

Review Article

Australian Men's Sheds and Their Role in the Health and Wellbeing of Men: A Systematic Review

Michael S. Barbagallo ¹, Sara Brito ² and Joanne E. Porter ¹

¹Collaborative Evaluation & Research Group (CERG), Institute of Health and Wellbeing, Federation University Australia, Churchill, Victoria, Australia

²Institute of Health and Wellbeing, Federation University Australia, Churchill, Victoria, Australia

Correspondence should be addressed to Michael S. Barbagallo; m.barbagallo@federation.edu.au

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Men's sheds are a community-based organisation that allows a space for a community of men to interact and engage with one another with hands-on activities. As such, men's sheds form an appropriate setting to deliver health and wellbeing initiatives. This review aims to understand the role of Australian men's sheds with respect to the health and wellbeing of their male participants. This review was conducted in accordance with the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analysis (PRISMA) following a three-step process of planning, conducting, and reporting the review. All three authors reviewed all the eligible articles. There was significant methodological heterogeneity between the sources identified ($n = 11$). A narrative synthesis identified three key themes: health promotion, wellbeing, and socialisation; intergenerational mentoring; and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men's health. Men's sheds serve as ideal locations for the delivery of initiatives that can positively impact on the health and wellbeing of their male participants. Furthermore, research is needed to explore the implementation and evaluation of these health and wellbeing initiatives for men in their respective communities.

1. Introduction

Globally, men have worse health outcomes and a shorter life expectancy than women [1, 2]. While some of this is due in part to biology, the main causes are commonly attributed to higher risk-taking behaviours and under-utilisation of health services [1]. Australia has committed to improve health outcomes for men and boys with its release of the National Men's Health Strategy: 2020–2030 with the commitment of \$19.7 million over this time [3]. This strategy outlines key principles for action which include male-centred information programs and services, transparency and accountability, building on existing services and programs, focusing on prevention, and acknowledging the way that gender influences health [3].

As men's attitudes to health and health seeking behaviours are different from women [4, 5], it is important that services and initiatives aimed at men take this into account.

One such initiative are men's sheds. Men's sheds have been a worldwide initiative beginning in the 1990s with sheds now hosted in Australia, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Denmark, the UK, the United States, Canada, and New Zealand. However, little data have been reported from these locations with the predominance of literature stemming from Australia and to a lesser extent Ireland [6]. Australia's National Men's Health Strategy 2020–2030 [3] identified men's sheds as an appropriate setting to deliver health outreach programs. Men's sheds are community-based organisations with an aim to improve health and wellbeing by providing opportunity for meaningful participation [7]. Men's sheds are primarily used by older men in rural areas [8]. They provide the opportunity for hands-on activities (e.g., woodwork or metal working) and are named as such because they frequently meet in a shed or workshop [8]. Through a range of social (e.g., billiards, cards, and movies) and health-related (e.g., walking, health talks, etc.) activities for members to

participate in, men's sheds provide social connection [9] and a sense of belonging and mateship [8]. In a study and report written for Beyond Blue, Flood et al. [9] found that there were both direct (health promotion education) and indirect (social connection, sense of purpose, and increase of help-seeking behaviour) opportunities for improving men's health and well-being. Kelly et al. [10] proposed a model that outlined how men's sheds improved social well-being. Kelly et al. [11] went on to further develop this model and demonstrated how men's sheds positively impact users' health behaviours and attitudes (e.g., health-seeking behaviours, personal health management, and increased capacity to overcome illness and injury).

Previous reviews of men's sheds explored their role in reducing social isolation and promoting men's health and well-being [12] and older men and social activity [13]. Wilson and Cordier [12] reported that the studies they reviewed did not adequately identify what variables constituted best practice in men's sheds and the studies were mostly descriptive surveys or small qualitative. Milligan et al. [13] conducted a scoping review of gendered health interventions (including men's sheds) but was unable to conclude they conferred the desired health and well-being benefits to older men. They were able to identify some key factors that were common to successful interventions including accessibility, having a range of activities, local support, and skilled coordination. This review aims to understand the role of Australian men's sheds with respect to the health and wellbeing of their male participants. This will further develop the concept of how men's sheds are linked to health and wellbeing in the literature.

