



Written Submission for Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the Upcoming Federal Budget

By:

Men's Sheds Canada

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Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

That the Government's development of a national men's and boys' health strategy includes addressing the unique needs and capacities of older men.

Recommendation 2:

That the Government invest \$3 million over five years through Men's Sheds Canada to expand community-based programs for older men that reduce social isolation and loneliness, strengthen health and well-being, and enhance their contributions to communities, including through intergenerational connection.



About Men's Sheds Canada

Men's Sheds Canada (MSC) supports a growing network of Men's Sheds—grassroots groups where men gather to connect, share skills, and contribute to their communities. We envision a Canada where every man feels valued and engaged in his community, experiencing meaning, purpose, belonging, and well-being in his aging journey. Our Mission is to grow and strengthen the Men's Shed movement in Canada; we do this by: supporting creation of new Sheds; connecting existing Sheds for peer learning and mentoring; providing education programs and communications opportunities; working with provincial Men's Shed associations; and engaging in research and other partnerships.

A Men's Shed is a group of men who get together in their community to develop new skills, discover new interests, and make new friends. But it's so much more than that. For many men, aging and retirement can lead to a loss of identity, loneliness, and a lack of meaning and purpose. Symbolic of the backyard workshop where men share stories and tinker in woodworking or mechanics, a Men's Shed is grounded in the idea that men communicate more effectively when they're "shoulder to shoulder" with other men. Men's Sheds offer a place to go, something useful to do, and someone to talk with while they do it.

As health concerns related to social isolation and depression are often unrecognized and men can be reluctant to seek help, Men's Sheds have a vital role to play in fostering well-being and transformative, fulfilling relationships for men, especially in their senior years. Shed members cross age, culture, and socioeconomic status, and no two Sheds are quite alike. Some Sheddens gather in a workshop to build and fix things. Others focus on hiking or gardening or cooking. Most partner with local organizations on special projects that support their community. But what all Sheds have in common is a welcoming environment where men create shared experiences, celebrate accomplishments, and build community.

Over the past 30 years, the Men's Sheds movement has expanded from its 1990s origins in Australia over 3500 Sheds in 20+ countries. This growth and accompanying research reflect how Sheds are an effective remedy to aging challenges in many countries, cultures, and contexts.

Since the launch of Canada's first Shed in 2011, there are now more than 200 autonomous Sheds across the country offering low-barrier, peer-led support for social connection, health, and well-being, and MSC plans to reach 1,000 Sheds by 2032. In partnership with leading academic institutions, and health agencies, we are engaging in research on the impacts of Men's Sheds on men's health and wellness and on the value of Men's Sheds in communities throughout the country.



Rationale for Recommendations

These recommendations align with the **Government of Canada's Cabinet Committee on Quality of Life and Well-Being**, which considers ways to improve community safety and health, advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, and augment the overall quality of life and well-being of Canadians.

Recommendation 1: *That the Government's development of a national men and boys' health strategy includes addressing the unique needs and capacities of older men.*

Developing a national men's health strategy that includes older men is essential for health equity. With Canada's rapidly aging population, proactive investment will reduce long-term healthcare costs, improve quality of life, and strengthen community well-being. International models demonstrate that targeted strategies work, and Canada must act to ensure older men are not neglected and under-utilized.

Older men face higher rates of preventable illness, suicide, and social isolation, yet they are less likely to engage in preventive healthcare or seek support due to stigma and systemic gaps in services. With one in four Canadians projected to be over 65 by 2030 (Statistics Canada), the health and well-being of older men is a pressing equity issue and a public health priority. Also, older men are a significant under-utilized reservoir of expertise and social capital that could be making greater contributions to their communities.

November Canada's report ***The Real Face of Men's Health (2025)*** notes: *More than two in five (44%) Canadian men die prematurely, before age 75; Preventing avoidable conditions and improving the day-to-day lives of men and those closest to them can save Canada billions.* The report also notes that Men's Sheds offer a community-based remedy that works to advance health literacy in men. New research on Canadian Men's Sheds confirms this and provides further evidence of the health promoting effects of Men's Sheds, including an understanding of how older men's mental health is a different life experience because of life course events, and why gendered spaces in community are important. The research underscores how Men's Sheds provide natural support networks and recreate social networks that men lose upon retirement, divorce, or widowhood, as well as how they increase social confidence and foster men's engagement in community and purposeful activity. The data confirms that Sheds function as preventative mental health spaces rooted in peer support and routine participation.

Investing in a national strategy that includes addressing the unique needs of older men will improve quality of life, reduce healthcare costs, and strengthen communities by keeping older men active, connected, engaged, and productive. International experience, such as in Australia and Ireland, shows that targeted men's health strategies lead to better outcomes and stronger systems of care. By acting now, Canada can ensure older men are not neglected and can continue to contribute to families, communities, and society well into later life.



