family structure." It goes on to list the many specific ways in which fathers positively contribute to the wellbeing of children.[6]

And the importance of fathers is neither a recent nor a merely Western truth. The need and importance of fathers is an historical and universal given. As anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowksi put it, "The most important moral and legal rule concerning the physiological site of kinship is that no child should be brought into the world without a man – and one man at that. . . . I think that this generalization amounts to a universal sociological law." There may be cultural variations, yet "through all the variations there runs the rule that the father is indispensable for the full sociological status of the child as well of its mother, that the group consisting of a woman and her offspring is sociologically incomplete and illegitimate." [7]

Here then is a sampling of the evidence:

Fatherlessness Increases Poverty:
Poverty is the breeding ground for poor health in men, women & children

- In America, among families with dependent children, only 8.3 per cent of married couples were living below the poverty line, compared to 47.1 percent of female-headed households.[8]
- Also in the US, a nationally representative sample found this: "In 2005, the median income for married couples was $66,067, which was $35,000 more than the median income for single mothers, $19,000 more than that of single fathers, $43,000 more than that of single women, and $24,000 more than that of single men. Married couples made up 79 percent of the highest quintile income and 17.9 percent of the lowest income quintile."[9]
- In Australia, a recent study of 500 divorcees with children five to eight years after the separation found that four in five divorced mothers were dependent on social security after their marriages dissolved.[10]
- Figures from Monash University's Centre for Population and Urban Research show that family break-up, rather than unemployment, is the main cause of the rise in poverty levels in Australia.[11]
- A joint report from AMP Life and Canberra University's National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling says that divorce leaves both partners worse off economically, but women tend to experience the biggest fall in disposable income.[12]

Fatherlessness Lowers Educational Performance.
Poor educational outcomes produce poor health outcomes in boys & men

- American children from intact families have a 21 per cent chance of dropping out of high school whereas children from broken families have a 46 per cent chance.[13]
- American school children who became father-absent early in life generally scored significantly lower on measures of IQ and achievement tests.[14]
- A study of Australian primary school children from three family types (married heterosexual couples, cohabiting heterosexual couples and homosexual couples) found that in every area of educational endeavour (language; mathematics; social studies; sport; class work, sociability and popularity; and attitudes to learning), children from married heterosexual couples performed better than the other two groups. The study concludes with these words: "Married couples seem to offer the best environment for a child's social and educational development".[15]

- A Melbourne University study of 212 children found that fathers, even more than mothers, had a major beneficial influence on children in their first year of school. The study found that kids with regular father involvement were more cooperative and self-reliant in school than kids who did not have father involvement. The more regular involvement the father has with the child, the study's author said, the better the child does in his or her first year of school.[16]

Fatherlessness Increases Crime.
Increased crime levels contribute to greater levels of male morbidity and injury

- A British study found a direct statistical link between single parenthood and virtually every major type of crime, including mugging, violence against strangers, car theft and burglary.[17]
- One American study even arrived at this startling conclusion: the proportion of single-parent households in a community predicts its rates of violent crime and burglary, but the community's poverty level does not. Neither poverty nor race seem to account very much for the crime rate, compared to the proportion of single parent families.[18]
- In Australia, a recent book noted the connection between broken families and crime. In a discussion of rising crime rates in Western Australia, the book reported that "family breakdown in the form of divorce and separation is the main cause of the crime wave".[19]

Fatherlessness Increases Drug Abuse.
Drug abuse is a major health risk in men

- A UCLA study pointed out that inadequate family structure makes children more susceptible to drug use "as a coping mechanism to relieve depression and anxiety."[20]
- Another US study found that among the homes with strict fathers, only 18 per cent had children who used alcohol or drugs at all. In contrast, among mother-dominated homes, 35 per cent had children who used drugs frequently.[21]
- A New Zealand study of nearly 1000 children observed over a period of 15 years found that children who have watched their parents separate are more likely to use illegal drugs than those whose parents stay together.[22]

Fatherlessness Increases Sexual Problems.
Sexual problems impact the health of men, women & children