2. Method

2.1. Study Design. This literature review follows the guidelines of a systematic review encompassing a rigorous review of a specific research topic. The overarching aim of this systematic process is to develop evidence-based guidelines [14]. This review has followed a three-step process as detailed previously by [15]. This rigorous three-step process involved planning and designing the review, developing the search strategy and conducting the review, and finally extracting the data and reporting the review. In addition, this systematic literature review also followed the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA) process as described by [16].

2.2. Search Strategy. A total of six EBSCO host databases were used; Academic Search Complete, Australian/New Zealand Reference Centre, CINAHL Complete, MEDLINE, APA PsycINFO, and APA Psyc articles. Databases were searched using a Boolean search strategy, in which key concepts and their variations were entered into the databases. The search was collectively devised by all authors. The search terms used were "men's shed" and "Australia*" and "well*" and "health*." The term "men's shed" refers to the "brand" of community-based, non-commercial organisations open to men to foster safe,

friendly, and inclusive environments for men to meet and work on projects together. This is vastly different to the term "men's club" or "working for men's club" which often were instigated solely for recreational and/or educational purposes. The search engine, Google Scholar, was used to extract articles detected from manual checking of the reference lists of any of the included papers.

2.3. Screening and Eligibility. After duplicates were removed, papers were screened based on full-text screening. Papers were only included if they were a full-text peer-reviewed publication in English and published from 2012 to May 20, 2022. Papers were excluded where the sole foci were on individual events, program characteristics, and papers exploring the impact of men's sheds from the partners or wife's perspective. Articles with a single focus on the perspectives of men's shed facilitators were also excluded due to the nature of the review being solely focused on the male participants. The remaining full-text papers were independently assessed for their eligibility, in which all three researchers read through each paper to determine their compatibility with the search criteria. All study designs were considered for the purposes of the review if they were peer-reviewed original articles. The final data set only included original research articles, thus excluding other literature such as systematic reviews, protocols, editorials, or commentaries. Grey literature was excluded from the review. All three authors approved the final set of articles included in this review.

2.4. Quality Appraisal. The final papers underwent a quality assessment to assess their rigor. The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) tool was implemented to critique the quality of the studies [17]. The CASP checklists were used to evaluate the methodology and validity of the research results, with papers scoring 80% or more included in the review, resulting in 11 articles (Table 1). The quality appraisal process was independently completed by all three authors with consensus achieved via discussion.

2.5. Data Extraction. A data summary table was created by the authors to extract the data from the articles selected for the review. All three authors collectively determined that the following data should be extracted: author, year and country, design, purpose, study population, location, method or intervention, and key findings. Extraction of the data was conducted by all three authors independently with discussion to achieve consensus of the data, with all authors having reviewed the final summary table to verify its accuracy and completeness. The authors extracted the key findings of each study verbatim and conducted a narrative synthesis of the findings to provide a summary of the data. Table 1 depicts the data summary. To provide a narrative account of the results, the authors familiarised themselves with the data and revisited the research objectives. The main qualitative and quantitative findings from each article were grouped into three domains. These domains were inductively developed

TABLE 1: Summary of literature.

