

Eight tips for promoting men's health

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Men's Sheds are modern, shared versions of home workshops. Credit: UBC

With November comes Movember, putting the spotlight on men's health, and UBC nursing professor John Oliffe has a few tips that can help ensure the success of men's health programs. He recently led a study that reviewed community-based programs in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, U.K., the U.S. and other regions to see what worked and what didn't.

"Men tend to shy away from clinical medical services and formal health

care programs, leaving community-based programs to help fill the gap," says Oliffe, principal investigator of the men's [health program](#) based at UBC's faculty of applied science. "But not all programs are created equal. Our research shows that the ones that succeed are those that recognize and adapt to the social forces that uniquely affect men."

Recognize the forces that affect men's health

The UBC research points out that social factors can significantly affect health, including race, culture, socioeconomic status, education and income levels. Dudes Club, a [program](#) based in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, succeeds because its content is tailored to its largely Indigenous clientele. Events include culturally based activities and elder-led circles, and clients are reporting improved mental, spiritual, physical and emotional well-being as a result.

Physical activity builds connections

Activity-based programs that link to masculine ideals such as problem-solving and physical prowess work well. Men's Sheds, a program that runs in Australia, Canada and a few other countries, successfully attracts men with woodworking activities, computer tutorials, gardening and informal social events.

Safe spaces help men open up

Many men are reticent to talk about health challenges or talk about personal issues, but programs—like prostate cancer support groups—can expand their [comfort zone](#) by creating safe spaces for sharing experiences and discussing sensitive topics.

Knowledge can combat stigma

Many men who are experiencing health challenges like depression or suicidal thoughts lack knowledge about their condition, which further fuels any stigma they may already feel. Community-based programs can promote health literacy and tackle stigma by using simple, non-judgmental language to describe health conditions, Oliffe said.

Men-focused environments work well

No surprise, "men-friendly" community spaces and activities—such as sports events or competitions—work better in recruiting men to [health](#)-related programs than strictly clinical programs. Oliffe points to a few examples, including some European soccer clubs, that draw men in to join exercise and healthy eating programs.

A clear vision for the program is a must

Programs must have tangible benefits, clear goals and strong, collaborative leaders. Dads in Gear—developed to assist dads to quit smoking—recruited participants with an offer of free meals and child care. It emphasized the need for participants to actively work for their well-being, and it encouraged the men to independently sustain their healthy practices after completing the program.

Evaluate to perpetuate

Every program should carry out a consistent and formal evaluation process, Oliffe advises. This helps to support future funding efforts and ensures the program is working as well as it should.

'Pop-ups' are OK

And finally, don't expect to sustain or expand every program, says

Oliffe, as some might be best considered "pop-ups." Once they've hit their goal, they can be retired and regarded as the seed for future ideas.

More information: John L Oliffe et al, Community-based men's health promotion programs: eight lessons learnt and their caveats, *Health Promotion International* (2019). [DOI: 10.1093/heapro/daz101](https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daz101)

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