



A framework to engage men in wellbeing initiatives

How to engage men in impactful and successful wellbeing initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

Many wellbeing initiatives often miss the mark when it comes to addressing men's mental health. Whether it's the use of inappropriate language or developing programmes that fail to connect with men, there are a number of common pitfalls. With this framework, we unveil the essential principles required to develop initiatives that effectively engage men, ensuring that efforts are not only well-intentioned but impactful and relevant to their needs.

One of the biggest things to consider is how wellbeing initiatives are often **outdated and lack any appeal to men**. For example, we usually see:

- Posters promoting an EAP with an image of a man with his head in his hands
- Drop-in sessions where the outcome of the meetings is unclear
- Terms such as 'poor mental health' being used in initiatives
- Initiatives that are static, not accessible to all or not engaging

“We must stop blaming men for not seeking help due to characteristics or deficits in themselves, rather than to characteristics or limitations of therapy, services and interventions provided.”

Dr John Barry

Founder of The Centre of Male Psychology



THE FRAMEWORK

This framework has been developed to help you design and run wellbeing initiatives that are more likely to create meaningful engagement with men in the workplace.

We believe that **successful wellbeing initiatives aimed at men need to be actually designed for men**, taking into account the potential barriers they face in opening up about mental health.



Our framework comprises of five key principles:

- 1. Engagement and accessibility**
- 2. Low commitment**
- 3. Clear structure and communication**
- 4. Peer-to-peer connection**
- 5. Collective and individual goals**

By following these principles, wellbeing initiatives targeted at men are more likely to appeal to, and be **impactful for creating spaces for men to be more open about their mental health** and access support.

We hope this helps you.

Engagement and accessibility

Research shows that men acknowledge the importance of having strong social connections, even though they often admit feeling uncomfortable about expressing their emotions. Nonetheless, when combined with activities they are already involved in, sharing their feelings becomes significantly less

daunting. Activities that can help men talk and meet other people whilst engaging in something eases discomfort and makes conversations feel more natural. This is a key barrier to be aware of when promoting talking-based initiatives such as counselling, EAP services or helplines.



How can you increase engagement in your wellbeing initiatives?

Support activities that utilise the ‘shoulder-to-shoulder’ approach.

With this information in mind, focus on how you can create activities that support this ‘shoulder-to-shoulder’ approach. Men find that conversations flow easier when engaging in an activity with someone or being shoulder-to-shoulder with them.

This could be a walking/running group, a charity fundraiser such as a 100k step challenge or embedding a mental health focus into day-to-day activities such as coffee or breakfast mornings.

Be mindful of the language you use.

Use relatable language to engage men from the start. Research shows that using direct, humorous, male-specific phrasing and less clinical terminology increases willingness to engage. Consider how organisations such as Movember approach their campaigns and activities, they are great examples of how language changes the way men engage with campaigns.

For example, “The mo is calling, Movember is our time to unite.” as opposed to “It’s common for men to experience depression, to be angry or isolated”. The intent to help is the same but the context and message is very different.

Other way you can increase engagement in your wellbeing initiatives

Make the activity the primary focus rather than the initiative itself. For example, a walking group could be promoted as a ‘fitness challenge’ or ‘staying fit during your working day’ rather than focusing on the connection and talking element of the initiative.

Consider the imagery used in promotional materials. Try to steer away from images of men looking sad or sitting around a table holding cups of tea. Make them more positive and focused on the activity.



How do you make your initiatives accessible for men?

Have a variety of methods to engage men.

Physical-based activities are fantastic but be conscious that they won't engage all men. Finding other ways to make it possible for different groups to get involved is key. One of the most effective, is sharing real stories from men who have faced mental health challenges and sought help.

Ensure men are part of your wellbeing network

Leading organisations in the wellbeing space, always have a diverse wellbeing network that's impactful, supported and engaged. When it comes to making initiatives accessible, it's crucial to have men within your network that others can reach out to.

They also represent the voice of the group. Helping you to identify the initiatives that will work and also consider the operational elements that may prevent men from engaging in activities.

More ways to make your initiatives accessible for men

Think about the timing

Is the initiative at a time that will be accessible? Operational requirements must be considered otherwise they won't engage. Consider how to fit in activities around lunchtime or other opportunities in the working day.