No.	Author, year, and country	Design	Purpose	Sample/population	Location	Method/intervention	Findings
1	Cox, Hoang, Barnett, Cross, (2020), Australia	Qualitative	Investigated how a cohort of Aboriginal men consider the value of shed participation	A total of 10 Aboriginal men from a single men's shed	Rural	Semistructured interviews	Four themes; belonging, hope mentoring, and shared illness experiences Shed participation is associated with positive health benefits and are useful sites for health promotion activities
2	Ford, Scholz, & Lu, (2015), Australia	Quantitative	Examined health benefits of men's sheds through the lens of social identity theory	A total of 322 men's shed's users in Australia	Mixed	Survey of four quality of life domains and their willingness to take health advice offered at sheds regarding physical, psychological, environmental, and social indicators	Significant improvements in mental health. No significant change in physical health and generativity learning together through a relational and practical routine was observed
3	Mahoney, Wilson, Buchanan, Milbourn, Hoey & Cordier, (2020), Australia	Mixed methods	The experiences of the older mentors from men's sheds working with young adult men in an intergenerational program	16 mentors (older men)	Mixed	Mentees paired with a men's shed mentor and attended the shed at least once per week over 6 months. Case managers are present for graded support	A positive impact on the mentees and their families was reported, including opportunities for social interaction, skill development, knowledge, validation, and self-belief Key health issues were mainly age-related chronic conditions with the regular medical practitioner remaining the preference to receive health information. Knowledge of reproductive and psychological health was lacking. Hands-on or kinaesthetic approaches to information was preferred Mentor attitude towards the mentee's, freedom to make independent choices and the nature and perceived usefulness of the project were considered the most significant characteristics of these programs
4	Milbourn, Mahoney, Trimboli, Hoey, Cordier, Buchanan & Wilson, (2020), Australia	Qualitative	The experiences and occupational wellbeing of young adult men with intellectual disability in an intergenerational men's she program	8 mentees (young men with intellectual disabilities) 5 parents of mentees	Urban	Mentees paired with a men's shed mentor and attended the shed at least once per week over 6 months. Case managers are present for graded support. Interviews with mentees and parents	
5	Misan, Oosterbroek & Wilson, (2017), Australia	Quantitative	Explore the health concerns, interests, help-seeking, and health-seeking behaviours and the preferences for receipt of such information	11 men's sheds 154 men's shed members	Rural	Survey	
6	Rahja, Newton Scanlan, Wilson, & Cordier, (2016), Australia	Qualitative	Provide insight into the outcomes of a mentoring program comparing characteristics of different programs as beneficial for a young male's transition into adulthood	Sample 4 young people and 18 men who were mentors and members of the men's shed	Urban	Interviews and case study descriptions	

TABLE 1: Continued.

No.	Author, year, and country	Design	Purpose	Sample/population	Location	Method/intervention	Findings
7	Southcombe, Cavanagh, & Bartram, (2015a), Australia	Qualitative	Investigation into capacity building at the community level in aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men's groups and sheds	A total of 45 men from urban, regional and remote communities from 15 groups/sheds	Mixed	Yarning circles focus groups, semistructured interview technique	Capacity building results in better health outcomes and educates and empowers men to improve their social, cultural emotional and economic well-being. It helps men better connect with family and community Links between charismatic leadership and social connectiveness and well-being. Overall, the study found that charismatic leadership, value congruence, and social connectiveness contribute to the social and emotional well-being of men The program presents a great "opportunity" and pose a viable option to support young people with intellectual disabilities
8	Southcombe, Cavanagh, & Bartram, (2015b), Australia	Qualitative	Investigate the influence of charismatic leadership on social connectiveness or retired men	A total of 305 men from 60 men's sheds in urban and regional areas across every state and territory of Australia	Mixed	Focus groups (yarning circles) semistructured interviews with shed leaders, men members, and healthcare workers	Men's sheds are 37% "active" in health promotion and 70% "active" in social inclusivity across Australia
9	Wilson, Cordier, Ciccarelli, MacCallum, Milbourn, Vaz, Joosten, Buchanan, McAuliffe & Stancliffe, (2018), Australia	Mixed methods	Feasibility study of intergenerational mentoring program in men's sheds for young adult males with intellectual disabilities	5 mentees (young men with intellectual disabilities) 12 mentors (older men)	Urban	Mentees paired with two men's shed mentors and attended the shed at least once per week (2 hrs) over 10-week period International men's shed survey of health promotion and social activities undertaken in the men's sheds across Australia	Improved community connection and quality of life was observed in the mentees There was no significant difference in the loneliness, wellbeing, or workplace adjustments of the mentees
10	Wilson, Cordier, Parsons, Vaz & Ciccarelli (2019), Australia	Quantitative	Explore the social inclusion and health promotion activities in men's sheds	305 men's sheds	Mixed		
11	Wilson, Cordier, Milbourn, Mahoney, Hoey & Buchanan, (2020), Australia	Quantitative	Explore the outcomes of intergenerational mentors in men's sheds for young adult men with intellectual disabilities	18 mentees (young men with intellectual disabilities)	Mixed	Mentees paired with a men's shed mentor and attended the shed at least once per week over 6 months. Case managers present for graded support	

from the findings of the review. The lead author collated the information into the three domains, providing a comparison between the relevant studies. All authors reviewed the domains and findings prior to summarising and reporting the results.

