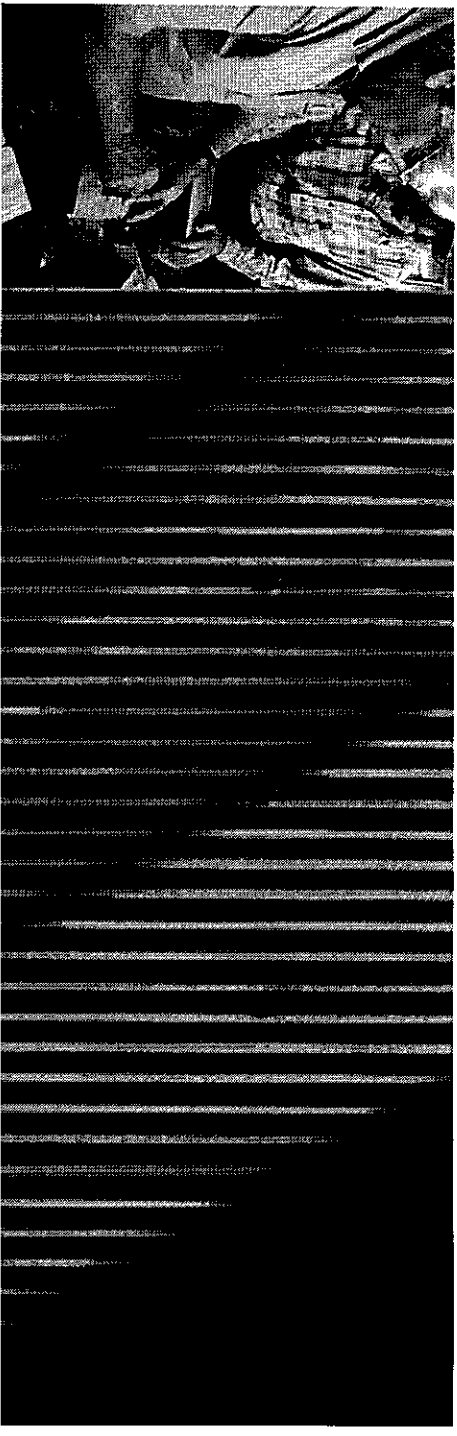


MEN'S SHEDS

EXPLORING THE EVIDENCE FOR BEST PRACTICE

RICK HAYES | MICHELLE WILLIAMSON



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June 2007

By Rick Hayes and Michelle Williamson
School of Public Health
La Trobe University
Bundoora, VIC 3086
(03) 9479.3290 or 0407379787
r.hayes@latrobe.edu.au

Research assistance by: Christopher Ford and Michelle Morgan.
Additional support provided by: Ayse Cimen and Jessica Maloun.

Acknowledgments: We acknowledge our gratitude for the support and encouragement of Gary Green (Orbost Regional Health), Peter Muldoon (Gippsland Lakes Health Service), Dr. Barry Golding (Ballarat University), Greg Holding (Peninsula Health), Andrew Haddot (Port Pirie, SA) and the students, men and workers participating in the various 'Men's Sheds' projects in Victoria. Because of their dedication to practicing in an excellent manner with many varied good results, special thanks is due to Professor John MacDonald and Anthony Brown, the Co-Directors of the Men's Health Information and Resource Centre at the University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury, NSW (www.menshealth.uws.edu.au).

The School of Public Health, La Trobe University, gratefully acknowledges financial assistance from the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC) to compile the information for this document. Please note, however, that the content was produced independently of DVC by the staff of La Trobe University. Therefore, the views and opinions expressed in the report do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Victorian Communities.

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Executive Summary:

There is no doubt that 'Men's Sheds' projects and programs are important. They can benefit both older and younger men in Australian society. There are a number of important changes that have occurred over the past two generations that make it increasingly difficult for some men to maintain social connectedness. Also, previous research and current 'conversations' provide a convincing argument that such projects and programs are important to both the organisations which host them and the communities that support them. However, there are potential downsides for the men, their communities and the larger society. Therefore, it is important to develop a better understanding of Men's Sheds and their usefulness.

This document represents a first attempt in Victoria to explore the evidence for best-practice, pertinent to Men's Sheds. It is written for a number of audiences in mind: from the men themselves to those who might report on their activities in the community. An attempt has been made in the first section to introduce the concept of Men's Sheds. This is important to dispel misconceptions. The reasons for such projects and programs are spelled out and a background to their development in Victoria is provided to guide readers.

Because this is an emerging field and 'evidence' is not straight-forward as yet, the first section discusses some of the important 'deep' principles relating to Men's Sheds. Key terms are explored and models elaborated. Finally, some important implications are discussed including the need to document more carefully what is being done and to develop acceptable evaluation approaches that will assist in decision-making about resources and processes. Conclusions and recommendations can be found in Part C. An elaboration of the typology developed for this topic and relevant case studies that can help readers interested in specific applications that is provided in Part E. References are provided in Part D.

It should be noted that complementary research exploring Men's Sheds as preferred learning environments has been carried out by Associate Professor Barry Golding and his team at the University of Ballarat (Golding 2005; Golding & Harvey 2006). Its findings support much of what is contained in this document. Additionally, this research highlights the tendency at present for Men's Sheds to be primarily established for and used by older men. This is particularly true in rural areas. Given the World Health Organization's (2001:56) recognition of the importance of access to life-long learning opportunities as a means of social integration for healthy ageing among men, there are important implications in terms of policy action associated with this.

When reviewing this document, two factors should be kept in mind. The first is that there is a wide diversity among men. Not all men are alike in temperament or taste. Even though the findings reflect a mixture of critical reflection on current practice and important theoretical considerations, those who use them should avoid being overly prescriptive. There is wide scope for innovation and development. Of course this should be well-considered and prudent. Additionally, readers should remember that these findings reflect a primary health care approach. More particularly, they embody the ethos of the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (WHO 1986). In that regard, it is important to remember the general importance of literacy, leadership and linkages in developing any project or program.

However, there are also a number of key considerations that should be taken into account when considering Men's Sheds. While they and related recommendations are elaborated more fully in the main body of the report (Part B), they can be summarised here under the headings of:

- Origins—facilitating the broad conversations that are needed to know what is desired;
- Operations—elaborating comprehensively the nuts and bolts of running a program through time;
- Activities—ensuring a fruitful match between funding body expectations and the interests of the men;
- Funding and Resources—considering carefully *where* funds will be obtained and *how* they will be gained through the life of the Shed; and,
- Linkages—keeping an eye on the larger policy environment that might create threats or opportunities and the potentials for creating partnerships that have greater effects.

To conclude, there are a number of recommendations to be made with regards to: (a) Men's Sheds in general, and (b) Men's Health Promotion in Victoria. They are outlined below.

There are three points to be made about the findings in terms of policy development: consideration as to their dissemination, creation of opportunities for their wide discussion, and concern for their review and development. Also, policy development would be beneficial in terms of infrastructure development to support Men's Sheds.

While these policies must be considered at many levels (organisations, local and state governments), there are four areas of special regard: specifying the nature of support to be given at the grassroots (community capacity building), enhancing the workforce that would help to facilitate Men's Sheds, increasing coordination of resources across projects to consolidate Men's Sheds programs, and attending explicitly to the organisational development that is required for each agency or body hosting Men's Sheds.

Finally, these first two concerns should be considered within a larger policy context that seeks to enhance Men's Health Promotion in Victoria. It would be expedient for the State government to take a primary leadership role in terms of ensuring the development of appropriate policies. However, peak bodies with responsibilities for the health and wellbeing of the men, women and children of Victoria must also play a role. This responsibility does not preclude all governmental and non-governmental agencies reviewing their policies relating to working with men.

A. Introduction

1. Initial orientation

These are preliminary findings. They are open to change. Yet, they provide a place to expand a very important conversation about Men's Sheds in Victoria. That conversation is already well underway in some fifty locations. And, for each shed that has been proposed or is already functioning, there are likely to be several more conversations that people would like to start.

This document is intended to sharpen the focus of the discussions for those who are already going at it full-tilt. It may also help others get their conversations started or heard more widely. The idea of conversations are important, and could be very important to the long-term success of the Men's Shed experience (Beebe 2001).

The Audiences

In one sense this trend is just emerging. In another sense, the reality of Men's Sheds has been around for some time in Australia. So, it is important in this introduction to set down some basic rules of thumb in terms of the things that will be talked about. Firstly, this document is relevant to five very different, but sometimes overlapping, groups of people. The most important are the men who are interested in starting, participating in, maintaining, enhancing or expanding a 'Men's Shed' project or program.

Almost as important are the men and women who are interested in supporting them. These people are often workers in health and community support services. But, they can include members of service clubs, librarians, employers, spouses, children, parents, teachers, and so forth. Another influential group are the managers and CEOs of organisations that often host, or otherwise support, Men's Sheds.

These organisations, in turn, typically receive resources and guidance from local, state and federal government bodies. They also seek support from non-government peak bodies as well as. Finally, there are the reporters and researchers who endeavour to capture, evaluate and communicate, each in the way most appropriate to their discipline, the events relating to Men's Sheds.

Some may wish to begin at the beginning here in Section A. Others may wish to dash to Section B and the Appendices as they may make for an easier and more relevant read for some.

The Principles

Secondly, there are a few 'deep' principles that influence what will be proposed. They tend to oppose common assumptions about men (Macdonald, McDermott & Di Campi 2001). For instance, any idea that men are problems to be solved will be avoided. While men do face problems more or less successfully and while they can cause problems for themselves and others, they are not problems because they are men.

Instead, they are potential partners who often possess constructive possibilities unknown to themselves and others (Hayes 2003). Another related assumption is that men cannot (or, will not) help themselves in any significant way. For instance, all too often people suggest that men will not talk to others about their concerns.