- Studies from many different cultures have found that girls raised without fathers are more like to be sexually active, and to start early sexual activity. Father-deprived girls "show precocious sexual interest, derogation of masculinity and males, and poor ability to maintain sexual and emotional adjustment with one male".[23]
- A US study found that girls who grow up without fathers were "53 percent more likely to marry as teenagers, 111 percent more likely to have children as teenagers, 164 percent more likely to have a premarital birth, and 92 percent more likely to dissolve their own marriages."[24]
- New Zealand research has found that the absence of a father is a major factor in the early onset of puberty and teenage pregnancy. Dr Bruce Ellis, Psychologist in Sexual Development at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch found that one of the most important factors in determining early menarche is the father: "There seems to be something special about the role of fathers in regulating daughters sexual development".[25]
- A British study found that girls brought up by lone parents were twice as likely to leave home by the age of 18 as the daughters of intact homes; were three times as likely to be

cohabiting by the age of 20; and almost three times as likely to have a birth out of wedlock.[26]

Fatherlessness Increase Physical, Emotional & Mental Health Problems and is a major contributor to poor health for boys

- From nations as diverse as Finland and South Africa, a number of studies have reported that anywhere from 50 to 80 per cent of psychiatric patients come from broken homes.[27]
- A Canadian study of teenagers discharged from psychiatric hospitals found that only 16 per cent were living with both parents when they were admitted.[28]
- A study of nearly 14,000 Dutch adolescents between the ages of 12 to 19 found that, "In general, children from one parent and stepparent families reported lower self-esteem, more symptoms of anxiety and loneliness, more depressed mood and more suicidal thoughts than children from intact families."[29]
- A massive longitudinal study undertaken in Sweden involving over one million children found that children from single parents showed increased risks of psychiatric disease, suicide or suicide attempt, injury and addiction. The authors, writing in *The Lancet*, concluded that growing up in "a single-parent family has disadvantages to the health of the child". Bear in mind that Sweden is one of the most highly advanced welfare states on earth. Thus even with a comprehensive welfare net, children still suffer when not in two-parent families.[30]
- A US study of 2,733 adolescents found this: "The greater the fathers' involvement was, the lower the level of adolescents' behavioral problems, both in terms of aggression and antisocial behavior and negative feelings such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem."[31]
- A researcher from the University of South Australia's School of Health Sciences found that children from single families do less well than those from married families because they are less active and do not have as much opportunity for physical activity.[32]

Fatherlessness and Family Breakdown Costs Australia 13 Billion Dollars per Year. Boys & men pay the price with their health

- Dr Bruce Robinson, University of Western Australia, and author of *Fathering from the Fast Lane*, has estimated the cost of fatherlessness in Australia to be over 13 billion dollars per year.[33]
- In Australia it has been estimated that marriage breakdown costs $2.5 billion annually. Each separation is estimated to cost society some $12,000.[34]
- Also, Australian industry is reported to lose production of more than $1 billion a year due to problems of family breakdown.[35]
- Homelessness is also closely linked with family breakdown. A recent Australian study conducted at two Melbourne universities has found that children whose biological parents stay together are about three times less likely to become homeless than those from other family types.[36]

Fatherlessness Increases Physical & Sexual Child Abuse. Boys & girls suffer long term health impairment

- A 1994 study of 52,000 children found that those who are most at risk of being abused are those who are not living with both parents.[37]
- A recent American review of the studies found that "fathers, especially married fathers who live with their children, play an important role in protecting their children from abuse and neglect". It found that 15.5 children out of 1000 children were mistreated in married-

parent families, whereas 27.3 children per 1000 were mistreated in single-parent families.[38]

- A Finnish study of nearly 4,000 ninth-grade girls found that "stepfather-daughter incest was about 15 times as common as father-daughter incest".[39]
- In Australia, former Human Rights Commissioner Mr Brian Burdekin has reported a 500 to 600 per cent increase in sexual abuse of girls in families where the adult male was not the natural father.[40]
- A recent study by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found that "a relatively high proportion of substantiations [of child abuse] involved children living in female-headed one-parent families and in two-parent step or blended families."[41]

Fatherlessness & Family Breakdown:
Major social problems & contributors to poor health for boys & men in our society

The evidence of the harmful effects of father absence could fill many pages. The above is just a small sampling of a very large body of research findings on the issue. The social science research on the need for children to be raised by both a biological mother and father, preferably cemented by marriage, is vast and growing.

Indeed, the evidence is so overwhelming that the reader is advised to look at recent summaries of the data.[42] However, several recent academic studies can be mentioned here, which demonstrate the importance of children growing up with their married biological mother and father.