3. Results

3.1. Article Characteristics. From the initial database search, a total of 52 citations were screened as shown in the PRISMA flow chart (Figure 1). Following a systematic process, 11 articles were identified and included in this review. All studies were conducted in Australia ($n = 11$) in a mixture of rural ($n = 2$), mixed ($n = 6$), and urban ($n = 3$) areas. There was a mixture of quantitative studies ($n = 4$), mixed methods studies ($n = 2$), and qualitative studies ($n = 5$) included. The papers published ranged in date from 2014 to 2020. Following the narrative synthesis, three key themes were identified: health promotion, wellbeing, and socialisation; intergenerational mentoring; and indigenous men's health. These themes were iteratively developed using an inductive approach, in which general consensus of the themes was achieved through discussion.

3.2. Health Promotion, Wellbeing, and Socialisation. One of the key benefits to men's health and wellbeing comes from the social aspect of the men's shed. Wilson et al. [26] reported that some 37% of Australian men's sheds were considered "active" in health promotion activity with 70% reporting that they were active in inclusive social environments. As such, these findings showed that men's sheds were actively supporting members with mental illness, members of indigenous backgrounds, supporting veterans of war and providing healthy meal options, as well as providing spaces for men with disabilities and men whose primary language was not English. Further to these findings, Misan et al. [22] report that while Australian men's sheds primarily support older, retired men from lesser educated backgrounds or lower socioeconomic groups, their health concerns are predominantly age-related chronic conditions as well as reproductive and psychological health. Data from this report suggested that the male participants preferred not to receive health-related information via seminars or internet-based sources, but rather the participants preferred information to be received in a hands-on or kinaesthetic mode [22].

Socialisation and social identity are also considered a key outcome of men's sheds in Australia [19]. As such, these indicators serve an important role in the prediction of physical health, psychological health, social and environmental relationships, quality of life indicators, and a willingness to accept health advice [19]. Furthermore, to these findings, Southcombe et al. [25] highlight the role of a charismatic shed leader in the strengthening of the social connectedness of the members with an overall enhancement in the wellbeing of its members. Southcombe et al. [24] suggest that a leader that is empowering and empathetic can facilitate the positive environment for members to feel a sense of belonging and overall wellbeing.

Wilson et al. [27] stated that the key driving force for men's sheds to provide health promotion or social inclusion activities remains unclear and that this is perhaps a relationship between the perceived need to the shed members and the initiatives available and supported in the area. As such, Wilson et al. [27] reported that shed where higher memberships were observed displayed two-fold levels of health promotion activities. Of these health promotion activities, the key enabling forces reported in the literature included the use of inclusive imagery that encapsulates both an ingroup tie with members of the shed as well as a centrality or positive health focus for the members [19]. Other enabling factors include the preferred learning mode of the shed members. Misan et al. [22] reported that hands on or kinaesthetic learning modes were predominantly (84%) preferred by members for receiving health information material. Finally, one of the key barriers to access to the men's shed and the associated health, wellbeing, and socialisation initiatives offered was reported by Wilson et al. [26]. Wilson et al. (2018) reported that men's sheds that provided both meals and transportation to and from the shed location were two-fold more successful in health promotion initiatives.

3.3. Intergenerational Mentoring. A key theme from the literature is the intergenerational mentoring opportunity men's sheds play. An exploratory study conducted by Rahja et al. [23] explores the perceptions of such a program that enabled young men transitioning into adulthood to be mentored by a men's shed participant. Further to these findings, a feasibility study conducted by Wilson et al. [26] suggested that an intergenerational mentoring program between the men's shed participants and youth with intellectual disabilities provided a significant opportunity for creating social networks for the youth and a positive experience for both mentees and mentors. The findings of these two studies suggested that intergenerational mentoring programs between young people and men's shed participants can be viable. These studies also identified further considerations for future mentoring inclusion but should ensure that selected mentors possess suitable interpersonal skills or engage in suitable training, enabling enough time for mentor-mentee interactions, and the program allows for shared decision-making opportunities [23, 27].

