

MAN v FAT UK Government Call for Evidence Q1

Understanding and identifying areas where we can improve support for healthier behaviours

To get a true and lived experience of men's health, our insights come from a specifically designed survey for this submission. We asked a random cohort of the MAN v FAT service users to complete, with questions predominantly coming from this call for evidence.

IDENTIFYING NEED

The most popular areas identified for the strategy by our community, in popularity order were Mental Health, Diet, Weight, Suicide Prevention & Access to Services / Fatherhood. However, there was very little between these and other topics such as loneliness, male specific cancers, joint problem and physical activity / inactivity. This shows there is a large number of physical and mental health gaps in existing provision.

It is logical that those attending MAN v FAT will naturally feel that services relating to diet, weight loss and inactivity have historically let them down. However, due to the complications and need to access services due to the typical physical and mental health long term conditions perpetuated by excess weight they make for a good lived experience focus group on men's health services.

The survey has only been completed by a small cohort of our existing users. Should the UK Government have a need for further comprehensive data from our community we would be happy to facilitate this.

MAN v FAT UK Government Call for Evidence Q2

Improving outcomes for health conditions that typically, disproportionately or differently affect men

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FEEDBACK FOCUS

It is well known that suicide in the UK is the largest killer in men aged under 50. Over a third of our respondents said they had been diagnosed with a mental health condition, with the average rating being 5.9 / 10 for how they rated the level of support that they received.

Some of the responses offered additional insights into their experiences with mental health services, those that are most powerful and insightful include:

I have suffered my entire life with depression even trying to take my own life on multiple occasions, when speaking to drs I was only ever told to take medication! I had to ask myself about therapy. I was put forward for therapy and never got contacted! I chased and chased until I just gave up on it as it was never going to happen!

Hard to access, basically when I did, not prolonged, not what I needed.

Overall really good, was offered therapy and or antidepressants. One bad experience was that something was meant to be noted and I learnt 8 months later it never was.

My abuser was allowed to join and control all the sessions

Was put on a waiting list and had to wait 3 months before any real help was received

MAN v FAT UK Government Call for Evidence Q3

Improving men's access, engagement and experience of the health service

ACCESSIBILITY TO HEALTHCARE SERVICES FOR MEN

MAN v FAT are aware that only 15% of those who get weight loss support in the UK are male. We also know that there are less male front line healthcare professionals than female, and that men don't feel like services are conducive to them.

There are thousands of examples of men who tell us we are the first weight management and men's health service where it actually feels like the support has been designed for them.

In our survey, when asked more broadly about accessibility for men to access healthcare services the rating was even more damning than responses on mental health provision. The overall rating falling to 5 / 10. The mode average value was 6 / 10.

Response themes tended to express a frustration with an inability to get an appointment, which probably isn't a gendered issue. On a similar theme though there was a frustration that opportunities to get appointments outside of when many men, often self employed men, need to work to support their families.

Topics such as health professionals not really understanding or listening to male problems, a female focus, and a lack of awareness of what is available to men were also noted consistently across the group. Some respondents highlighted that men need to do more themselves, with one person stating 'Talk about it more, don't be ashamed to share'.

More of these insights in men's own words are shared below:

The NHS is always good that it's free at the point of service but what doesn't help is that in lot of cases men are still slightly stigmatized with they will get through it and suck it up.

Trying to get any appointments for my mental health or weight loss health is impossible! I've found that unless I'm on the verge of trying to take my own life you get nowhere.

It's very hard to know what services are available.

In general, if a man has made an appointment then there is definitely something wrong - otherwise we just carry on. That should be a trigger to take things seriously.

Most men work 8 or 9 til 5. Unless the healthcare has an online option most cannot sit on hold at 8am or attend most appointments.

Always in work time, my experience is that you have to work damn hard to be heard and when you do sit down with someone, they're very focused on female, rather than male healing.

Services should be offered outside of the normal "9-5" Men tend to prioritise providing for the families over their own health, and would be reluctant to access services that conflict with their work.

Need more accessible material. Men don't like to talk about their issues so perhaps AI could help provide guidance.

I do think there are services available, but I don't think they are known enough, more could be done to make men aware of what is available.