One American study of 19,000 young people conducted by the Bowling Green State University (Ohio) found that teens fare best when living with two married biological parents: "Adolescents in married, two-biological-parent families generally fare better than children in any of the family types examined here, including single-mother, cohabiting stepfather, and married stepfather families. The advantage of marriage appears to exist primarily when the child is the biological offspring of both parents. Our findings are consistent with previous work, which demonstrates children in cohabiting stepparent families fare worse than children living with two married, biological parents."[43]

Another large-scale American study found that there are "overall disadvantages" in not living with both biological parents.[44] The author concludes, "My analyses have clearly demonstrated some overall disadvantages of living with neither parent. Among adolescents from all six family types, those in non-biological-parent appear to rank the lowest in academic performance, educational aspiration, and locus of control. Further, they appear to fare less well in the remaining outcome areas (self-esteem, behavior problems, and cigarette smoking)."[45]

Cornell University Professor Urie Bronfenbrenner, a leading expert in developmental psychology, summarises the evidence in this fashion:

> Controlling for associated factors such as low income, children growing up in [single-parent] households are at greater risk for experiencing a variety of behavioral and educational problems, including extremes of hyperactivity or withdrawal; lack of attentiveness in the classroom; difficulty in deferring gratification; impaired academic achievement; school misbehavior; absenteeism; dropping out; involvement in socially alienated peer groups; and, especially, the so-called 'teenage syndrome' of behaviors that tend to hang together - smoking, drinking, early and frequent sexual experience, a cynical attitude to work, adolescent pregnancy, and in the more extreme cases, drugs, suicide, vandalism, violence, and criminal acts.[46]

Similar comments can be made about the situation in Britain. After amassing a wealth of data on the negative effects of fatherless in the UK, Rebecca O'Neil makes this concluding remark:

> The weight of evidence indicates that the traditional family based upon a married father and mother is still the best environment for raising children, and it forms the soundest basis for the wider society. For many mothers, fathers and children, the 'fatherless family' has meant poverty, emotional heartache, ill health, lost opportunities, and a lack of stability. The social fabric – once considered flexible enough to incorporate all types of lifestyles – has been stretched and strained. Although a good society should tolerate people's rights to live as they wish, it must also hold adults responsible for the consequences of their actions. To do this, society must not shrink from evaluation of the results of these actions. As J.S. Mill argued, a good society must share the lessons learnt from its experience and hold up ideals to which all can aspire.[47]

Wade Horn, the head of the National Fatherhood Initiative in the USA offers this concluding word: "The news is not good when large numbers of children are growing up disconnected from their fathers. It's not that every child who grows up in a fatherless household is going to have these kinds of difficulties. But it is true that there's an increased risk of these negative outcomes when kids grow up without fathers."[48]

With the rise of fatherlessness Australia and the Western world has also experienced a marked rise in social problems. And the brunt of these problems have been borne by children. We owe it to our children to do better. We urgently need to address the problems of fatherlessness and family breakdown as they are major contributors to poor health outcomes for men and children. Public policy must begin to address these crucial areas. Until we tackle these problems, our children and our societies will continue to suffer.

4. The Reality of Men's Health in Australia Compared to Women's Health

- Average life expectancy of men is 5 years and 10 months below women (82 years for women and 77 years for men).
- The average life expectancy for Indigenous men in Australia is 56 years of age, 21 years less than other men.
- The Australian male mortality rate (the number of deaths from all causes) is 146% of the female mortality rate. Overall, for every two women that die, three men die.
- The death rate for men from injury is about 3 times the rate for women as per NSW figures.
- Overall indigenous males die at 3.2 times the rate of non-indigenous men from injury - this includes motor vehicles, accidents, falls, homicides and suicides.
- Men die from ischemic heart diseases at 1.7 times the rate of women.
- Men die from lung cancer at 2.3 times the rate of women.
- Men die from chronic lower respiratory diseases at 1.9 times the rate of women.
- Men die from diabetes at 1.6 times the rate of women.
- Indigenous men die at 6.1 times the rate of non-indigenous men from diabetes.
- Men commit suicide at 4 times the rate that women commit suicide.
- In 2005 1,657 men committed suicide whilst the Australian road toll was 1,636.
- Suicide for indigenous men is 70% higher than for non-indigenous men.

- Rates of homicide for indigenous men are 7 to 8 as compared with other non-indigenous men.
- Rates of expenditure on health care, in spite of the poor state of men's health is 34% higher on women than men. In 1993-94, 13.4 billion dollars was spent on men's health care as opposed to 18 billion dollars on women's health care (Mathers, Penm, Carter & Stevensen 1998).
- Death rates for men were greater than for women for: colon cancer, influenza and pneumonia, blood vessel, heart and cerebrovascular diseases.
- After the first year of life, boys nationally have a death rate 35 % higher than girls. In all areas of health status (death disability, handicap and illness) boys fare worse than girls (ages 0-12 years).
- Generally more boys than girls have mental health problems, including conduct disorder, disruptive or anti-social behaviours. Young boys are the predominant reported victims of physical violence, emotional abuse and neglect from adults and carers.
- More men die annually from prostrate cancer than women die of breast cancer.