Furthermore, a small yet growing body of literature exploring the outcomes of intergenerational mentoring programs with young adult males with intellectual disabilities has since emerged. Mahoney et al. [20] examined the outcomes for men's shed mentors of such a program. While there was no significant change in the physical health and generativity of the older men, significant improvements in their mental health scores were reported [20]. Through this bonding process, the men also reported mutual learning and development opportunities allowing them to observe noticeable improvements in mentee skill development and confidence levels [20]. Mentees and their families reported the positive impacts of the program with increases reported in occupational wellbeing, socialisation, skill development, knowledge, and self-confidence [21, 28].

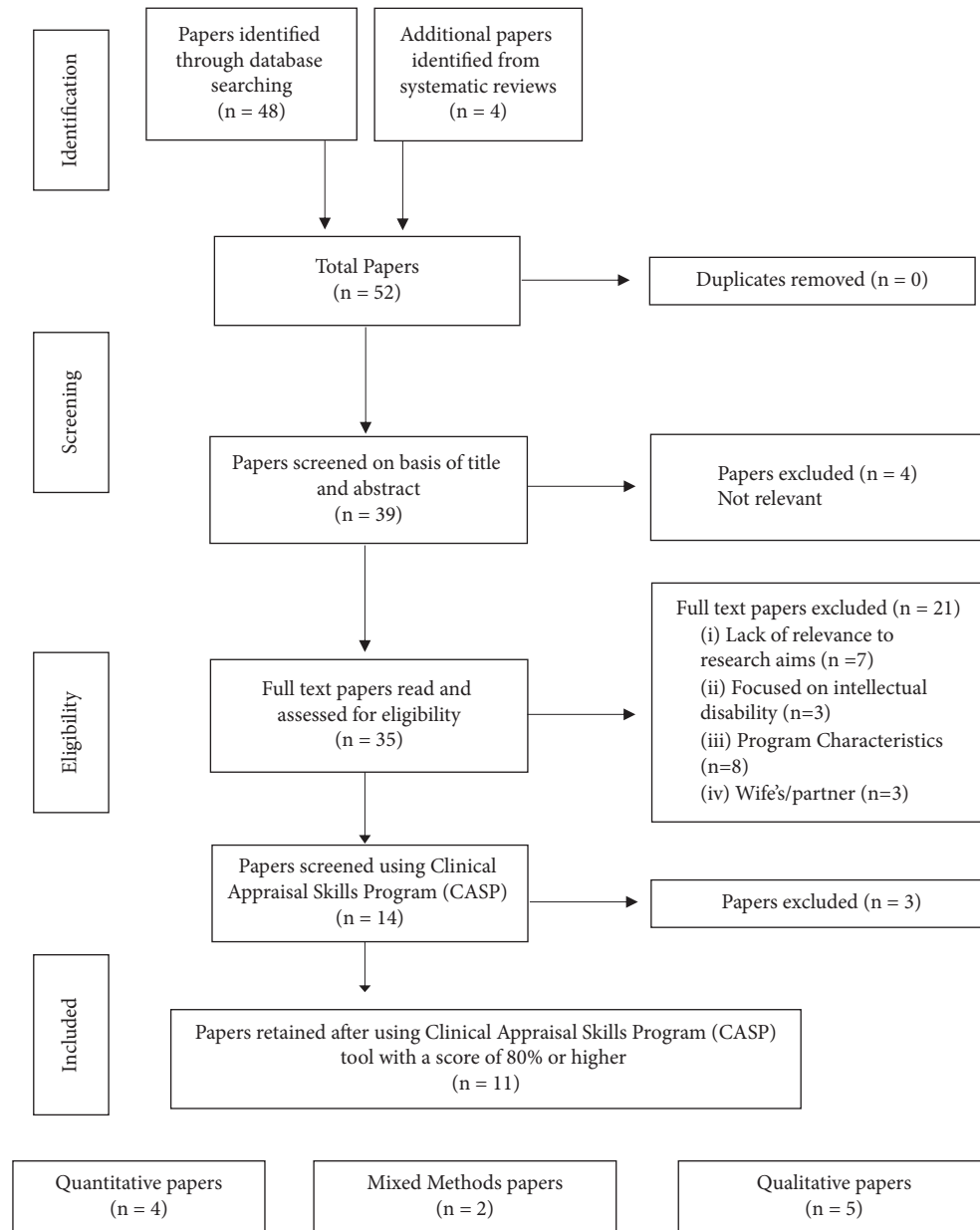


FIGURE 1: Search strategy.

3.4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Men's Health. The literature also reported on the role of Australian men's sheds play in the health and wellbeing of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. Southcombe et al. [24] reported that indigenous men need to connect and engage with men's sheds as these may provide spaces for such men to seek support for issues they face, much of which is not supported well or at all in the wider community. In doing so, men's sheds leaders need to strengthen relationships and capacity build to gain the support of government and nongovernment services, which in turn have the ability to improve health and empower them with the tools to seek better social, cultural, emotional, and economic wellbeing status. Cox et al. [18] and Southcombe et al. [24] further reported that men's sheds provide indigenous men

a therapeutic landscape where a sense of hope, belonging as well as the opportunities of mentoring and the ability to share illness experience are observed. Despite their age and decline in physical health, participants report that the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men in the Australian men's sheds improved their social, emotional, and physical wellbeing [18].

Southcombe et al. [24] reported that indigenous men associated with a men's shed often had better linkages with government services. Such services included a range of housing, unemployment and pensioner payments, public healthcare, family and community services, addiction services, child support, financial planning, mental health, legal aid, and transport as well as probation and parole services. These strong linkages and connections between men's sheds

