

Have your say on the Men's Health Strategy

A guide for **professionals** completing the consultation survey

We want as many practitioners with experience of working with fathers as possible, to have their say directly on the Men's Health Strategy.

You'll each have your own personal perspectives on this subject, and it's important that you answer the survey questions in your own way, drawing on your personal experience.

In this guide, our aim is to encourage you to **approach the consultation with fatherhood in mind**, even if the focus of your work is wider than this.

Fatherhood and health

Research shows that fatherhood affects, and is affected by, men's health – but the NHS currently misses opportunities to acknowledge it.

Our evidence reviews [Who's the bloke in the room?](#) and [Bringing baby home](#), and the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel report [The myth of invisible men](#) (for which we contributed background evidence), highlighted clearly the 'dad-shaped hole' in antenatal, postnatal and other key health systems.

Our [Looking out for dad campaign](#) identifies some key ideas for what a father-inclusive health system could include:

- An NHS health check for all new fathers
- Routine collection and use of fathers' contact details, to invite them to appointments
- Linking of fathers' and children's health records, so it's easy for services to share information and take a holistic view of the family

- Stronger requirements around practitioner skills and training, to make sure they know about fathers' impacts, and are confident at engaging with them
- Basic engagement with all expectant/new fathers:
 - Inviting and welcoming them when they attend antenatal and postnatal appointments, scans and the birth
 - Asking them how they are, and if they have any questions
 - Providing them with a nationally agreed information pack to help them understand their roles and impacts as a father
 - Asking about their health, running basic tests (e.g. blood pressure), and signposting or referring them to other support (e.g. for their mental health, if they're struggling), if required.

Developing a 'father pathway'

Taken together, these changes would add up to a clear 'father pathway' for the NHS to engage better with the large proportion of men who become dads.

Currently, the systems that could support all of us through the transition to parenthood are designed only to help women through pregnancy, childbirth, and the postnatal period. Services don't see the father as their patient, or even, sometimes, as an important parent in his own right – a central figure in a child's life, whose health matters and has impacts on those who need and love him.

Especially if combined with a better statutory paternity offer (see our [six weeks for dads campaign](#) for more on this), ideally including paid time off to attend health appointments in the antenatal and postnatal period (both to support the mother and to receive the 'new dad' health check), a 'father pathway' would leave men in no doubt that the state valued and cared for them, and their roles as dads.

And beyond perinatal services, framing men's health provision in ways that recognised their parental roles could:

- Boost their motivation to attend, and to look after their health
- Keep children safer, by flagging the small minority of dads whose mental health and/or behaviours might pose serious risk

Completing the survey

You can read the Government's call for evidence [here](#).



Here's the link to the [survey](#) itself.

Depending on how much detail you want to give in your answers, we estimate that for most people the survey should take about 10-15 minutes. As you go along, you'll see a bar along the top of the page, to show how far you've got in the survey. You can save your answers and come back to the survey later.

The first few pages ask for some brief details about you and your professional role. On the 'Education and training' page there's a question about the extent to which you have the skills to engage with men effectively about their health.

Below we've suggested **places in the survey where you could consider wearing a 'fatherhood hat'** when writing your answers.

Survey question: 'Men's health topics'

Here you can choose up to five topics that you think are most important for the Men's Health Strategy to consider.

Most of the topics listed are health conditions. These may or may not be relevant to your work and/or personal experience. You could choose on that basis, or based on what you think are the most important issues men face.

Fatherhood is listed as a topic, and the more people choose this, the more likely we are to be able to push for the strategy to have a strong focus on improving services for dads.

There are other, non-health-condition topics you could consider choosing, which could also support the argument for a better 'father pathway':

- **Access to services**

Why? Many fathers report feeling ignored or sidelined within antenatal and postnatal care

- **Training and education for healthcare professionals**
Why? Many professionals report lacking the skills to engage with men/fathers
- **Research and data**
Why? When data is not systematically collected from or about fathers, knowledge is missed about services' engagement with fathers; about their characteristics and behaviours; and about their impacts
- **Masculinity**
Why? Ideas about men's roles, beliefs and attitudes may inform men's – and health professionals' – behaviours. They might make negative assumptions about men resisting help or not being open to talk about their feelings, for example, rather than seeing it as their role to provide services that are inclusive of men

Survey question: 'Improving support for healthier behaviours'

On this page there is an open text box asking for suggestions for how to make it easier for men and boys to engage in healthier behaviours.

Here you could reflect on whether health professionals focus enough on supporting men in the antenatal and postnatal period – inviting them to appointments, asking them how they are, and providing information designed to help them be the best dad they can be.

