

Plus Paternal: A focus on fathers

Case for Change

Australian society, and our health system, has not kept pace with the changing needs, expectations, roles and diversity of modern-day families. To improve the health of men and their families, a fundamental shift in the way fathers are viewed and supported is required.

The goals of the Case for Change are about strengthening society and the health system. Efforts to acknowledge, engage and support men should not detract from, nor compete with, women's health initiatives.

Goals	What would change for fathers look like?
Society recognises and values both parents equally	Men and women would be viewed as equally important to raising children. Traditional family stereotypes would be challenged. Help-seeking would not be associated with stigma. The uptake of parental leave and flexible work arrangements by men would become the norm.
Health policy addresses the health and wellbeing of both parents	All policies, strategies and guidelines related to reproductive health would acknowledge the needs of both parents and provide guidance in meeting those needs. Fathers and prospective fathers would receive nationally consistent, standardised care.
The health system supports the proactive engagement of both parents	Men and women would be proactively engaged, informed and supported from preconception to parenthood, and at times of loss or distress. Initiatives that support the care of men would become standard practice.
Health professionals are willing and able to support men and women	Health professionals who provide reproductive health services would be trained to provide care for fathers and prospective fathers.
Both parents are prepared for the transition to parenthood	Information and education for fathers and prospective fathers would be widely available in various formats and languages. Antenatal and first-time-parents education curriculum would include nationally consistent content that addresses the needs of both parents..
Parents who experience loss, distress or are struggling with parenthood receive the care they need	The emotional wellbeing of men would be routinely monitored by health professionals. Tailored information, debriefing, counselling support and culturally appropriate care would be readily available for and offered to men who experience loss or distress.
Practice is evidence-informed and shaped by the lived- experiences of both men and women	The evidence base for how best to engage diverse fathers and respond to their needs would build over time. Initiatives would be co-designed with men. The engagement of fathers across the health system would be monitored and reported.



Why focus on fathers?

Australian fathers want and deserve more from our health system.

Non-birthing parents, most commonly men, are not systematically engaged or supported from pre-conception to parenthood. They are often treated as secondary to fertility, birthing and parenting processes – welcome but not active-partners. Many do not receive the care they need if they are unable to conceive, if they lose a child or if they are struggling with parenthood. Opportunities to prepare them for this major life transition are lost.

This negatively impacts on the health and wellbeing of all family members, as well as on relationships within families.

The evidence and the feedback Healthy Male has drawn together showed clear, consistent themes:

1. Australian fathers have unmet needs and diverse experiences
2. Traditional norms can negatively influence the roles, support and experiences of men (and women)
3. The health system's focus on mothers masks opportunities to support and prepare men for fatherhood
4. The knowledge and skills of men and health professionals in relation to fatherhood need to be strengthened

Not only did we discover **a pressing need for change**, we found **a strong desire for change** amongst men, health professionals and policy makers.

Achieving change - a collective effort

Supporting men's journey to fatherhood requires the collaboration and commitment of a wide range of stakeholders.

You can help by taking action to improve the experiences of men, and by endorsing the seven goals of the Case for Change.

Visit healthymale.org.au/plus-paternal to view the comprehensive Case for Change or to register your support and/or that of your organisation.

Together we can make a difference.