and the service providers foster a holistic approach to health and wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men that may otherwise be more difficult to connect with independently [24]. Wilson et al. [26] further support this, stating that men's sheds with members of a marginalised group are at least 1.5 times more liable to conduct health promotion and social inclusion activities. In particular, Wilson et al. [26] further describe that men's shed with significantly higher proportions of either indigenous Australians, veterans, or members with poor mental health were particularly more active (2.5 times higher) in health and social inclusion activities. Further data suggested that the more regional or remote men's shed is, the more likely the membership will consist of or target the inclusion of indigenous people [26]. Importantly, none of the remaining studies included any data pertaining to the health and wellbeing nor the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men.

4. Discussion

Grouping the studies by intended purpose allowed for easier comparison of the outcome measures used. One study used 17 different outcome measures [26], four studies used a quality-of-life measure [19, 20, 22, 26], and the remaining seven of the studies used qualitative methodology (utilizing focus group or interviews) to gather data [18–21, 23–25]. Two of the studies [27, 28], that measured outcomes of intergenerational mentor initiatives in men's sheds, used the Becker Work Adjustment Profile (WAP-2) [29], the comprehensive quality of life scale-intellectual disability (ComQol-I5) [30], and the modified work loneliness questionnaire (MWLQ) [31]. The use of men's sheds to conduct such a variety of studies indicates that potentially, there is a versatility of men's sheds to adapt and respond to the needs and contexts of the location in which they operate. While this reflexivity to respond to the needs of the community in which they operate is an asset, it does make identifying key contributions to health and wellbeing and the subsequent measuring of such interventions challenging.

A deeper understanding of the relationships between men's social connections and networks and their health and wellbeing is still needed [32]. Previous research by McKenzie et al. [32] on masculinity, social connectedness, and mental health described that men tend to connect socially with other men during socially recognized, masculine activities. Men's sheds are one such location where socially recognised masculine activities occur. When reviewing current published literature exploring topics relevant to men's sheds, the concept of social prescribing emerged. Social prescribing involves helping patients improve their health, wellbeing, and social welfare by connecting them to community services which might be run by the council or a local charity to address patient-centred goals [33]. Men's sheds are one such community-based resource. It was therefore not surprising that a recent systematic review on the effectiveness of social prescribing found similar limitations in studies reporting outcomes of social prescribing [33]. Cooper et al. [33]

recommended a more systematic approach to better describe the interventions but also to allow for improved conceptualisation of the purpose and reasoning for their prescription. Future research in men's sheds would also benefit from the consideration of this framework and other theoretically sound theories and evidence.