IMPROVING ACCESS AND EXPERIENCES:

MAN v FAT was founded over eleven year ago because our founder discovered first hand that there almost no services specifically designed to support men's weight loss journeys. Whilst the profile of men's health has undoubtedly grown since our inception through fantastic organisations such as MAN v FAT, Movember, Prostate Cancer UK, Men's Sheds, The Robin Cancer Trust and Andy's Man Club it appears that public services are not following these organisations learning on how to market to and support men.

Many of these organisations struggle for funding or resource and do what they do out of a passion and vision for a better world for men.

We asked men to order how they perceived different types of healthcare organisations to cater for men specifically. The order that came back on average was:

- 1st (Best) – Private Healthcare Services
- 2nd – Hospitals
- 3rd – Primary Care
- 4th – Pharmacies
- 5th – Public Health Services
- 6th – Mental Health Services
- 7th (Worst) – Community Health Services

We asked our community 'What would your suggestions be for how services for health conditions that affect men can be improved to better meet their needs?' As you'll see the narrative of 'women and children first', stigma, a lack of listening to men and need for better promotion of men's services or services to men were all very common.

In their own words their responses included:

Better opening times. Promote these services in similar ways to men's private healthcare

organisations.

More education in schools and more safe spaces to talk

I think there needs to be more availability for men to reach out to! More focus groups as well where men can go and feel comfortable speaking to each other about their problems and relax! Where there's no judgement or fear to be ourselves and be vulnerable. A lot of men would benefit from a more social situation down and chat to get life's stresses off their chest!

By immediately helping remove the stigma that men are always ok, show that men can indeed ask for help physically and mentally, help remove the stigma that men should be men and suck it up.

Not sure but typically men carrying extra weight and trying to be more active and healthier and going to develop injuries but limited health care service or strained services mean little or no access to support

Actually address men and the challenges they have. Access to fit around men and their lives, not prioritise women and children before, and access in the way they want it

Finding celebrities or people men of all kinds would look up to to advertise and talk about their experiences would be a huge help

Better access to gp appointments. Better mental awareness education

Needs more qualified mental health practitioners that understand the issues men go through.

Encourage more screenings

Tricky one to get your head around but i feel the bigger discussion is men accessing them themselves. They are there. But where to look? Who to ask? How to ask?

More focus on men's mental health and it needs to be de stigmatised to talk. It seems a lot of the things for men is put together by volunteer groups

Encourage more men to enter the health profession

MAN v FAT UK Government Call for Evidence Q4

Is there anything else you would like to see noted in the response to the call to evidence?

MAN v FAT are proud to support a network of over 9,000 men weekly across MAN v FAT Football & Rugby in the UK. We have also started MAN v FAT Soccer in the US. We have supported over 40,000 men in the UK since our inception and seen men lost in excess of 850,000'lbs of excess weight. We strongly believe potentially thousands of men's lives would have been lost if our community didn't exist.

Our members span the depths of demographics across society in areas like age, ethnicity and socio-economic and political views. We would happily support any further calls for evidence or real-world stress testing that you may need for this men's health strategy or anything else on the men's health agenda.

In terms of 'other comments' that our users left in this section of the survey, they included:

I think man vs fat should be recommended to a lot of men through the nhs! It's such a big thing that helps a lot of blokes! I can honestly say without mvf I don't think I'd still be here!

Men's health treatment for me has almost exclusively meant "you just have to wait". That is a destructive mantra for men (and women) who are active in sports etc. Being injured should be taken seriously as it adversely affects mental health and relationships.

Encourage more men to enter the health profession

There is a massive problem with cocaine in this country, and it's having a significant effect on men's mental health. Swab testing for cocaine use should be routine when stopped by police/going to football/by employers, and then if positive directed towards help as the carrot, to prevent the stick of being punished.

That Man v Fat should be studied as a way of helping men. This format could certainly be replicated and offered as a support group for men. I regularly see how Slimming World/WW are available on the NHS, but Man v FAT would provide so much more benefit & is more than a weight loss group.

It needs to be recognised that men are less likely to seek help for issues they are having, and services should be promoted to men specifically. I also think that employers have a responsibility to promote/signpost services through their male employees, and they should be mandated as part of their responsibilities towards their employees.