Summary

Professor John Macdonald says, "In Australia indigenous males, whether Australian Aborigines or Torres Strait Islanders, have a health status surprisingly worse than indigenous males in such comparably-developed countries as Canada, New Zealand, or the USA. In fact, a bipartisan inquiry of the Australian parliament reported in 2000 that: 'The failure to make progress in the health of the Australian indigenous population is unique in the developed world'."

Associate Professor Gary Wittert from the University of Adelaide, Department of Medicine tells us, "Compared with women, Australian men of all ages are less healthy and therefore do not enjoy as good a quality of life as they should. . . Identifying the reasons for men's poorer physical and mental health is an imperative. We hope that measures could then be developed and implemented to promote a healthy and active lifestyle, eventually prevent diseases, and guide the development of appropriate health services and policy."

The above men's health statistics and comparisons show the shocking discrimination men suffer when it come to their health. Many would argue that much of the ill health of men is self-inflicted because of the preponderance for a greater level of risk taking by the male of the species. Others would argue that inherent male apathy is a problem in seeking medical assistance in the first place. Whilst there is a measure of truth in both of these assertions the simple reality is that government expenditure on women's health compared with men's health is anywhere between 25% and 50% greater and in some cases the ratio of expenditure on behalf of females to males is greater than ten to one. In the light of the gap in life expectancy and other male health anomalies, it is time to make a concerted effort to not only construct a viable Men's Health Policy but commit to reducing the funding inequity in men's health. A priority must be placed on quickly improving the health of Australian men by creating the government machinery necessary to ensure this inequity is diminished quickly.

The Fatherhood Foundation would like to thank Greg Andresen, Professor John Macdonald, Michael Woods, Dennis McDermott and Anthony Brown who provided research papers from which the above information has been summarized. The Fatherhood Foundation has been a long time advocate for a co-ordinated men's health policy that also takes into account indigenous men and would like to thank all the parliamentarians from both sides of the house who have supported the introduction of a national men's health policy.

5. Healthy Men, Healthy Families, Healthy Nation
A Plan of Action

The amazing story of Roseto in Pennsylvania, that began this submission, shows the importance of Social Determinants of Men's Health. In Roseto, amongst their men, there was no suicide, no alcoholism, no drug addiction and very little crime. The death rate from all causes in Roseto, in fact, was 30-35% lower than expected. Roseto was a glowing example of healthy marriages, healthy fathers, healthy mothers, healthy families, which produced healthy children. People helped each other. They ascribed to a higher level of values. The spiritual life of the individual and the community as a whole was exemplary. All these things taken together produced an extraordinary level of health.

The dream for an Australian version of Roseto has already been articulated. It was documented by those who drafted and approved The 12pt Plan in June 2003. The 12pt Plan received bipartisan support from the soon-to-be Leader of the Opposition, Mark Latham, and the then Minister for Children, Hon Larry Anthony. The 12pt Plan was drafted before Malcolm Gladwell ever told the story of Roseto in his book, "The Outliers". Such a story is what the Dads4Kids Fatherhood Foundation is working towards in its harm prevention work.

We must not discount the fundamental need to get Australia eating the right food. We must not discount the need to encourage people to engage in meaningful exercise and in so doing embrace a healthy lifestyle and enjoy, rather than endure, life. We must not discount the improved provision of male-friendly health services and expenditure to bring equity to the gender based health investment.

Dads4Kids Fatherhood Foundation believes there is a pressing need to provide a government driver to allocate finance and fast track a family friendly men's heath policy that will ensure action and not just words. That government driver or taskforce, will have to reach across several government departments to ensure all the social determinants are dealt with in a coordinated fashion for the good of the men and the families of Australia. The departments requiring reform will include: health, sport and recreation, department of aging, education and science, family and community, human services and Attorney General.

Dads4Kids Fatherhood Foundation proposes that an Office for the Status of Men and Father's responsible to the Prime Ministers Department be set up urgently, with a three year sunset clause and a three year possible extension, to be evaluated on the basis of achievement of key performance indicators. The above proposal is point one of the 12pt Plan, drafted in 2003.

Healthy men mean healthy families which are the foundation for a healthy nation.

Yours for our children
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