Yet, important Victorian research suggests that “in safe, well-facilitated groups associated with their networks, men can and will talk about what concerns them” (Hayes 2000). They will also do something about their concerns. This will often be done with the support of others. In other words, men do appreciate the importance of being with and for others. This is particularly true of older men who have had long experience of working or recreating in groups.

Additionally, many factors influencing men are beyond their immediate control. Such factors can only be coped with satisfactorily or changed substantively by the activities of a group and a larger community of support (Macdonald 2000). It is important for people to have access to processes that allow them to engage these larger realities while maintaining their own sense of purpose and dignity.

The Key Terms

Finally, it would probably be useful to say something about the term, Men’s Shed, and evidence relating to ‘best practice’. Because of a persistent and sometimes one-sided association in the wider community of sheds with isolation and withdrawal (ABC 1996; Earle, Earle & Von Mering 1996; Moloney 2002), it is important to at least begin to outline what is meant by using the term ‘Men’s Sheds’ in this document.

There is both an historical and continuing association with tools and work in many of these Sheds. However, there are more clinically, recreationally, educationally and communally oriented Sheds as well. Additionally, these Sheds are not places where men get away from people. They go to Sheds specifically to be with other men.

Men can run the Sheds by themselves, or the Sheds can be facilitated by workers. These workers are often associated with community health services. Many community health services actually have the Sheds built on their properties. This report will capitalise the word when it is used to refer to a group orientation.

It can get a little more complicated when we try to work out the meaning and significance of the phrases ‘evidence’ and ‘best-practice’. These phrases move us well and truly beyond loose rules of thumb that are never looked at very closely. We begin to move to the idea of a larger accountability and a closer scrutiny. So, let’s examine the ideas more carefully.

Best practice assumes that there is some good to be practiced (e.g., telling the truth and respecting people’s concerns and privacy) to attain other goods. These goods might include: (a) a growing trust between men and workers in a program hosted by an agency that leads to (b) a greater willingness to take calculated risks in disclosing information about one’s self to others in order (c) to deal more satisfactorily with an instance of communal grief and loss such as the death of a CFA member. Further, in seeking to achieve such goods, we should strive for excellence in our practice (e.g., *always* telling the truth *appropriately* and *properly* respecting *everyone’s* concerns and privacy).

What is being specifically called for is some sort of evidence (*e + videre*, Latin—out of what is being seen) that a practice (or, practices) can be *recognised* as being good, that such practice can be shown to lead to *recognised* goods, and that the practice can be and is being seen to be done to a *recognised* standard of excellence. Recognised has been italicised to emphasise that evidence is something that we use to convince other intelligent and reasonable people.

It's important that such people have sufficient knowledge of a context to be able to judge that what is going on there has the value or meaning that we attribute to it. To speak of 'seeing' and 'being shown' suggests that there is good cause to believe that there are sufficiently strong and reliable links in the chain of our reasoning from one thing to another. This is an essential point. This is why we are tried by a jury of our peers, for instance, in a court of law for serious offences.

At this point, to give some idea of what good practice might look like, a brief example is offered. It relates to principles proposed for use with the employment of mature workers. As can be seen from the typology in the Appendix, many Sheds have a work-like ethos and such workplace-related good practice principles may provide a bridge between sectors. The principles mentioned below also reflect some of the concerns that were raised in the evaluation of the 'Men in Sheds' program in Bendigo (CBH 2001).

According to Walker (1998, as quoted in Fogg 2001:19), good practice in recruiting and employing mature workers involves nine steps that various Men's Sheds could modify appropriately and adopt when starting or improving their projects or programs:

- preparation and research, for example, on recruitment trends and age profiles
- open communication with staff
- early involvement of trade unions, staff associations, etc
- early involvement of mature workers themselves
- education of line managers
- staged implementation, regular monitoring and feedback
- periodic assessment of impact
- constant communication with all employees
- attention to other aspects of the working environment which may inhibit the uptake of good practice

The Best Models?

Models can be very useful to help understand what is going on and learn how to work in the world. Yet, there are dangers in the use of ready made models. The most likely danger is to select a model whose mechanisms operated well in a wholly different context than your own.

In the selection of models, care should be taken to ensure there is sufficient similarity in terms of contexts and capacities. The general expectation should be that the model is a simplification of reality that helps us to be more effective in our struggles. But, a model will not eliminate these struggles. You can use a typological or taxonomical approach to models. The next few paragraphs will discuss each approach.

A list of Men's Sheds 'types' is given in the Appendix to provide some idea of the wide variety of Sheds that exist in Australia at present. It should also give some idea of the difficulties when trying to establish a typology. Even though 'exemplars' are given, the 'types' are extremely idealised according to their 'ethos'. With few exceptions, most Sheds would not be one pure 'type'. However, each Shed is likely to have a somewhat dominant orientation.

Besides the difficulty in developing a useful classification system, there is another salient problem with using a typological approach. This can be understood more readily when it is realised that a typology is more like a snapshot rather than a video. It does not give us an adequate picture of the changing circumstances of the Shed through time. Instead, it gives some idea of what you might strive for in the *end*. So, in summary, a typology is a classification of representative cases according to common *traits*.

On the other hand, taxonomy refers to guidance (*nomos*: rule) for ordering (*taxo*: arrange) aspects of reality into coherent relationships. Some people use the terms typology and taxonomy interchangeably. That's fine to a point. However, taxonomy *can* be more like the instructions that you get for a 'self-assemble' book-case from Ikea.

First, the instructions ask you, the would-be-carpenter, to group the various elements separately at the beginning according to characteristic features. Then, they ask you to *check* to be sure that you have all of the screws, bolts, panels, nails, 'feet', Allen keys, screwdrivers, hammers and, so on, that you will need. Next, the instructions direct you to regroup the *different* elements into salient relationships in an ordered and step-wise fashion. In doing this, they give some indication of what to do to correctly assemble the bookcase.

Ostensibly, if you have carefully followed the guide, the book-case elements should have been arranged to look something like the picture in the catalogue. It should also function as you had hoped. A taxonomy approach combines the 'snapshot' and the 'instruction sheet' to help arrive at the final product. It is used in the various considerations of the specific suggestions that are discussed later.

The Implications

There are several implications for an emerging trend such as the Men's Sheds in Victoria. First of all, there is very little data to go by in terms of the actual Sheds. There has been scant research done to date with regards to the Sheds in general. This is hampered by very limited documenting and evaluation of particular Men's Sheds. The one exception found to date in the journals focuses on the importance of a man's shed as a personal coping resource for a creative retirement (Earle, Earle & Von Mering 1996). However, the research of Earle (1996) indicates that this personal resource could be easily expanded into a social and communal resource as well. Yet, there is a paucity of research evidence showing that this has been done extensively or effectively. This reflects the very limited funds allocated for men's health research in Australia beyond sexual health during the past ten years (Connell et al. 1998:47-53).

Secondly, much of what can be used as evidence is often circumstantial and, therefore, inferential. It is hoped that this document will provide a means for helping men, workers, agencies, funding bodies, reporters and researchers to constructively evaluate and note the activities of particular Sheds. Should this occur, then, a growing tradition of practice can ensure the framing of improved strategies in the future.

It should be noted that the Darebin Men's Shed has been documented and evaluated by use of the QIPPS online software system supported by the Victorian Department of Human Services (VDHS) and the Australian Institute of Primary Care (AIPC) at La Trobe University. In 2001, with the assistance of La Trobe University, the 'Men in Sheds' program that Community Health Bendigo initiated in 1999 was evaluated. The evaluation used a community health promotion tool (PRECEDE)

developed in the United States (Green & Kreuter 1991). A report was published and can be found on the web (CHB 2001).

Robyn Jones and Lyn-Marie Richards have documented research conducted by the Cobaw Community Health Service (Jones & Richards 2003). Unfortunately, it is not available electronically as yet. This is regrettable, as it can be quite expensive to print and distribute hard-copies to the larger community through time.

What is needed is some means of collecting and making these evaluations and the documentation of various Sheds available to the larger community so that the material is not lost. For instance, it would also be very beneficial to have access to the evaluations that have been done of the Manningham Men's Shed. Importantly, specific methodologies are being developed to evaluate programs, such as Men's Sheds, that are specifically implemented to engage the issues men face (Fildes 2005). A more general approach to evaluating rural partnerships for mental health might also provide some guidance for Men's Sheds (VicHealth n.d.)

2. Rationales for Men's Sheds in Victoria

Regarding Older Men in Society

During the last thirty years the roles and circumstances of men in Australia have changed dramatically (Ausmed 1994; CDHSS 1996; Moloney 2000; Hayes 2003). Research done over the last few years indicates that the force of these changes has been felt by both men over 50 and men under 30. For instance, during the *Older Men's Access to Health and Welfare Services* (Foreman, Thomas, Moran & Hayes 2001) research project, the present situation for older men became more apparent.

Professor Shane Thomas (2001) discovered older men's employment opportunities and pathways had changed substantively from the mid-1970s. Whereas 75% of men over fifty were working full-time in their chosen career path then, now less than 50% of men over fifty were working full-time, much less in their chosen career path (Thomas 2001). Perry and Freeland (2001) have reported similar findings. In effect, the casualised and part-time nature of working women in the 1970s may be becoming the norm for older men in the 21st century.

This may have significant impacts in terms of increased use of government services at the more expensive end of the scale (MACA 2004). Divorced and never married men are particularly more likely to lack sufficient high quality linkages with the community as they grow older (Davidson, Daly & Arber 2003).

Since work traditionally has been an important place for men to meet and exchange information, a significant means of providing for the needs of their families and communities, and a salient site for developing an identity, this circumstance has implications for their health and well-being (Thompson 1994a; Sheen 1999; Commonwealth 2000; COTA 2001).