Recommendation 2: *That the Government invest \$3 million over five years through Men's Sheds Canada to expand community-based programs for older men that reduce social isolation and loneliness, strengthen health and well-being, and enhance their contributions to communities, including through intergenerational connections.*

Men's Sheds Canada is a driving force for innovation within the men's health sector and at the forefront of addressing the pressing issues of older men's mental health and social isolation, and under-utilization of their capacities. MSC's collaboration with local Men's Sheds; provincial Men's Shed associations; regional, provincial, and national organizations; and research and health agency partners has emerged as a broad and strategic network well-positioned to:

- Fill research gaps on the health and well-being of men over 55. **1**
- Provide remedies for the social isolation, loss of identity, connection, and purpose, and mental and physical health challenges faced by many older men. **2**
- Expand availability of safe, inclusive, welcoming spaces for men in communities that are low-barrier, stigma-free, and foster wellness through a "health by stealth" approach. **3**
- Engage older men from often under-served or marginalized groups, such as veterans, immigrants, Indigenous, GBQ, and men experiencing dementia, neurodiversity, mental illness, or disability. **4**
- Demonstrate that when men are engaged, productive, and feel they belong, their health needs are reduced and demands on health and social services are also reduced.
- Demonstrate that older men are assets in communities, contributing to community vibrancy and resilience by volunteering, undertaking community projects, increasing trust and social capital, and providing positive male role models through intergenerational and mentoring activities. **5**
- Provide opportunities for younger men (and women) to learn practical skills and exposure to trades and other fields essential to Canada's workforce needs.
- Create communities that engage men in their 50s and 60s to ensure they have social and community supports and productive opportunities when they are 60-85, an age range often experiencing more social isolation due to retirement, divorce, widowhood, children moving away, and poorer health.

1 *Literature reviews and Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging show few male-specific studies on aging.*

2 *Statistics Canada data shows men aged 65+ experience higher levels of social isolation and are more likely to live alone than women—factors associated with loneliness, loss of identity, and reduced purpose.*

Understanding the Factors Driving the Epidemic of Social Isolation and Loneliness among Older Canadians

A 2019 survey found male retirees reported significant declines in social engagement and sense of purpose compared to female counterparts

3 *Studies from Australia and UK report Men's Sheds help reduce stigma, increase belonging, support mental well-being and social connection, and reduce suicides among older men.*

4 **Immigrant status and loneliness among older Canadians** **Social isolation of seniors: A Focus on New Immigrant and Refugee Seniors in Canada** **Mental Health and Service Issues Faced by Older Immigrants in Canada: A Scoping Review**

5 *Statistics Canada data indicates men aged 55–75 volunteer at higher-than-average rates*



Men's Sheds Canada (MSC) collaborates with national and provincial organizations to raise awareness, educate, and deliver programs on topics relevant to older men's health and wellness. Partners include HelpAge Canada; Movember Canada; GenWell; Oasis Communities for Aging Well; Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health; Healthy Aging Alberta; Manitoba Association of Senior Communities; Seniors NL, and United Way B.C.

MSC also partners with academic institutions on research, knowledge translation, student placements, and research symposia, e.g. Simon Fraser University; University of British Columbia; University of Manitoba; Queens University; University of Alberta, and University of Toronto.

At local levels, Men's Sheds partner with community organizations and local governments on projects benefitting the community. Many volunteer thousands of hours annually on projects such as repairs, maintenance, and restoration of community facilities; home repairs for low-income seniors; garden beds and benches for seniors' homes; bicycle repairs and donations to refugees and homeless shelters; repair cafes; and so much more.

Many Sheds reach out to engage more men from diverse backgrounds and communities that often experience barriers to inclusion, such as newcomers; Indigenous men; those with disabilities, chronic conditions, mental health challenges, or cognitive impairment; and gay, bisexual, or queer men. Men's Sheds are increasingly involved in social prescribing programs, NORCs (naturally occurring retirement communities), health literacy initiatives, emergency preparedness, and intergenerational activities, as well as programming in areas such as grief and bereavement, caregiving, aging in place, and retirement planning from the perspective of older men.

Provincial Men's Sheds associations (B.C., AB, MB, ON, QC) are engaging with provincial governments, community-based seniors organizations, and health and social service agencies to raise awareness of Men's Sheds and their impact on participants and communities; start new Sheds; and partner on programs, research, and education. Provincial associations play a key role in development of new Sheds, providing information, outreach, and mentoring support.



An investment of \$3 million over five years through Men's Sheds Canada would support:

- Research into the unique health needs and capacities of men over 55, addressing the current lack of data and awareness of older men's circumstances.
- Providing evidence to support policies to address older men's needs and capacities.
- Scaling Men's Sheds to reach northern communities and other areas not yet served by Men's Sheds, and increased outreach to veterans, immigrant, Indigenous, and GBQ men, and men with disabilities.
- Creating programs and resources to support and enhance effectiveness and impact of Men's Sheds, e.g. social prescribing; mental health first aid and suicide prevention; preventative health checks and screening; intergenerational initiatives; caregiving, grief and bereavement, and end-of-life planning; and community building.
- Translating resources and websites to be available in French and other languages.
- Convening gatherings to activate partnerships and support peer learning, awareness, education, participatory action research, and development of policy, program, and research initiatives.
- Pilot projects that co-create, implement, evaluate, and scale innovative models of Men's Shed development, such as intergenerational and mentoring activities; embedding Sheds in NORCs (Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities), schools, universities, or multi-cultural agencies; and virtual Sheds.
- Assessing and amplifying how Men's Sheds are building social capital and accelerating volunteerism when both have been in decline in many communities and demographics, helping to shift the too common perception of older adults as deficits, to seeing them as valuable community assets.