Make it relatable

This may mean specific initiatives or groups are created so men feel they can relate to the other attendees. For example, it could be a 'dads club' or a weekly exercise challenge group.

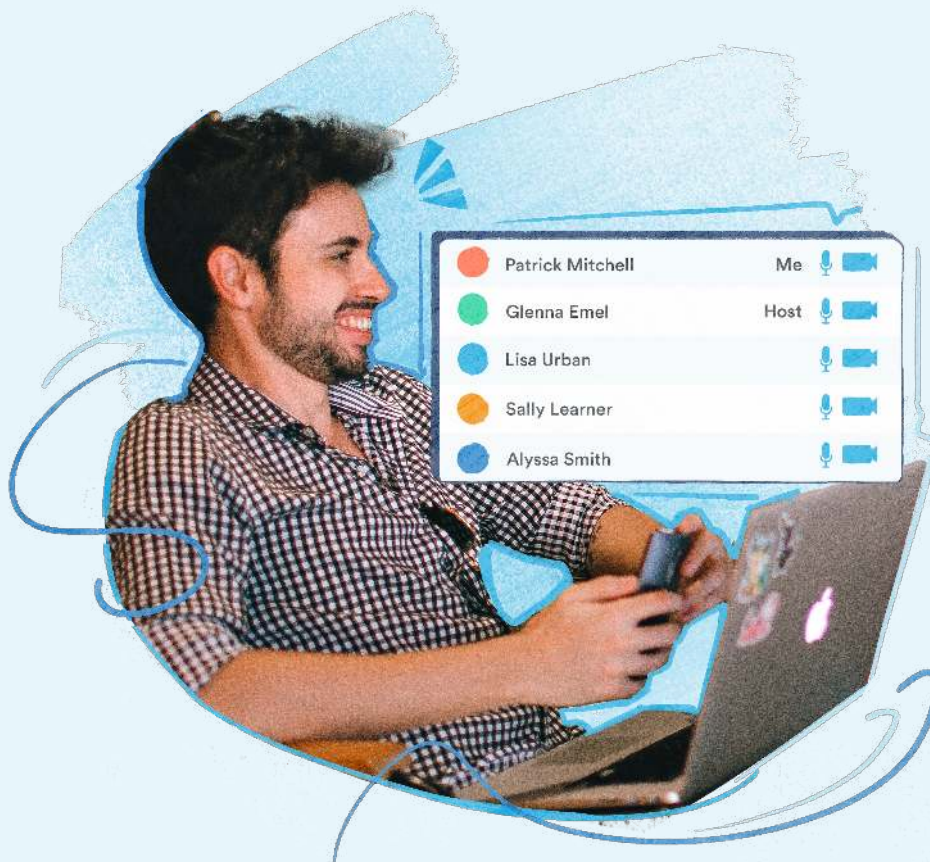


LOW COMMITMENT

Low commitment

To ensure wellbeing initiatives are accessible we must remove as much friction as possible. It's important to provide men with a flexible approach to their level of commitment. **Instead of expecting too much too soon, you should encourage commitment to build up over time.**

Avoid putting too much pressure on people, you are more likely to see a willingness to give the initiative a go if you're patient.



How can you utilise a low-commitment approach?

Here are some ideas of how you can do this:

- **Utilise a 'drop-in' approach.** Let men know that the initiatives are not mandatory to attend every time and use inviting language.
- **Make every first greeting a positive one.** This could mean having someone there each week to greet new people and introduce them to others.
- **Make it easy to sign up.** Clearly communicate how people sign up or if they just turn up. Make this an easy process to follow.
- **Consider the use of merchandise.** T-shirts, lanyards or water bottles can be a way of creating a feeling of community and commitment.