Regarding Younger Men in Society

Professor Birrell and his associates (2004) have discovered that younger men live in a substantively changed world as well. During the last thirty years, older women have changed their preference in partners. No longer satisfied with men who provide economic support, but who are unavailable to provide emotional support, many women left 'unfulfilling' partnership arrangements. Younger men had been warned to take heed of the need to be available emotionally.

Yet, recent research indicates that younger women are placing a high priority on their potential partner's economically viability. Given changes to education and employment opportunities, this leaves many younger men at a loss in terms of being able to establish a family. It may be that up to a third of young men would be unable to meet the criteria of young women with regard to desirability.

This has significant implications as single men who have never married and are living alone under the age of thirty are at higher risk of negative health outcomes and even death. The loneliness experienced by men who never marry can become increasingly pronounced as men grow older (de Jong Gierveld 2003). Again, given the cultural difficulties for young men seeking to access health and welfare services, a lack of familial relationships as a safe context for discussing issues of concern means that other social contexts are required (Bond 2000; Hartley 2004).

Younger men are increasingly at risk in the education system (Hayes 2005). They can also find it difficult to occupy public spaces that should be generously

offered and generatively used (White, Murray and Robins 1996). As the 'Growing Up in Cities' Project of the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organization has discovered in Melbourne and twenty-odd other cities around the globe, this has serious consequences for both younger children and older people (Malone 1999). Yet, even very young children can participate in community development processes. They, thereby, benefit both themselves and others (Hart 1997; Driskell 2002). Additionally, innovative programs have been developed and should be explored by those seeking to develop Sheds for younger men (ChoiM 2004; 2005a; 2005b).

The Previous Research Findings

As indicated previously, contrary to the expectations of many, research indicates that men in safe, well-facilitated groups associated with their networks can and will talk about their concerns and act upon them (Hayes 2001). Additionally, men's health promotion has become a mainstream concern in Australia over the last decade and the impetus for this has often come from various sub-groups of men from the larger community such as Aboriginal, Gay, and Blue-Collar men (Hayes 2003).

There is a salient and salutary move away from seeing men as problems to be solved towards recognising that they are partners in solving the problems that they face (Hayes 2002). Additionally, previous research into men's involvement with adult learning situations in rural settings supports what has been suggested already:

Most men want learning provided in less formal, less structured, practical group settings, locally and on site through organisations they know and feel comfortable within. Men generally learn best by doing and through practice in familiar situations, through organisations and people they know and trust rather than via abstracted learning 'about' something in simulated situations...Men, particularly older men with typically negative previous experiences of school and formal learning, generally prefer to learn through being involved in an activity in real and familiar situations. (Golding 2005:2)

Staying connected has been recognised as important in general (Encel, Kaye & Zdenkowski 1996) and for men specifically (MacDonald, Brown & Buchanan 2001). Social isolation is associated with higher morbidity and mortality rates (Keller & Lemberg 2002; Loucks 2003; Sorokin 2003).

Men's Sheds can potentially provide men, who might otherwise become isolated from important work, family and community networks, a place to gather together for various purposes in a manner that supports their own flourishing and the flourishing of others (CHB 2001). These activities can range widely from education, respite care, masculine identity exploration, and meaningful support for dementia sufferers (Bettany n.d.; Tse & Howie 2005; Emslie et al. 2006; Golding 2006). Yet, there can be significant problems to be overcome in planning, funding, staffing, implementing and maintaining such Sheds (CHB 2001; Jones & Richards 2003).

Recent 'Conversations' in General

A fuller picture of what is happening among Men's Sheds in Victoria at present begins to emerge by examining the results of the first Delphi study distributed by the authors in September 2005. Of the fifty sheds that were contacted, twenty responded within a ten-day timeframe allocated before the draft version was prepared for the Victorian Men's Shed Conference held in Lakes Entrance (Victoria) in November 2005 (see Table 1).

During the ensuing months, there have been many opportunities for readers of the draft versions of this document to make comments. While a small, but significant, number returned the attached feedback form, most were content to respond verbally during and after the Men's Shed Conference. This seems to be in keeping with both the informality of most Sheds and the limited time and resources available to those running or attending the Sheds.

This document is also informed by the results of a focus group held by the authors on 11 October 2005 with key informants from Victoria and South Australia at the 6th National Men's Health Conference in Melbourne. Collaboration between this research project and that being conducted simultaneously at the University of Ballarat has also ensured a rich discussion of ideas, issues and information.¹ This process of iterative, or repeated, conversations between researchers, key informants and stakeholders is at the heart of the research methodology employed by the authors to reduce intrusiveness (Beebe 2001).

Over all, the sheds were deemed to be important as a place or space both for *gathering* men together (serving a utility function) and for men to *gather together* (serving a social function). In some cases, this was for the specific purpose of improving health outcomes. However, there were a number of other related responses including:

- *a place to reconnect with community*
- *safe and non-judgemental space*
- *support for disadvantaged men*
- *a place to do 'bloke' things*
- *a 'man friendly environment'*
- *social support and mateship*
- *an 'excuse' to get together*
- *a warm, friendly environment*

The comments above reflect the growing awareness, mentioned earlier, that many men are left without a place or space to safely meet with other men in Victoria today. This is particularly true for older men who are no longer employed full-time.

Given that careful research among older men indicates that participation in social networks is more often for supportive feedback and emotional support (as experienced and expressed by men) than for instrumental support, it is important to realise that social contact is important as a good in its own right (Thompson & Wheatly 2004).

A fuller summary of the results is provided in Table 1 below.

Age of participants

While it is impossible to generalise absolutely from this sample to all sheds due to self-selection among respondents, it is significant that the men involved in the sheds are generally reported to be older (+50). Additionally, most sheds seem to deliberately cater to older males explicitly. Out of the 20 sheds canvassed, less than 25% are presently working with students and men between the ages of 18-50.

Activities of Sheds

Three quarters of the sheds canvassed do wood work specifically. Repair work, metal work, gardening and other 'hands on' and recreational type projects were mentioned.

¹ On the other hand, the conducting of two projects on Men's Sheds at the same time has undoubtedly led to a certain amount of 'research fatigue' on the part of respondents.

One quarter of the sheds also have activities relating to cooking and computers. While the men will obviously have many opportunities for socialising through such activities, other men attend sheds specifically to socialise and talk. Importantly, some sheds have a focus on mentoring.

Rationale for activities

There were a number of reasons given for the various activities. The activities helped to provide purpose and meaning. They promoted self-esteem and worth. Opportunities for skill sharing, community involvement and networking in a safe and non-judgemental social milieu were afforded by the activities. All of these reasons can be subsumed under the rationale of providing social connectedness to decrease social isolation and the depression that can result through isolation. Significantly, as will be seen later as well, the men chose what to do typically.

How are men enabled?

While this question was probably not clear to most respondents because of its two-part nature, there are some important indications of how men are enabled to participate in the shed. One means, resources, will be discussed in the next section. However, two other means are important to note here. The first is through the gaining of skills learned through participation in the sheds. The second is through the paid and unpaid facilitators.

What resources are used?

Because of the high number of sheds doing woodwork, it is not surprising to find that woodworking tools were a resource welcomed by sheds when donated by other groups or people in the community. Volunteers were seen as an important and common resource. However, funding was deemed the critical resource that was both used and needed. Sheds have obtained funding from a variety of sources and sectors in the community such as the local council, businesses, donations and opportunity shops.

Who makes the decisions?

The tendency is for men to make the decisions concerning the shed with the occasional assistance from facilitators. This can happen directly or through a selected group of representative participants. However, there were a large number of the sheds canvassed that mentioned Management as the decision makers.

How are problems solved?

Again, most of the respondents indicated that the men participating in the shed would set and solve problems that arise. This is typically done by the group alone. However, it can be done with a facilitator. In a number of sheds, the men may seek to work things out, but the final say if there are differences of opinion rests with the facilitator. In other cases, sheds have specific procedures and policies to follow when the group is unable to resolve the issues on their own.

Links to community

As indicated above, one of the links that some sheds have to the wider community relates to obtaining resources for the sheds. However, many sheds provide resources to the community in terms of undertaking community programs or projects. This might include: completing woodworking tasks for fundraising, assisting the elderly, repairing and maintaining furniture.

What partnerships are made?

Many sheds work in partnership with other programs. As would be obvious from the above, some partnerships are created with the view of addressing funding issues. In fact, this may be the most important reason for the partnerships. However, partnerships allow increased opportunities for men to be involved in more programs. It also allows them to engage in mutual learning between the various groups in the community. Local businesses, local councils and other government agencies are often partners of the Men's Sheds.

Table 1

Recent 'Conversations' Regarding Older Men

A very specific concern of the background research was focused on determining the value of Men's Sheds for older men, the agencies that hosted the Sheds, and the larger community. The research also tried to determine if there were any downsides for the older men.

The following paragraphs draw upon the Delphi study, written feedback comments about the draft version of this document, presentations given at the Victorian Men's Shed Conference (November 2005), and verbal discussions held both during and following the conference. They parallel the thoughts of 30 men who participated in a workshop facilitated by Gary Green and Barry Golding on behalf of the authors on 12 October 2005 at the 6th National Men's Health Conference in Melbourne.

A. The Benefits for Older Men in the Sheds

The benefit of Men's Sheds programs for older men is deemed by facilitators to be the decreasing of social isolation and the enhancing of self-esteem. Both of these factors are important to men in terms of their physical, emotional and social well-being.

Key informants recognise that men who participate in Shed programs have increased access to specific information about health; they are socially facilitated to operate on this information and gain important feedback from others about observed behaviours and conditions. Research by the Council of the Aging (COTA) has indicated the importance for older people of having access to information sources that can meet their changing needs (Scott 1999).