Drawing on your own experience, knowledge and training – and our ideas – you could make the case that a well-designed 'father pathway' has the potential to:

- Nudge new fathers to think about and improve their own physical and mental health, and understand how their own health and own direct relationship with the baby impacts on the child, and the mother
- Do a better job of supporting mothers to make healthy choices. For example, whether the father smokes is known to be a strong factor in mothers quitting successfully
- 'Check in' on the father's mental health and wellbeing from the point of view of making sure they're in a 'good place' and a 'safe

pair of hands' in terms of hands-on parenting, at what can be a challenging, stressful time for both parents

- Include the father in explanations about bonding and attachment, and advice about caregiving and baby safety - and help him understand key roles, like breastfeeding supporter, first aid provider and advocate for the mother's health (including, for example, around postnatal mental health)

Survey question: 'What actions should the strategy take to address the greatest health challenges affecting men and boys?'

This question is aimed at identifying ways of addressing the main health challenges facing men and boys – the health conditions that affect them most. The Government's survey introduction lists many of these, including cancer, cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes and suicide.

Here, again, you could think about answering this with your 'fatherhood hat' on. Might a 'new dad health check' help men who smoke, drink too much or eat unhealthily adopt healthier lifestyles – or help identify men whose mental health takes a dip during the early months of fatherhood, for example?

Survey question: 'What suggestions do you have for how to better support men with health conditions in the workplace?'

Here, with your 'fatherhood hat' on, you could suggest some ways employers can do a good or bad job of taking men's fatherhood into account, in your judgement. Here are some ideas you could think about:

- Paternity leave and time off to attend health appointments (see our [six weeks for dads campaign](#)). Are they long enough, easy to take and paid? If they were better, might this lead more fathers to access healthcare services?
- Training for line managers, to help them be more supportive of men's roles as fathers. Do they see flexible working, parental leave and last-minute time off for caregiving as being for female rather than male staff? If this changed, might men feel 'safer' to ask for a

better work-life balance? Might this reduce their stress levels, and also give them more time to look after their health?

- Dads' networks and role modelling of leave-taking and flexibility by senior male staff. Might these help change the culture – and make it more acceptable for men to 'own' their work/life juggle, and attend appointments?
- Targeted campaigns to promote access to mental health and other health support by male staff. Do these happen enough? Might they raise awareness of key health conditions, and encourage more men to get themselves checked?

Maybe you think health providers offering more appointments in the evenings or weekends could help more men look after their health – in which case, you could suggest that.

Survey question: 'What actions do you think should be taken to improve how men can access and engage with healthcare services?'

Here you may already have your own ideas. If you've received [training](#) from the Fatherhood Institute, or accessed our [resources](#), you could draw on these to argue for changes in how our health systems are designed and delivered.

For example, you could suggest that the Government should introduce an NHS health checks for all new fathers – a targeted opportunity to 'pull dads in' to the NHS at a key life transition point, rather than leaving them on the sidelines. You could also mention some of the ideas we highlighted for the 'workplace question' above.

You may think that services for fathers will only improve if there is targeted funding to support service redesign, improved workforce capacity and training. If so, you could say that.

Perhaps you'd like to see Fatherhood Champions in every local authority, and audits of fathers' use of services, to help create a more father-inclusive culture? If so, say this.

Survey question: 'What actions do you think should be taken to improve men and boys' experience of healthcare services?'

Again, drawing on your expertise, and our work, you could suggest key approaches that might help improve men's experience of services by capitalising on their fatherhood. Examples might be:

- Providing high quality information for all new fathers, to make sure that whatever their background, and wherever they live, they receive the same important messages about their own and their loved ones' health
- Collecting and sharing routine data from and about fathers, and linking their health records with their children's, so it's easy for services to share information and take a holistic view of the family
- Providing training to health professionals to improve their communication with men and fathers

As above, you may think that fathers' experience will only improve if there is targeted funding to support service redesign, improved workforce capacity and training. If so, say this.

As above, perhaps you'd like to see Fatherhood Champions in every local authority, and audits of fathers' use of services, to help create a more father-inclusive culture? If so, say this.

Survey question: 'Data, research, and other reports'

As a professional, you are allowed to upload up to three Word documents (of up to 10 pages each), relating to:

- Understanding and identifying areas where we can improve support for healthier behaviours
- Improving outcomes for health conditions that typically, disproportionately or differently affect men
- Improving men's access, engagement and experience of the health service

You may have your own reports to upload. We've created one that summarises our ideas for a 'father pathway', including the 'new dad health check'. You can download it [here](#).

Once you've finished...

We hope you've found this guide useful. If you'd like to support the [Looking out for dad campaign](#) further, here are some other actions you could take:

1. Sign our [open letter to Wes Streeting](#). We'll be handing this over in early July, along with our organisational response to the Men's Health Strategy consultation
2. Complete our [practitioner survey](#). We'll be pulling together key data from this in our organisational response to the MHS consultation
3. [Donate](#), become a [Fatherhood Institute supporter](#), or buy from our [shop](#), to support our campaigns