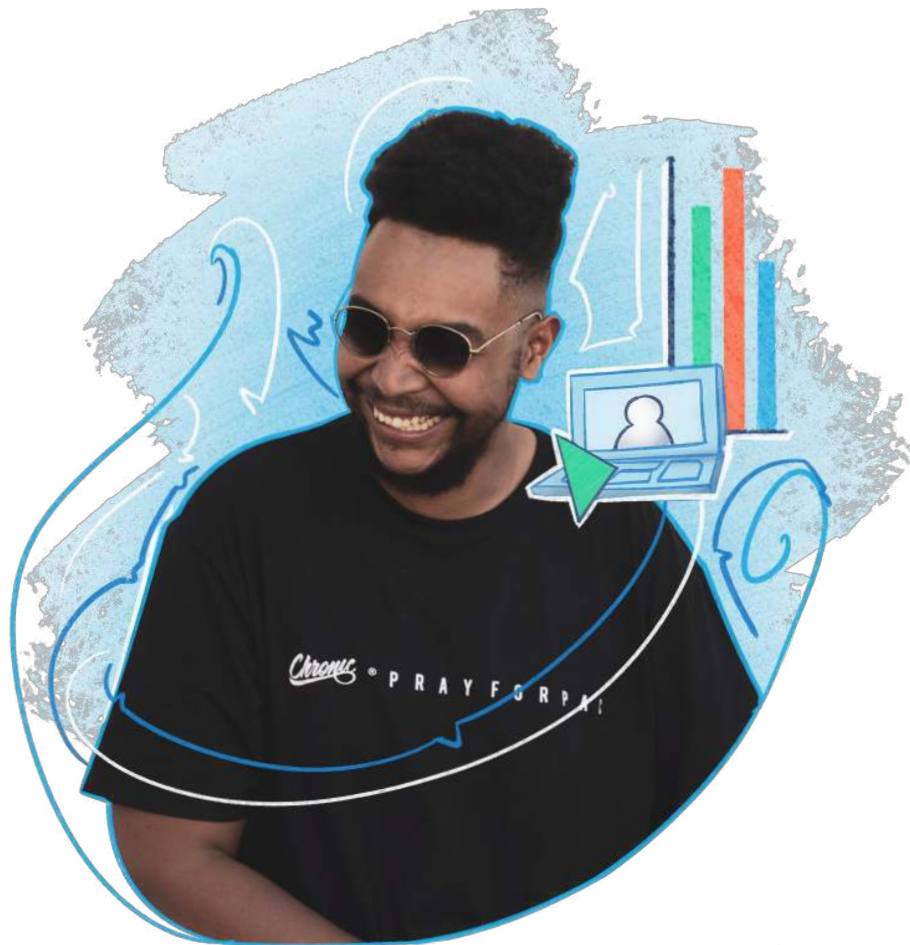
Over time, some individuals may wish to increase their commitment with initiatives. A great way to do this is to create opportunities for added responsibilities.

This might be to mentor other individuals, lead initiatives and/or groups or even become a MHFA for the organisation.

Clear structure and communication of initiatives

Research shows that men, especially those aged 46-59 years old, prefer activities with clear structure and outcomes. Providing details about what they can expect helps to reduce the fear of the unknown and helps them feel as though the time will be productive.

So, what can you do? Let's take a look...



STRUCTURE & COMMUNICATION

Create clarity not confusion

Research has shown that men do not like to waste time. It is important to not overcomplicate your messaging when designing initiatives, ensure there is a clear purpose and plan to everything you do. This will significantly help.



Outline expectations from the beginning

Perhaps you are hosting a men's mental health panel event. Outline the structure of the session, what's being covered, the timing and don't forget our tips on making sure the language resonates.

Avoid ambiguity

If you have a poster with an EAP number on it, that may not be enough. This comes with too many unanswered questions so instead, lay out the process of what happens when they call that number, what support to expect and what is involved.

Peer-to-peer connection

So far we've looked at ways to get men to engage in wellbeing initiatives. If they do engage and have a valuable and positive experience they're more likely to want to continue participating. However, another key area of focus is to **find ways to nurture peer-to-peer connections.**



How can you use peer-to-peer support in your wellbeing initiatives?

Create buddy systems.

This could be done within teams or initiatives to help build connections and encourage conversations. It can give people someone to relate to and have more meaningful conversations with or help ease someone into the group if they are new.

Facilitate extensions of the activity.

Encourage a coffee break or encourage group leaders to facilitate a group chat before/after the activity has taken place. This extends the opportunity for relationships to continue.

Have specific peer-to-peer groups for men.

For example, a walking group specifically for men, or a 'dad's coffee club'. It increases relatability for group members.

Empower individuals to lead initiatives.

For example, someone may want to start an internal podcast or blog and could be the facilitator of that initiative. Empowering men to take a lead in running initiatives can foster peer-to-peer connection.