Sheds linked with community health services are deemed to be particularly useful to the men as they can act as a mediating structure between the everyday world of the men and the more specialised world of the health care system. The respondents at the conference workshop commented on the importance of the grass-roots nature of the Sheds that are locally managed.

Other participants recognised the importance of diversity and their importance in terms of rebuilding relationships in society and the community (Aboriginal), maintaining cultural bonds (African) and integration within a community (men with disabilities). These issues are easily overlooked by stereotyping older people, particularly men (COTA 2001; Saint-Aubin 2004).

An often overlooked aspect of Sheds relates to the religious or spiritual domain and its importance. This aspect was deemed to be one of the influencing factors by the World Health Organization's document on healthy ageing among men (2001). While Australians may be deemed less overtly religious than other post-industrial nations, care must be taken not to void this dimension. Pastoral care is one of the salient support resources at the Orpost Men's Shed. Overtly religious themes are also found in the Manningham Men's Shed fifteen minute DVD (Dobrejcer & Ristov 2005).

B. The Benefits of Having Sheds Associated with an Organisation

From the survey data alone, it is difficult to infer that organisations and the community also benefit from the sheds. However, several comments can and should be made based on the information from the survey respondents, key informants and

the documents provided by some of the sheds and important discussions and presentations at the Conference. First of all, some of the men in the Men's Shed programs are care-givers. The needs and possibilities of these men can often be misunderstood (Calasanti 2003).

The Shed represents the possibility of a time of respite for these and other care-givers by allowing them to recuperate from the exigencies of providing support to others. In these cases, it is likely that those being cared for are able to remain in the community longer because of this indirect support. Secondly, many of the men are cared for by others in the community. The Shed programs effectively provide respite to their carers either intentionally or unintentionally (Tse & Howie 2005).

Given the group nature of such programs there is a possibility that economies of scale reduce the cost of such respite and enhance the outcomes by ensuring a wider range of interactions within the program. It should be noted as well that those men who also participate in psycho-social disability support services also benefit from changes of location and a larger set of interaction partners.

Conversely, psycho-social disability support workers can gain some space to attend to the needs of women in the service. This can be a great benefit as such services have typically been concerned about the larger numbers of men accessing their services. It should also be pointed out that many workers have commented about how working with men in the Sheds has changed their attitudes towards men, especially older men. The inspirational power of story-telling that is overheard by others was powerfully demonstrated at the Conference itself. There are implications for those training for work in the field as well.

First year health science students at the Bundoora campus of La Trobe University have often been given their first introduction to the field by visiting the Men's Shed in Darebin. This typically piques their interest in the field and may play a vital part of encouraging a new generation of practitioners to remain at their studies. Over the years, the Orbst Men's Shed has hosted a number of the third year health science students while they have been on a rural intensive placement program in East Gippsland. Upon returning to Melbourne, these students have been willing to continue contributing to rural health initiatives because of their links to the region's health organisations and the larger community consolidated through their contacts with the men.

The National Men's Health Conference (Melbourne) workshop participants suggested that Sheds can be a new source of funding and provide opportunities to open new directions. The organisations can benefit from the drawing power of the Sheds and develop ways for men to access other services and to volunteer to help others. This might be particularly true in terms of reaching the more isolated groups such as older men.

There is some indication from the literature that older men may be less well connected to the community than older women. Men provide a source of information at the grass-roots level for health promotion planning, intervention and evaluation. They can also help reduce the costs to some organisation through maintenance of gardens, grounds and fixtures.

C. The Benefit of Having Sheds in the Community

The initial survey data and the National Men's Health Conference workshop results also indicates that benefits to the larger community may be obtained by greater social interaction of older men in the life of the community. A workshop participant spoke of this in terms of community resilience because the Shed can provide a 'space for integration'. Another spoke of a Shed as a 'point of reference in the community'. Others spoke of the creative energies that can be released in the development of Shed models and of 'revitalising existing community spaces' such as RSL Clubs. These have become recurring themes in most conversations.

This is true, first of all, in terms of instrumental support (e.g., the repair or sale of items, or the dissemination of information gained in the shed program to a wider network of association of friends and family). Secondly, there is the opportunity for increased supportive feedback and affective support (e.g., affirmations of competency and worth, or emotional support received during a struggle with health issues). And, finally, there is the enhancement of inspirational support (e.g., younger people who might benefit from relationships with older people who have survived a number of social and cultural changes).

Each of these has been witnessed by the present researchers, key informants and respondents and has been highlighted in earlier research (Earle 1996). Therefore, Men's Sheds can be viewed as an important starting point in the community that causes a 'domino effect' in terms of enhancing opportunities for increasing social capital (COTA 2001). Better capturing this reality will help to convince funding bodies of the importance of Sheds.

D. Potential Downsides to Men's Sheds

However, the National Conference workshop participants did indicate that there could be some downsides. While Sheds might be an example of community, they could result in 'Shed Envy'! Additionally, there is always the danger of having the 'personal and political agendas' of others imposed upon the men. There is the very real possibility that diversity will not be adequately accounted for by organisers.

Of course, there may be too much attention in trying to make it 'inclusive' in a manner that may not be culturally appropriate. In fact, a very real question can be raised about where members of CALD communities might fit into 'Aussie' models for Men's Sheds. Similar issues relating to the overlooking of 'minority ageing' have been raised in Brittan (Blakemore & Boneham 1994).

Failure to facilitate processes well can lead to the development of harmful cliques and too great an emphasis on 'management principles' and other expectations can change the basically 'man friendly' space provided by peer support. In such a case there may be a loss of the ability for men to share their stories in appropriate ways. There may be a stereotyping of men that is unhelpful in terms of supporting some men.

Additionally, there can be stereotyping of the Sheds themselves. On the part of the men, they might contend that there is only one way to run a Shed. The workers and hosting organisations may be set of another type or model. And, funding bodies may have their own reasons for preferring another type. These dangers were discussed

at the Victorian Men's Shed Conference and have been raised in subsequent conversations.

These are important issues. If not well established and managed, the Shed might tie up important resources that could actually be better used unless there is sufficient leverage of volunteers and other community resources. Finally, it is possible that running a Men's Shed might justify an organisation or a community thinking that no further resources for supporting men need be deployed.

3. A Brief Background to Men's Sheds in Victoria²

As late as 1996, the general perception of a man's shed in Australia was that it was a private and somewhat isolated hideout where a man could retreat in order to cope with the vicissitudes of life (Earle, Earle, Von Mering 1996). This was unfortunate as Victorians had a much more generative model in Joseph Furphy's use of his shed. Additionally, the very important role that strong group bonding had in terms of survival on the Burma-Thailand Railway during the Second World War was increasingly well known.

Yet, the perceptions about men were already changing (Hayes 2003). In fact, important public discussions relating to the development of safe spaces for men to gather within have their roots in the first National Men's Health Conference that was held in Melbourne in 1995 (CDHSS 1996) and its more local predecessor (Aunmed 1994). In 1997, The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation commissioned the North East Health Promotion Centre to develop a strategic framework for men's health promotion in various settings such as: work, education, recreation, and community.

The Centre was comprised of 12 partnership agencies drawn from the local government areas of Whittlesea, Nillumbik, Banyule and Darebin. The first two were rural-urban fringe areas. The third was similar to the rest of the Metropolitan region, but had a large area of relative disadvantage. The last had a wide variety of very disparate populations. The Centre was co-located at the Darebin Community Health Service in East Preston.

A participatory action research process was followed with men and workers in the region and a framework that emphasised working with men in groups was first developed in early 1999. Then, it was disseminated widely around Victoria (and discussed critically) during the 3rd National Men's Health Conference in Alice Springs in the spring of 1999. A second version of the Framework was developed that further emphasised intersectoral collaboration (Hayes 2001). While acknowledging critical issues, the framework was less focused on problems.

Instead, following Antonovsky (1987), it was oriented towards possibilities among men and workers, agencies, communities and funding bodies. Additionally, it made important distinctions between the health states of men in general and the life-worlds of men who were from working class and non-English Speaking backgrounds, who were under and unemployed, and who were experiencing issues relating to mental health. It also consciously regarded men's health as important for women and children.

² This background does not seek to be comprehensive or complete. Rather, it is an attempt to outline the development of Men's Sheds in Victoria.

During this time, several attempts were made at launching and maintaining a 'Men's Health and Wellbeing Association' in Victoria and modest success had been achieved in this regard by 1999. One important output during this period was a regular newsletter connecting various workers. This was edited and published by Patrick Cox at Community Health Bendigo in Eaglehawk, Victoria. Cox (1999) was able to compile a twelve page *Men's Contacts and Services Directory* from the Association's database.

The directory listed services for men, various men's groups around the State, community health services oriented towards men, Divisions of General Practice offering services for men and individuals providing mentoring, guidance and counselling. Shortly thereafter, the Association ceased to function as a networking point. Yet, the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS) provided approximately \$100,000 to fund nine men's health promotion projects during 1999. Unfortunately, the report on these projects has never been released to the public.

A number of successful and important men's health nights and forums were held in Victoria by various agencies and primary care partnerships during the period 2000-2004. The *Working With Men Network* was formed in Melbourne during this time. Additionally, more agencies requested workforce development support for staff and community development sessions with men interested in developing groups for men.

Work done with younger men led to important tools to enable agencies to be more male friendly (Bond 2000). The work with older men led to the development of models for working with men (Foreman, Thomas, Moran & Hayes 2001). This included a multifunctional Men's Shed and a 'male' friendly approach to screening (Pit Stop).

There were both urban (Darebin) and rural (Mitchell) components to the latter research. There were a number of practical applications that followed the research phase including: the development of a Shed at the Darebin site, a suicide screening tool for General Practitioners and further development of QIPPS. While the Darebin Shed benefited greatly from its predecessors, it went beyond earlier models such as the purpose built shed developed at Manningham Community Health Service for older and younger men with disabilities in 2000.

