



## Minnesota Men's Sheds

### Reducing Social Isolation and Promoting Men's Health

Steve Hoover, PHD  
Bob Bache, MD  
Sue Fust, MPH, PhD

Minnesota Gerontological Society  
Conference  
March 21, 2023

1



## What are Men's Sheds?

- ▶ Grassroots organizations
- ▶ Promote men's health at the local community level
- ▶ Self-managed by the members themselves
- ▶ A space for older men to participate in meaningful activities with others like themselves

2

## How do Men's Sheds work?

- ▶ They provide a welcoming, supportive and socially inclusive environment
- ▶ Men connect with others to develop new interests and improve the community
- ▶ Men enjoy meeting, camaraderie
- ▶ Men's Sheds address social isolation
- ▶ Outside of traditional health service settings




3

## The Need for Men's Sheds

Men experience poorer health and well-being than other similar demographics.

Men are more likely to have:

- ▶ Poor help-seeking behaviors
- ▶ Desire to be seen as self-sufficient
- ▶ Disinterest in their own health
- ▶ Limited health literacy
- ▶ Disengage with traditional models of health service delivery



4

## Mental Health Issues Related to Social Isolation and Loneliness

- ▶ Loneliness has been associated with higher rates of clinical depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation (Beutel et al., 2017);
- ▶ Social isolation has been associated with an approximately 50% increased risk of developing dementia (Kuijper et al., 2015; Penninkilampi et al., 2018)

While older women report greater loneliness than men, older men who do indicate being lonely are more often depressed and suicidal than women. One factor which appears to mediate is a lack of meaning and purpose in life. (Neville, et al., 2018)

5

## Medical Implications of Social Isolation/Loneliness

- ▶ In addition to mental health issues, it is less well known that social isolation can contribute to the development of medical disease – especially diseases of the heart and vessels.
- ▶ Although the prevalence of cardiovascular diseases (heart disease, stroke, vascular disease) increase with age, they are not necessarily a consequence of aging; instead, they are linked to modifiable risk factors including:
  - ▶ Hypertension
  - ▶ Elevated cholesterol
  - ▶ Diabetes
  - ▶ Cigarette smoking
  - ▶ Sedentary lifestyle
  - ▶ Social isolation/loneliness

6

## Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Coronary Heart Disease and Stroke

- ▶ Poor social relationships were associated with a 29% increase in risk of coronary heart disease and a 32% increase in risk of stroke.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ Gené and colleagues<sup>2</sup> found that social isolation (assessed using adapted versions of the Berkman-Syme Social Network Index) increased the risk of heart failure hospitalization in individuals free of heart disease at baseline by 23% after adjusting for traditional risk factors

1. Valtora N et al. Heart 2016; 102:1009-16  
2. Gené CW et al. J Am Heart Assoc. 2022;11:e022907

7

## Loneliness and Health Indicators in Middle-Aged and Older Females and Males

- ▶ Crespo-Sanmiguel<sup>1</sup> found that loneliness is associated with worse subjective health in men than in women
- ▶ Subjective health is an important measure because it predicts the evolution of health and life expectancy as well as or even better than objective health examinations
- ▶ Males appeared to be more vulnerable to loneliness and so could especially benefit from prevention strategies to avoid adverse health outcomes

1. Crespo-Sanmiguel et al. Front Behav Neurosci. 2022;16:80973310

8

## Effects of life events and social isolation on stroke and coronary heart disease



Gronewold J. Effects of Life Events and Social Isolation on Stroke and Coronary Heart Disease. Stroke; 2021; 52: 735-747

9

## Why is the medical risk of social isolation not better appreciated by physicians?

- ▶ Most research is reported in the psychological, psychiatric or social sciences literature that is not seen by practicing physicians
- ▶ Unlike other commonly measured risk factors, social isolation/loneliness are difficult to quantitate
- ▶ No ready prescriptions are available for treatment

10

## Men's Sheds Started in Australia

- ▶ First Men's Shed started 1978
- ▶ By 90's, Men's Sheds spread across Australia
- ▶ 2003, Australian government recognized Men's Sheds
- ▶ There are now 2,000+ local Men's Sheds in 13 countries worldwide



11

## U Of M Pilot Study

- ▶ A needs assessment was conducted with a grant from the University of Minnesota in order to:
  - ▶ Determine the needs of senior men for socialization opportunities in rural communities and counties
  - ▶ Determine the interest in forming Men's Sheds local groups
  - ▶ Obtain lists of local contacts
  - ▶ Obtain information about how best to market local Sheds
  - ▶ Understand the barriers and challenges facing senior men in rural communities

This initiative received financial support from the National Institute of Health via the University of Minnesota's Clinical and Translational Science Institute.

12

## Results of Needs Assessment

21 community experts from 7 rural counties participated

**Results:**

- Positive responses to the idea of establishing local Men's Sheds
- Beliefs that there were benefits for both the men and their communities
- Finding the ways and means to interest men will be challenging
- Barriers to participation will need to be thoughtfully addressed
- Finding leaders to volunteer, particularly male leaders, will be important.

13

## Minnesota Men's Sheds History

Established in 2020  
Became a nonprofit organization in 2022

- ▶ 10 Registered Men's Sheds
  - ▶ Hopkins MN
  - ▶ Mound
  - ▶ Madison
  - ▶ Roseville
  - ▶ Crystal
  - ▶ Waseca
  - ▶ St. Cloud
  - ▶ Minnetonka
  - ▶ Duluth
  - ▶ Spring Park



14

## What Makes Men's Sheds Work?



- ▶ Regular, meaningful male-specific gatherings
- ▶ Men helping men
- ▶ Participation enhance health and well-being
  - ▶ Camaraderie
  - ▶ Purpose
  - ▶ Self-respect

15

## What do Men do at Men's Sheds?



- ▶ The purpose is to connect with each other while doing something fun or interesting together
- ▶ Activity Types:
  - ▶ Community Service
  - ▶ Speakers
  - ▶ Field Trips

16

## How are activities chosen?

- ▶ Members choose what activities they want to do
- ▶ Most types of activities can be done in any type of a sponsor's meeting space or within the community

The ideas come from all over.

- ▶ Sponsor's Ideas
- ▶ Local charities
- ▶ Working across generations
- ▶ City Public Works
- ▶ BUT most of all, they come from the men



17

## Examples of Men's Sheds Activities



- ▶ Share a member's hobby
- ▶ Share members military service experiences
- ▶ Visit local businesses to see what they do
- ▶ Visit local Fire Department or police departments
- ▶ Do volunteering at a local community organization
- ▶ Do a fun class or learning activity together

18

## Men's Sheds is a Therapeutic Model

- ▶ A whole array of health benefits
- ▶ An alternative healthcare strategy for men's health and well-being
- ▶ Works using "Health by Stealth"
- ▶ Intergenerational Bluebird House Construction



19

## How To Start a Men's Shed?

1. **Find a Shed Sponsor** with space to hold meetings
2. **Find Supporters and Members** who could work together to help promote and start a local Men's Shed
3. **Schedule and Hold an Informational Meeting** at the Sponsor's location
4. **Shed Members start** to Meet regularly
5. **Register your new Men's Shed** with Minnesota Men's Sheds

*For assistance in progressing through these steps, contact us at [mnmenssheds@gmail.com](mailto:mnmenssheds@gmail.com)*



20

Any Questions?

Conference Planned for Fall 2023  
Sign-up to get on contact list at:

[mnmenssheds@gmail.com](mailto:mnmenssheds@gmail.com)

21