Identifying collective and individual goals

It's important that men can see progress throughout their engagement with an initiative or activity. Empowering men to help with the running of an initiative wherever possible can be an important way of making them feel invested and allows them to contribute at a deeper level.



COLLECTIVE & INDIVIDUAL GOALS

How can individual and collective goals help?

Collective goals

Setting collective goals for a network can bring about a sense of community and connection.

This could be done through fundraising events inside and outside of work for example.

Individual goals

Can the last 5 minutes of the activity or session focus on a goal for them that week or visualising how this support could help them feel in 6 months' time?

It can empower them to do more to support themselves and also see the benefits of committing to the group or initiative.

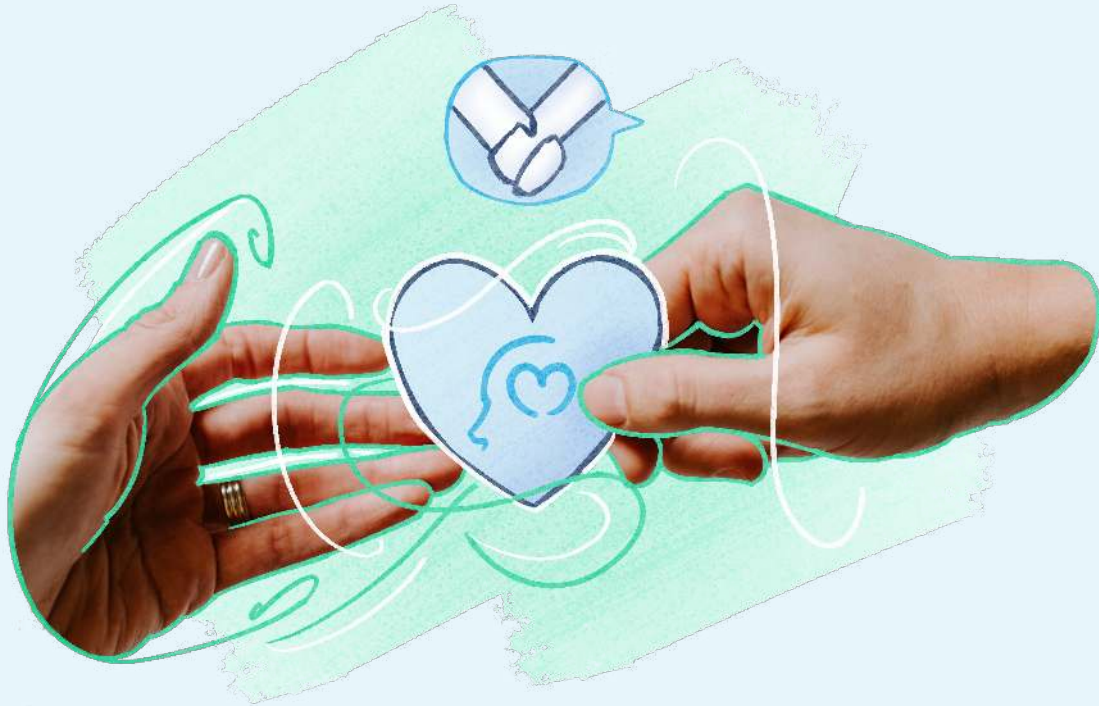
Other things to consider

Goals for growing the initiative

Perhaps it's your MHFA or Champion network and you want more men to become MHFAs to increase representation? Make sure you advertise for male MHFAs using the right language and being clear on roles and responsibilities upfront.

Involve Senior Leadership

Buy-in from your Senior Leadership Team (SLT) is crucial to success. One of the most powerful things you can do is find a member of the SLT (especially male) who's willing to share their experiences around mental health. If they back initiatives and role model open conversations, the impact will be even greater.



Conclusion

We hope this guide helps you take the necessary steps to boost engagement with your wellbeing initiatives. In times of low engagement, don't lose heart – focus on the few, and the many will follow. Your efforts will create a lasting ripple effect, as small changes lead to substantial impact over time.

For additional support in tackling this challenge, [Everymind at Work](#) offers a variety of solutions such as ongoing awareness campaigns and resources, tailored to different groups within your organisation. If you'd like to discuss this, simply click below to reach out to us!

[Speak with us](#)



Get in touch with us 

To learn more, please visit
everymindatwork.com