Building on the work of John Heritage and the vision of Neil Wakeman (CEO), Rick Blackburn has extended Manningham's earlier model into an innovative, full-time operation that has been evaluated and supports a wide variety of men with disabilities. Both the Darebin and Manningham Sheds used Home and Community Care (HACC) funds to begin and continue.

Things were happening outside of the Melbourne Metropolitan area as well. In 1999, with funding from DHS that had been allocated for men's health promotion, Stuart Willder began work with farmers in the Western District. This work provided an alternate way for community health centres to work with men, particularly farmers. Of all the projects funded that year, it is the only one to have continued. This is in large part due to the ingenuity of the men, workers and management engaged in issues relating to rural men's health. Community Health Bendigo established the 'Men in Sheds' program in the same year.

The Nowa Nowa Men's Choir began in 2000 in East Gippsland. In Creswick and Castlemaine Sheds were started in 2001 through the auspices of a health service

and a community house respectively. Orbst Region Health auspiced a Men's Shed in 2001 which quickly outgrew its original shed. According to Gary Green, the men of the Shed and the workers were able to save and extend the work of a disability support service that owned the land upon which the Sheds were built.

Community Health Bendigo released their *Shedding Light on 'Men in Sheds'* report in 2001. It has been posted for some time on the Office of Senior Victorians web-site (CHB 2001). This model was widely referred to when Men's Sheds were discussed around Australia.

In Kyneton, Robyn Jones and Lyn-Marie Richards conducted important research in order to garner evidence for the importance of Men's Sheds in rural areas and, in the process, highlighted the issues related to securing recurring funding (Jones & Richards 2003). In 2004, significant monies were allocated for more remote areas such as Mallacoota.

More recently in Melbourne, David Clunn of COTA (Victoria) has introduced the New South Wales OM : *MI* (Older Men: New Ideas) paradigm for men's groups into Victoria with the support of Rotary (Clunn 2005). At the same time a number of sheds have begun in the southern Metropolitan regions of Melbourne such as Frankston.

Increasingly, government ministers and advisors have become more involved in discussing and supporting Men's Sheds. For instance, the Honourable Gavin Jennings has been involved in a number of discussions, as has Mr Jude Perera, Member of Parliament for Cranbourne, with a Shed being established in the latter's electorate.

Finally, the Department of Victorian Communities has provided significant funding for three years to a consortium of agencies which developed a complex proposal for a Men's Shed in Brimbank (Sunshine Uniting Church Mission). The Honourable John Thwaites was the key-note speaker at the launch of the Shed.

This last example concludes this brief historical sketch. It has not sought to be comprehensive. However, it should give an idea of the development of Men's Sheds in Victoria. Further documentation would be extremely useful for building a body of evidence of what works and why.

B. Victorian Men's Sheds

1. General Comments

The following information engages a number of aspects of starting and maintaining a 'Men's Shed' project or program (origins, operations, activities, funding and resources, and linkages). It provide guidance at the project, program and policy levels. Each aspect will be treated in separate sections and the focus will shift within each section between potential concerns among the men, workers, managers, CEOs, funding and guidance bodies, and researcher/reporters.

As mentioned in the introduction, many aspects of these findings are informed by inferences drawn from research into related practices undertaken with men and women in other contexts. Two further comments should be made at this point to help orient the reader. They have to do with issues of diversity and the devising of the considerations.

Comments about diversity among men

It is important to recognise the significance of diversity when considering the information. Men are not all the same (Emslie, Hunt & O'Brien 2004). Or, in other words, 'one size does not fit all'. And, in a time when ageism is significant, it is important to especially emphasise this with regards to older men and their health (Job 1994; Thompson 1994; HEROC 1999; Clark & McCann 2004; Thompson 2004).

Much thinking around older people still tends to overlook the personal passion for the good of life that they can bring to their own networks and the larger community (Ranzijn & Grbich 2001). The lives of older people are often still richly textured. Older men live in various spatial, social and cultural contexts (Jackson 2001). They can each be located at different places on their own particular life-course through time.

At the same time, they belong to various cohorts and cliques that have their own traditions and expectations relating to work, family, recreation and community connectedness (Illich 1983). They are influenced by both personal and societal reflections concerning class, gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation (Saint-Aubin 2004). They may have various religious affiliations or spiritual affinities.

They live with the resources and deficits arising from diverse biological and psychosocial inheritances. Men vary in their access to societal resources based on personal choices throughout their lives and, also, because of differing structural barriers and enablers. Aboriginally raises its own possibilities, promises and liabilities (Reid & Trompf 1991; Crowe 1998; Anderson 2004).

Comments about devising the 'considerations'

A comment on the devising of the 'considerations' is in order. The initial research tool was based upon an accepted model for working with groups in health promotion settings. It also accords with important insights about the significance of older people's participation in organised group activities embedded 'in networks of friends and associates' (Jerrome 1992:1).

Following the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (1986), the model is concerned about issues relating to the creation of a supportive environment for people

to develop personal skills and to strengthen community action (Hayes 2002). It attends to the three critical principles of enabling, mediating and advocating.

Enabling is understood in this model as a *literacy* function that requires the discovery of the aspirations of the members of a group and the obtaining of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and resources that people need to attain their aspirations. *Leadership* is the concept used to discuss issues relating to mediation within the group.

It emphasises a need to balance between the purposes of the group and the people in the group. Concerns relating to the dynamics of the group which either hold the members together or tear them apart and the processes of the group which enable a group to achieve its purpose are engaged in terms of: problem-setting and solving, decision-making, negotiation and conflict resolution.

Finally, the model envisions that advocacy involves creating *linkages* between groups with common concerns to work in common cause to achieve their aims. In doing so, they will need to be critically aware of power issues as they relate to class, gender and ethnicity.

The considerations to be discussed in this document resulted from reflection on the initial responses from about forty percent of the known Victorian Men's Sheds to questions relating to the model outlined above. Additionally, a limited number of publicly available reports of and on Men's Sheds were consulted. Finally, there were a number of conversations with key informants and people who have been involved with men's groups and Men's Sheds.

2. Considerations for a 'Men's Shed' Project or Program

A. Origins in a 'Men's Shed' project or program

The beginnings of a 'Men's Shed' project or program will have a significant influence on whether or not the effort will end in success. Standards and expectations will be set at the beginning that might be difficult to change as time goes on.

Enthusiasms can build quickly and last for a long time. Then, they can abruptly end due to burn-out. In most cases, taking the time to begin well will be more likely to ensure that an endeavour will last.

So, how to begin? There are two ways typically. On the one hand, a worker or manager of an agency recognises that a Men's Shed might meet a newly recognised need or an issue of long standing that has resisted previous attempts. They are somewhat aware of the issues.

They might also have some general idea of what might be involved in working with men in this way. Perhaps they have been to a forum relating to men's health and heard an inspiring talk or were involved in a very dynamic workshop. What to do now?

Or, it might be that some men have been to a men's health night. They've heard some of the concerns that professionals have about them. This time the experts were less cocksure and were more personally engaging. Perhaps the men had an opportunity to have their questions answered. Indeed, perhaps they surprised the presenters with their knowledge and shrewdness.

They begin to talk to their mates. Everyone discovers that they each would like to be doing more about living better than they are doing now. They get excited reading an article in the paper about working together as men and say, ‘Hell, we could do that!’

There is a third way. Sometimes a funding body or a significant person with political influence knows that there are unmet needs or unrealised possibilities in a community or region. They would like to have someone do research and get something organised in terms of engaging the area of concern. They may have come to an awareness of the gaps through analysis of population data.

For instance, they may have been using the Victorian Burden of Disease study for something else and made an important discovery about men in the region. Such people will often approach someone who has been successful in the past with innovative programs, or someone who has a critical stake in the possible outcomes.

Each of the above is an example of how Sheds have begun. Which is the best? This question is not easy to answer. What can be said is that no Men’s Shed has ever been established just because of what has been said so far.

Those that have been the result of strategic planning required the enthusiasm and ‘spontaneous’ good will of a wide variety of people. Someone had to be actually willing to do the work. Those that started with plenty of expertise still needed to be justified to people who would have ensured that the project could be integrated with other resource claims. Otherwise, the growth would be very short term indeed.

The first consideration emphasises the importance of starting where you are at and finding the right conversation partners as soon as possible. If you are workers, you will have to begin to make connections with key informants and gatekeepers in the community of men with which you believe you should work. You will also need to think about where you want to be in six, eighteen and thirty-six months.

What are the program level implications of what you might be doing? Who will this need to be discussed with and when? What would convince them?

Having identified the varieties of conversation partners that are required, it’s time to have the conversations. They will need to be open and tentative. Unless there has been something in the air, people will have to warm up to the ideas for a while before they change their own inclinations.

As anyone who has sold shoes will tell you, the first no is the first step to a sale if you are polite, prudent and persistent. Also, an early yes may be an ill-conceived assent. Take information and examples to your partners and take note of what is of interest to them, or not. Listen carefully, speak confidently.

Having started the conversation with each of your partners separately, there will come a time when it is necessary to get them altogether. This is when the Rapid Assessment (or, Appraisal) Process (RAP) really gets going in earnest (Beebe 2001). To work well, it will be necessary for several multi-group conversation sessions to take place. They should be held on the various patches of the potential stakeholders so that people can see things from a variety of perspectives.

The RAP approach assumes that important things happen for people in terms of understanding and motivation through the process of socially facilitated conversation. It is possible to gain a great deal of comprehension about, and a

measure of control over, key processes. This will happen by coming to the conversation with as much preparation and patience as possible.

