



Shared Parenting Council of Australia

Issues that impact on a men's health policy.

The SPCA works mostly in the areas of Family Law and Child Custody, Local Court proceedings and Child Support legislation and reform. Of particular concern to us are the **social determinants of men's health**; emotional well being, spiritual well being, harm prevention, Families and continuence of parenting after separation and divorce. This includes the rights and best interests of Children to know and live with both of their parents in a substantially equal way.

We are concerned with male friendly counseling services, male friendly health services, government support services, the process through the family law court, Child support agency debt collection, the epidemic of false DVO and false sexual abuse claims, grandfather's access rights, legal discrimination against men, societal discrimination against men, the need to keep the word 'father' in government legislation along with the word 'mother' and 'marriage', father friendly government services, fatherhood education services, domestic violence bias in government advertising and funding, overtime demands, work life balance issues.

Key issues

1. Reversing the Decline in men's health both physical and mental health following family breakdown separation and divorce and in particular the associated grief and trauma around loss of contact.

Specific issues arising after separation include:

- Suicide prevention
- Shared Parenting needed by fathers and children
- Obesity
- Decline in Health and fitness
- Depression
- Loss of productivity at work
- Absenteeism
- Father trying to find a new role
- Phases of grief men go through with the loss of the family unit.
- Hardship/homelessness caused through inequitable property division

2. There needs to be research on the biology of fatherhood.

Women and children's development is biologically linked according to research. What happens with fathers in respect to the biological connectedness between fathers and kids? Intuitively we know they are linked but society treats fathers as optional and disposable.

Once this biological link is proven legislators should see that child custody is more than a simple partition of time but it has physiological implications particularly for dads. Child Custody is a major health issue for men and their children

3. There is a lot of work needed to get men functional again after breakdown of the family unit.

There needs to be targeted research and intervention programs to help men with their communication with their partner in marriage. In relation to this we believe there needs to be research on how best to deal with and provide special assistance for a large body of men whose partner's "cut and run" and leave a man "frozen" and crippled by their sudden departure, often removing the children when they leave.

4. Paid paternity leave is needed for fathers with the birth of a child. A week is inadequate.
5. Industry groups with a six day week need to consider specific father and male friendly practices to mitigate the extended working week. Changes need to be made to workplaces so that it becomes normal for men to take time off work to care for their families and children, rather than fearing that if they do so they will be persecuted or lose their chances of promotion or even lose their job. Amendments are required in the Sex Discrimination Act so that men with family responsibilities are covered by it.
6. The new men's health policy would talk about the devastating effect that unemployment has on men's health and wellbeing. It would be concerned that our feminised education system is becoming so unattractive to many boys that they start to believe that doing well at school is "what girls do" and drop out of the system altogether. And if they do drop out, it would talk about a revitalised apprenticeship system that would steer these boys into meaningful employment and out of the dole queues. It would also introduce schemes to get more male teachers into the classroom from early childhood education right through to high school, and introduce modern-day rites-of-passage to guide our boys from boyhood to healthy manhood.
7. The longest running pro-child institution we have is marriage. The richest and safest environment for children being the family unit comprised of a mother and a father. Men's health should not be used as a platform to socially re-engineer the institution of marriage. Misplaced calls for "equality" should never eradicate the child's inalienable right to a mother and a father.
8. Significant gains were made to facilitate a meaningful relationship with both parents in 2006. Further extending that work and to continue enhancing the emotional well being of men after separation, there needs to be a further enhancement of the definition in the Family Law Act of the best interests of the child which does not de-couple the child from its parents and instead upholds fatherhood and motherhood as being vital to a child's development. Equally relevant for infants and boys and girls alike.

Resources required:

These resources require consideration of funding and renewed focus on men and fathers

- An office for the status of men and fathers which could be charged with ensuring any possible Men's Health policy actually gets put into action as opposed to gathering dust on the shelf in a government office.
- More contact centres to facilitate exchanges for shared parenting
- All schools ordered to implement unbiased Shared Parenting Policies and Procedures and a common Federal school policy on dealing with separated families.
- Increased participation of men in education and schools
- Schools to have parenting related instruction included in at least Years 10 through 12.
- Greater encouragement to have men enter the teaching profession which will result in a long term impact on boys developmental progression through school.

- Greater participation of men in men's services delivery through Government service delivery agencies.
- More male friendly emphasis in State Government policy development not just pro feminist programmes & ideology (NSW State Legislation which passed in the objects section of the Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Bill 2007 that domestic violence is predominantly perpetrated by men against women and children.)
http://www.familylawwebguide.com.au/forum/pg/topicview/misc/909/index.php&start=0#post_3569
- Medical services delivery to reach men in the work place.
- Access for Dads to their children's medical and educational information.
- Promote and fund men's groups – men's socialisation and support through groups formed at local community level.
- Men's drop in centres. Perhaps extending the facilities at DiDS and Men's Sheds
- Accommodation and shelters
- Increased access to legal aid for men – less barriers to receiving funds when faced with family law costs and child support impost whilst still paying existing mortgages
- Male counsellors for men. New services and new organisations not derivative of existing organisations of which many promote a feminist outlook and model for men, which is antagonistic toward men and men's roles.
- Dads and kids camps and family recreation involving fathers with their children
- Preparation for marriage. Engagement and compulsory Marriage enrichment programmes.
- Support for parents as the primary educators of their children – includes more support for home schooling should parents desire it.

We would also refer you to a recent men's round table forum in Sydney and to a conference in 2008 in Federal Parliament.

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