Again, these sessions should be documented. One reason is so that there is a long-term record of the process for evaluation purposes. It will also help each party check on the expectations, intuitions and intentions of the others.

The various justification needs of the men, workers, managers, CEOs, funding bodies and researchers can be discerned. Answers and undertakings can be given and taken together. As potential ways forward are determined and evaluated, a growing consensus and a sense of trust will develop.

This will arise out of the good of cooperating with people of good-will who intend a good purpose. Increasingly, people want to ensure that their contribution is undertaken at the highest standard possible. This will help motivation.

Charles Handy has reminded us of the common wisdom that there are three types of group motivation (Handy 1985). The first is a common enemy. In this case, this is whatever would be lacking if there were no Men's Shed in this place among these people. Then, people move to seeking a common good as they realise what might be the specific answer in this particular context. Finally, we keep going through the tough times because we become committed to a commonly recognised standard of excellence.

In summary:

- Begin where you are and gain as much information as you can as soon as possible.
- Don't settle on an answer before you've raised all the relevant questions.
- You won't know whether you have raised all the relevant information until you have sufficient familiarity and mastery of all the critical information and issues.
- The quickest and best way to gain understanding, meaning and control is to cooperate conversationally with all the likely stakeholders (Rapid Assessment Process).
- Begin by having conversations with one group of people at a time to get to know their 'line and length' and to build sufficient levels and patterns of trust.
- Then, move to conversations between the various groups all at the same time.
- Be ready before each conversation and be prepared to do more research after each meeting—use the resources referred to in this guide and find new resources—be sure to tell others—insist that this guide is updated regularly.
- Keep shifting your thinking between the short, middle and long terms, and back again.
- Write down what is important before, during, and after each session—file it so you can find it—hold a staff or community briefing—write it up into professional practice reports—get articles published earlier rather than later so others know what is going on.
- Keep everyone informed and be generous with what you know and what you can do for your conversation partners—your own ideas get stronger and better when they are exercised by the insights and reasonableness of others.

B. Operations in a 'Men's Shed' project or program

It is probably worth saying two things at the beginning of this consideration. They are related. The first is that the considerations for beginning a Shed should continue during the life of the Shed. There should be a commitment to a constant iteration of the conversations. In a very real sense, the Rapid Assessment Process (RAP) should never end.

The second is that the things to be discussed in this section have already begun when we begin to think, talk and act in the very ways the might bring a Shed about.

This section deals with operational considerations. To what degree are the operations carried out by paid staff or volunteers? How often during the week and how long during the day is the Shed to be open? Should it be a part-time or a full-time operation?

Is there a general purpose to the shed (i.e. is it more recreational or communally oriented?) or is it more specific (i.e. is it educationally, clinically or work oriented?).

Who is eligible for participating in the Shed and is there some means by which they will be assessed?

Finally, is it open to the larger community or is it closed, except for specified groups of people? Are there good justifications for this (e.g. an Indigenous male program relating to manhood issues might appropriately disallow all women and all non-Indigenous men).

As has been suggested, these questions are being worked out more or less explicitly from the very beginning. Is the process being driven by paid workers? This might be appropriate because the men who are to benefit from the Shed are more frail or lacking in skills.

However, if the men are capable of learning and doing for themselves, this might be important to encourage up front. The paid staff would then be more likely to provide continuity rather than energy. In other words, the operations of the Shed should reflect the aspirations for the Shed that are clarified in the processes of the previous consideration.

With regard to the period of operation, this will depend on the balance that is created between the paid and volunteer staff of the Shed and their availability. Already, issues of funding and resources are intruding from a later consideration. Managerial consideration will have to be sought in both making the decisions in this regard and practically coordinating the staff between the various projects or programs.

Additionally, managers will need to outline recruitment and indoctrination processes. Employee and volunteer procedures will need to be created or modified. Increasingly, insurance requirements shape which qualifications and credentials people and organisations must possess.

Have you gained some idea of the ethos you wish to engender? In doing so, did you consider who is able to provide the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will be required? Do you have access to the resources required?

What processes will have to be engaged to negotiate with various parties to obtain resources and maintain them throughout the term of the Shed? Who will be responsible for this? Is it the men and the workers? Or, is this to be the responsibility of managers, senior managers, the board, or the chief executive officer?

Is all of this to be done on a handshake? Or, will there be plans, processes and procedures drafted, implemented and documented? Should the policies of the organisation reflect these?

There appear to be more questions in this section than the earlier one. This is because, with more familiarity and mastery of the subject, we begin to recognise the sorts of relevant questions that have to be asked in terms of operations.

A few more issues ought to be raised before moving to the activities of the shed. It should be pointed out that these issues and many of the earlier questions are already beginning to anticipate that section.

Determining who can and should participate in the Shed program is another element that will significantly influence the operations of the Shed. Decisions will need to be made about the means of assessing participants. Additionally, if various types of people and groups will participate in the Shed, schedules will need to be developed and negotiations engaged in to settle issues relating to times and materials.

Some anticipation of likely conflicts and how they will be settled would be beneficial before things get underway. Different groups of people using the Shed are likely to have different expectations about these issues based on age and experience.

When the operations of the Shed are to be less open to the larger community's access or scrutiny, accountability processes will need to be created. Managers and boards will be required to ensure that all appropriate legislation and regulations in this regard are being taken into account. Additionally, reasonable arguments for restrictions should be vetted as widely and as soon as possible.

It is possible for agencies to restrict programs on the basis of gender, age, ethnicity, functionality and, so forth. However, consultation with the relevant bodies should be conducted to avoid the actuality or appearance of unjust discrimination. Being open with the other staff members as well as the people who use the agency will also help to diminish a sense of pique that can arise with restricted programs.

Further, it is important to communicate well with the larger community. Since reporters are always looking for something to write about, give them as much positive material as possible. Answer critical questions honestly, politely and reasonably. For instance, some people see Men's Sheds in terms of disengagement by men and loss of funding for women and children's health. However, there are number of good reasons for communicating the salience of men's health in terms of promoting the health and well-being of children.

In summary:

- Operational issues and questions begin to arise right from the beginning.
- RAP iterations should continue throughout the life of the project or program.
- The degree of 'professionalisation' (the balance point between volunteer and paid staff) of the program will have a significant influence on the operations of the Shed.
- Managers have an important role to play in raising and answering operational questions, but senior managers, boards and chief executive officers have roles to play as well. Actually, so do funding bodies who are looking for sustainability.
- Issues concerning the recruitment, indoctrination, support and retention of staff are some of the managerial concerns to be engaged.
- The type of ethos (see Appendix A) will influence which staff will be engaged, what will be the days and hours of operation, and which OHS requirements need to be met.
- Issues of whether or not, and how to use assessments of participants need to be settled and dealt with to the satisfaction of all stakeholders.
- Negotiation and conflict resolution processes should be established and a means of keeping other staff, service user and the larger community on side should be established early on and followed assiduously.

C. Activities in a 'Men's Shed' project or program

It is important to have done the work appropriate to the previous two considerations before starting in on this section in earnest. It may seem more attractive to get stuck into thinking about the activities that men might like. But, this is putting the cart before the horse. The first consideration focuses on the widest contextual issues to be assessed and engaged.

The second consideration narrows the focus somewhat by considering the ethos of the Shed. It also begins to ask about the function of the Shed. Is it basically getting the men together for explicit purposes beyond the merely social? Or, is it primarily a means for men to be together?

Now, someone could argue that it can be both. That is true. But, it is also true that people are likely to have differing views on the matter. What are liable to influence these views are the social roles and positions that people occupy and the type of power they use in such roles and positions.

Typically, the higher someone is in a bureaucratic hierarchy, the more likely that they will see projects from a utilitarian perspective. If it is balanced by other viewpoints, this is not necessarily bad.

However, without some way of 'managing-up' from the project to the program and, then, the policy levels, it is likely that upper echelons will exercise disproportionate power in determining how and what is to take place. There are important alternative participatory approaches (Garcia-Zamor 1985).

Resistance at lower levels in a bureaucracy can begin to heavily influence practice at the project level. It is at this level that people cooperate according to their own discretion. It is also here that the pursuit of good, goods and excellence can be forfeited in a frantic effort to merely survive.

One of the first casualties is a relaxed sociability. This is easily communicated to the more vulnerable or marginalised in a community. Those who have a practice informed by a discipline may tend to repeat the actions, thoughts and affects that have been made routine by that discipline. The more general practices of life can be forgotten or overlooked.

This can spell disaster in terms of pursuing empowering processes with men. It can skew the balance between an orientation that allows for the more general activities facilitating sociability and the more focused activities that allow agencies to fulfil more utilitarian intentions.

Who will have a role in determining the activities of the Shed? How will this be realised in actual practice? Who will facilitate the group dynamics that either work towards creating group cohesion or that tears people apart? Who will facilitate the group processes that enable the group to achievement its various tasks and purposes?

In other words, who will set and solve the problems that arise, as well as envision the possibilities? Who will make the decisions? How will both of the functions be done? When will these decisions be made?

Related questions concerning negotiating expectations and resolving conflicts were raised in the previous consideration. They continue in earnest here.

These are all leadership issues. It would be helpful to think of leadership as residing in the larger group and not just in any one person in the Shed or even in the

agencies that might auspice the Shed. Leadership is something in which we must all engage.

We do this when we authentically seek a good to practice with others in order to create goods in an excellent fashion. Chanting this mantra now is not accidental. It has been repeated throughout the document to prepare the reader for its use at just this point.

The circle of leadership must extend beyond the Shed and the agency. It also includes the larger community, the funding bodies, researchers and reporters. Each is responsible for ensuring that we identify and cherish valued ends and acceptable means. These must be condensed and consolidated into policies about the creation, distribution and use of the resources that will be discussed further in the next section.

In this section it is salient to emphasise the need for ensuring that any Shed project or program is supported by the plans, procedures and processes of the institutions that have responsibility for the Shed. A practical example might help here.

The processes in a community health centre and, indeed, the very ethos of the agency might favour people whose gendering emphasised the importance of ‘face-to-face’ activities (this includes both women and men who are health or counselling professionals). Many cohorts of men across various ethnic groups have been gendered to participate in ‘side-by-side’ activities in which they are able to gain both instrumental *and* emotional support.

It is strongly suggested that a ‘Men’s Shed’ project or program honours this reality, unless it proves to be untrue for a particular group of men. Therefore, the participants of the Shed should have a powerful voice in the selection of activities with all due consideration being given to the desired ethos.

As the Donovan Report (1998) has argued, agencies should be enthusiastic about working with men on their terms and ‘turf’. They should respect the importance of making room for experiences that create common ground. Finally, they should confidently offer the expertise they have, when and as, the men request it.

In summary:

- It is important to resist the temptation to skip the previous two considerations and to start thinking about the Shed in terms of its activities first.
- However, it is critical to clearly think through the function of the Shed. Is it a means to gather men primarily for the purposes of the funding bodies, the researchers or the agencies? Or, is it primarily for the purpose of allowing the men to get together in ways that are appropriate to the gendering of various cohorts of men?
- Of course, it is important to strike some reasonable balance between these two very important functions.
- Yet, the very real issues of power, as it is expressed through various social roles and positions, should be kept in mind.
- By their nature, bureaucratic hierarchies can quickly sacrifice sociability for utility.
- One way to defend against these potential negative effects is to encourage an authentic approach to practicing any and every good that leads to goods of benefit to a wide variety of people in a manner that promotes excellence. *This is best practice!*
- Leadership is important in all of this and it resides within and between all of us.
- Leadership consists of balancing between the needs of the people who use the Shed and the purposes of the Shed, and it involves: setting and solving problems, identifying possibilities, making decisions, negotiating differences that make a difference, and seeking to resolve the conflicts that arise when these differences offend.
- Agencies that auspice Men’s Sheds should seek to institutionalise ‘male-friendly’ activities and attitudes within an appropriate ethos through the development of adequate plans, processes, procedures, protocols and policies.

- It is everyone's responsibility to ensure that this happens equitably.

D. Funding and resources in a 'Men's Shed' project or program

Not all Sheds are externally funded. Some Sheds have become self-sustaining. They build things for sale, or they do maintenance work. However, these Sheds are few and far between in Victoria.

For most sheds, funding and resource issues will be a constant concern and will regularly threaten the Shed with closure. It is unlikely that recurring funding for Men's Sheds will become the norm in the near future at the State government level. Therefore, everyone interested in starting or maintaining a Shed needs to consider carefully how they will proceed.

A clarification needs to be made. Many Sheds operate on a shoe-string budget. They can do so because of the social capital that they have developed in the community and in any hosting organisation.

They typically receive low levels of occasional funding and resources are gathered from here and there. A space is often provided because no one else is using it, yet. There is nothing wrong in this approach. However, as resources become scarcer, Sheds may find it more difficult to operate in this manner.

There are five very important things to say about funds and resources. First, unless you know some powerful people who are well disposed towards your work, you will need to work long and hard to get and keep resources. Secondly, you have to work systematically. Thirdly, you should work towards the long-term. Fourthly, you will need to work cooperatively with others. Fifthly, efficiencies should be developed after you have discovered what is effective in your work and not before.

Even if you know someone powerful, they may not always be able help you. They will have other concerns as well. More importantly, they might not always be available. Besides, someone else might make a very good case that this person ought to be funding something else with the same money.

Avoid the 'one source' trap. As they say in investment circles, develop a diverse portfolio to weather storms in any one sector. Remember to couch your requests in terms of the concerns of each funding body. However, be sure that doing so does not substantially change what you want to achieve.

You will need to work systematically. Get in touch with community workers and others who are used to seeking funds for various groups. Discover the various sources that they are aware of first. Then, look for more. There is always some new kid on the block.

Someone should regularly peruse a major paper on the best day for finding information about what various local, regional, state and federal bodies are funding and when. Keep good records of what you find and who is recommended as a source. Update files regularly.

Create a funding 'calendar' that notes the various funding request deadlines. Start filling the forms out early and keep copies of unsuccessful attempts. There might not have been much wrong with the application. When they are not so busy with the present funding round, check with the funding body to see what could have been done better.

You need to work towards the long-term. Keep the funding feelers out several months in advance and work various networks for modest, as well as substantive amounts. Consider how to break your budget up into chunks in a way that allows you to do some creative accounting. Sometimes it is possible to get from or give to others small amounts of money for discrete funding needs.

This is, in fact, a very important role for managers.

When things get tight, these moveable funds might hold you over until the next 'cheque' arrives. Ensure that you can honour your commitments to paid staff and be careful about spending big at the beginning. You might enthusiastically invest in things that you will not actually use effectively very often.

Think about how small investments of time and energy early on may pay off later. Be willing to be part of research that will get you known. Write your efforts up for publication in local and regional papers. Consider writing for a discipline-based journal or a government report.

If you do not have the tools to begin a Shed with a work ethos, consider starting a Shed with another. That might get the whole thing started. You can expand from there.

Work cooperatively with others. Offer to provide *quid pro quo*, or 'this-for-that' support to others. Do not be afraid to propose ways that your Shed might work with other groups to raise money or might share resources more equitably. You might have more time; they might have more equipment.

Remember that skills and knowledge are resources as well. It is very likely that the people supporting the Shed, or benefiting from the Shed, have had life-experiences that are rich and interesting. These stories can be shared.

They might just make a good book (it has been done at North Yarra Community Health), a feature article, or even some aspect of a video documentary to be aired on local or even national television stations. These are all things that can be exchanged for other considerations.

When putting in submissions, be sure to indicate to the funding body that there is more than one group supporting your endeavours. Also, let them know that there are well established ways in which supporting the Shed means supporting other groups in the organisation or the larger community.

Consider whether small changes in the way that your Shed operates might accommodate another group. For instance, this might be a Planned Activity Group (PAG). It might be possible to gain support from the other program.

Remember that starting up often requires wasting time and resources before you get things right. Be as prudent as you can. But realise that you're likely to fail first, and then succeed.

There is a very real danger in trying to be too efficient before you know what is effective. You might overlook the best way of doing something. That way might be more costly in some ways. However, it might return a better investment in the long run.

Be ready to learn from your mistakes. On the other hand, remember to make the most of what you've got while you've got it. A little forethought and canvassing can often reveal a better way of doing what you want to do.

In summary:

- While most Sheds are dependent on funding bodies and buddies in the community for money and resources, some Sheds operate independently by earning their keep.
- This is very difficult to do. Most Sheds will have to have some sort of plan for gaining and maintaining their resources from others in the short, medium and long-terms.
- Some Sheds are able to get by for a time on low amounts of support. However, this is becoming increasingly rare as more spaces require rent and resources are becoming scarce generally.
- Don't expect that one funding source will be able to carry the project or program for ever. While it can be great to get started with a bucket of money, it can also make you complacent. Create a diverse portfolio and work hard at keeping it current.
- Work systematically to gain information about potential funding sources. Ask around and pass on your own information. While there is some merit in strategic competition that keeps us sharp, too competitive an attitude causes trouble in the long run.
- Create a 'funding calendar' with the information sessions and deadlines clearly marked for various funding bodies operating at the local, regional, state and national levels. File your failed attempts and follow-up with the funding bodies to learn your trade.
- Work for the long-term, keep your funding feelers well out in front. Plan for lean times and take care of your team. Make many small investments in goodwill that might return to you later.
- When making purchases or investing in plant, keep your enthusiasms in check. Do what you can do well, not what you cannot do at all well.
- Work cooperatively with others. Share what you have, receive from others with gratitude. Work out what you can afford to redeploy between like-minded groups to better effect.
- Don't forget that you might be able to work together with others to create funding or resources opportunities. Most funding bodies like to see evidence that people can and do work well with other groups. Get in the habit early. (See the next consideration.)
- Expect failure and do not be too worried about it as you learn your trade. Learn how to do something before worrying about how to do it more efficiently. But, be prudent!

E. Linkages in a 'Men's Shed' project or program

To be honest, it is not the best of environments in which to be starting or running a shed. Resources are scarce and policy trends uncertain. Seeking a personal advantage and competing successfully are highly valued by many members of society.

However, there are ways of working that reduce such threats to success. One of the most important ways has to do with enhancing the density of the networks with which the Shed is associated. Additionally, it is important to appropriately maintain the quality of these relationships through time.

There is an old saying that a 'three-fold' cord is not easily broken.

So, what are the relationship issues that those running or starting a Shed should consider? There are four main considerations for most Sheds. There will be some Sheds that will have other considerations as well. But, the following are probably an important minimum:

- How well embedded (or, not) is the Shed into the 'life' or ethos of the host organisation?
- What types of interactions occur between the various members of the network?
- How engaged or disengaged is the Shed in relation to other projects and programs in the community, region, state and nation?
- Is it likely that the linkages are sustainable through time? Why, or why not?

Before looking at these questions, it would be wise to revisit another question. The issue of power was raised with regard to social roles and positions in the consideration examining the activities of the Shed. It would be worth taking time to consider how the issues of power might also influence and be influenced by aspects of social life such as class, gender and ethnicity.

A group of men from a working-class background are likely to think and act differently than the female managers of an organisation who have tertiary degrees and grew up in 'solidly' middle-class homes. If we were to add that the men are from ethnic backgrounds that are different than the managers, we would have a very complex situation.

Legitimate power results from cooperation. Cooperation is enhanced with understanding and compassion. These in turn grow with shared experiences and empathy. Such sharing of experience can lead to congruence in values and ethos that may extend each person's perspective beyond the one with which they had begun.

Linkages are best formed between people who are sufficiently like-minded to be able to work in common-cause towards a common good that each values and benefits from. Even people at different levels in a hierarchy can learn to appreciate the reasoning and aspirations of people at other levels. Without necessarily ignoring their own concerns, they can support the concerns of others.

They can help give voice to these concerns and ensure that others get a fair hearing. This may be done even when it is not necessarily to their immediate advantage to do so. Indeed, they might even do so to their decided disadvantage. We often refer to this as advocacy.

How might this influence the relations of a group vis-à-vis other groups?

In the case of Men's Sheds, particularly when community health services auspice them, it is important that they are sufficiently embedded in, and not just bedded at, the organisation. There should be regular means for other staff and service users to engage the participants in the Shed on common ground. They should certainly seek to have a better understanding of the life-worlds of the Shed participants. Who knows, they might be someone else's father, brother or son.

In turn, the participants of the Shed should find out what the various departments and services of the organisation are up to on a regular basis. It would be helpful if the men remained alert to how they might be able to support the work of the whole organisation and its various components.

Consideration will need to be given to how spontaneous or structured the process for doing this will be. Each agency and each Shed will have to work this out for themselves. However, it is probably worth noting the paradox that spontaneity often requires a great deal of structural preparation. Also, structures become brittle and enfeebled without the energies of spontaneity.

These questions should extend beyond the relationship between a Shed project or program and the organisation that hosts it. They will need to be asked about the linkages that the Shed has with other bodies in the community at various levels. Depending on the ethos, function and type of support offered to participants of the Shed, the program will be more or less engaged with other groups.

To be wholly disengaged is probably not wise. However, to be over engaged might threaten the viability of the Shed. Important questions should be raised about the sustainability of the various linkages in terms of security and insecurity.

As people pass through the program, various relationships will be more or less secure. Is it always wise to try to make a linkage that has become insecure with the loss of a key person secure again? What are the costs? Who would benefit?

In summary:

- Those seeking to start or maintain Men's Sheds need to keep a weather-eye on the environment. This is becoming increasingly competitive and resource scarce.
- One way of ameliorating the negative effects is through strong network relations.
- In talking about social relations, three further aspects of living in society arise with relationship to power. The concepts of class, ethnicity and gender each try to account for difference within a community or between communities.
- Positive and intentional means of building bridges between people from various backgrounds should be engaged.
- Cooperation is the means of generating legitimate power to effect change without diminishing the dignity of the participants.
- The likelihood of cooperation is enhanced with understanding and compassion. These are often engendered through empathetic regard and common experiences.
- A growing congruence can be achieved in terms of values and ethos through this means despite differences, as long as the differences do not offend.
- The increased willingness to listen to and consider the concerns of others can lead to a willingness to speak out on behalf of others in common-cause.
- Therefore, Men's Sheds should be embedded in the life of organisations that auspice them and not just bedded at such sites.
- Issues of how such relations can be structured to allow for spontaneous engagement or how spontaneity might energise structured relations should be considered carefully.
- These considerations also apply to the Sheds' relationships with groups outside of the organisation. To what degree is it helpful or harmful to be engaged or disengaged?
- Additionally, participants and staff of the Sheds should give regular thought to how secure or insecure their relationships are with other groups and organisations through time.

C. Conclusion and Recommendations

1. Conclusion

This report has attempted to inform the reader about the current state of play of Men's Sheds in Victoria through representative surveys, interviews and conversations. It has drawn upon other contemporary research as well as earlier research. Because of the paucity of evidence to date about Men's Sheds, a number of inferences are made from related research into social connectedness, mental health and men's health.

Part A provided an initial orientation to the rationale and background relevant to Men's Sheds. Particularly important was a discussion about the principles, key terms, models and implications relating to the evidence. This was followed by a discussion of the rationales for Men's Sheds in Victoria in terms of men in general and both older and younger men more specifically. A brief historical background to the development of Men's Sheds was provided as a context to the discussion.

In Part B a transition was made to the findings relating to comments and considerations. First, there were to brief sets of comments on the diversity of men and how this influences discussions about Men's Sheds. Secondly, there were comments about the process and issues of devising the considerations for a 'Men's Shed' Project or program. There were five actual considerations that were elaborated in this part. The first dealt with the origins of a project and the issues relating to establishing Men's Sheds.

The second outlined the operations that would need to be in place for a Shed to flourish. The third consideration canvassed some of the activities that the men might engage in and why. The fourth explored the funding and resources dimensions of a 'Men's Shed' and emphasised the need to ensure diverse funding streams to avoid collapse with the loss of any one. And, finally, consideration was given to the various linkages that would enhance and be enhanced by the Men's Shed.

A variety of recommendations about Men's Sheds and Men's Health promotion follows this section. The five case-studies and the 'Hayes-Williamson' typology of Men's Sheds of Part E follow an extensive set of references in Part D. It is hoped that these resources will assist in making evidence-based, best-practice decisions for Victorian Men's Sheds.

2. Recommendations

The recommendations in the section first have to do with policy decisions relating to infrastructure development. These have to do with policies relating to program development, organisational development, workforce development and community development. Finally, there are recommendations for men's health and its promotion more generally in Victoria. They should be considered particular applications of earlier recommendations (Hayes 2003).

A. Relating to Policies for Developing an Infrastructure for Men's Sheds

1. As Men's Sheds seem to be a grassroots phenomenon at present, it would be important to continue to build on this strength and ensure that:
 - there is continued support for building neighbourhood renewal and development;
 - increased attention is given by relevant governmental departments and community agencies for finding appropriate means to discover the aspirations of a wide variety of men in the light of the social changes influencing society;
 - resources continue to be strategically deployed to develop critical social and cultural skills for engaging these issues through the life-course;
 - men are enlisted as community leaders and members of decision-making processes for the issues that influence them and others; and,
 - attention be given to reducing the loss of community-spaces for men as well as seeking to discover new spaces.

2. While the community of both men and women have been an important force in the development of Men's Sheds, workers have also been crucial to their implementation and development; therefore, it would be prudent to:
 - seek means for helping such workers to develop an enthusiasm for working with men on their own 'terms and turf' in a manner that workers would be comfortable with;
 - use models and means that are supportive of the strengths of men and their intentions rather than those that merely focus on weakness or deficiency;
 - help workers reflect on experiences that they might have in common with the varieties of men that they might work with and to provide opportunities for workers to gain broader experience with and understanding of such men;
 - provide workers with both the time and opportunities that would enable them to gain the knowledge, skills and attitudes to help their fellow workers appreciate what they are doing and why; and,
 - ensure that the training of workers increasing includes explicit consideration of how their expertise should be used when working with men in a variety of contexts and circumstances.

3. Yet, the community members and workers have typically found it essential to work within a framework that moves their projects into programs with recurring funding and, when developing and deploying policies, managers should consider the following in light of this:
 - the need to first consider the effectiveness of the projects before being concerned about the efficiencies that can be gained by bundling projects into larger programs
 - the importance of making certain that a focus on program development enhances the various projects relating to men in terms of greater access to resources in the present, as well as into the future
 - considering the benefits to be gained for other programs by taking account of the indirect, as well as the direct benefits of working with men in Sheds
 - developing practices, procedures, plans and processes that enhance men's engagement with the agency beyond the 'Men's Shed' Project or Program

4. Finally, hosting agencies or bodies have a salient influence on the continued development and growth of Men's Sheds and this means that:
 - managers give priority to the Sheds in terms of discretionary funding and ensuring that budget line items are created for sustainable funding
 - Chief Executive Officers and senior managers work collaboratively between the various agencies and bodies to minimise undue competition for funds in this area

- and advocate with funding bodies for increased allocation resources for pilot projects, recurring funding, and documentation and evaluation
- decision-makers associated with governmental and non-governmental funding bodies consider the strategic benefits of investing in Men's Sheds in the near, medium and long-term in terms of providing for projects and programs of proven value in each region and catchment area

B. Relating to Policies for Enhancing Men's Health Promotion in Victoria

1. It would be expedient for the State government to take a primary leadership role in identifying and funding the resources needs for coordinated Men's Health Promotion policy development and implementation in Victoria. This should include means for ensuring that a 'zero-sum game' is avoided in terms of Women's Health Promotion.
2. The various peak bodies for engaging a wide variety of health and well-being issues in Victorian should clarify their responsibilities to the men, women and children of the State in the light of a need to develop and deploy coherent and relevant policies that seek to explicitly promote the health and well-being of men and boys.
3. As a vital aspect of fulfilling their duty of care and as a matter of best-practice in terms of engagement, *all* agencies (governmental and non-governmental) working in the community should explicitly consider how their policies, practices, procedures, plans and processes enhance or diminish the likelihood that men and boys can access and successfully use their services and resources to promote their own health and well-being regardless of whether they have a specific men's program.

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E. Appendices

Appendix A: *Five Case-Studies, by C. Ford and M. Morgan*

The following five case-studies were prepared by two senior health science students at the School of Public Health, La Trobe University (Bundoora). Both are double-degree students and have been involved extensively with various processes and people throughout the research project. They also facilitated at the Victorian Men's Shed Conference (November 2005). The students followed a template used in their studies. The intention is to allow readers sufficient information about each shed to gain an insight into why that shed is operating the way it does. Hopefully, this will help readers gain an appreciation of the intentions and uses of this document's findings.

Christopher Ford prepared the Orbst (Remote) and Frankston (Regional) case-studies and Michelle Morgan prepared the Brimbank (Western Metro), Darebin (North-Central Metro) and Manningham (Eastern Metro) case-studies. Final editing was done by the authors to create continuity of style. We would like to thank the various sheds for their cooperation and contributions.