One interesting aspect being explored in the literature has been the role of men's sheds play in intergenerational mentoring programs. As reported in this review, the outcomes for both men's shed mentors and their younger mentees saw improved mental health scores as well as the provision of mutual learning and engagement opportunities that saw improvements in mentee skill and confidence levels [20, 21, 28]. Intergenerational mentoring is well supported throughout other areas, not just men's sheds, with the data extracted here being not dissimilar to other reports that have observed positive outcomes for youth mentees [34]. Similarly, older adults have remarkable improvements noted in digital literacy skills, decreasing their anxiety and increasing their confidence with such skills [35]. Pruett [36] suggests that the workforce is becoming a much more multigenerational landscape with many organisations failing to adopt mentorship programs to facilitate the transfer of knowledge from one generation to the next. As such, resulting gaps in employment sectors, leadership positions, and skill loss become predominant issues for such organisations [36]. Furthermore, the intersectionality of leadership and spirituality through intergenerational mentorship also allows the development of such traits of empathy and self-awareness for mentees as well as a feeling of connectedness for both mentees and mentors alike [37]. Further work on the role men's sheds can play in the space of intergenerational mentoring could pave positive outcomes for both youth and the older men alike.

This review has highlighted the dearth nature of the literature surrounding the role of men's sheds play in the health and wellbeing of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. Men's sheds are well placed to provide a therapeutic landscape where a sense of hope, belonging as well as opportunities for mentoring and the ability to share illness experience can occur [18, 24, 26]. A body of literature supporting the mental health promotion initiatives of indigenous children around the world is prominent [38], as is a body of work exploring health promotion for indigenous Australian women [39]. Yet indigenous Australian men still have some of the worst health outcomes compared to both their nonmale counterparts let alone their nonindigenous ones [40]. Regardless of this, governments continue to recognise the effects colonisation, trauma, and grief play on the health and wellbeing of indigenous men, yet policy is not implemented well or at all [41]. The empowerment of these men through programs such as men's health clinics, men's groups, mentoring programs as well as men's sheds are recognised as being an effective means of improving the health and wellbeing, but they require appropriate funding, the policy as well as culturally and gender-specific responses from the government [42].

5. Limitations of the Studies

Limitations of this review include the use of English language papers only. The majority of the studies had small sample sizes and were part of a mentoring program intervention to measure the impact on both older and younger participants. In addition, the associated impacts on the partners and wives of the male participants were excluded from this review. The lack of consistent use of outcome measures among the studies makes meta-analysis or even comparison of outcomes impossible. Additionally, these studies lacked control groups which potentially opens them to methodological bias. The findings therefore cannot be generalised to the broader population. Three studies focused on the impact of a men's shed with Aboriginal men. The studies were from Australia and only provided an Australian context to this literature review; the findings are therefore not able to be put into a wider international context as there will be cultural and demographic differences that should be explored further. Irrespective of these limitations, this review provides a valuable contribution to an understanding of the key role men's sheds play on the health and wellbeing of men in Australia.

6. Conclusion

This review has established that further research into the role that Australian men's sheds play in the health and wellbeing of their male participants is warranted. The positive psychological and mental benefits of men's sheds have the potential to serve as ideal locations for the delivery of health and wellbeing initiatives targeting the male population. This systematic literature review demonstrates that such initiatives have the positive impacts on the health, wellbeing, and socialisation of the male participants in their respective communities. In addition, added benefits have also been observed with intergeneration mentoring programs as well as the health and wellbeing benefits for Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander male participants of men's sheds. Furthermore, research is still needed to explore the implementation and evaluation of the impact of these health and wellbeing initiatives in Australian men's sheds for their male participants.

What is known about this topic and what this paper adds is as follows:

- (i) Men's sheds are community-based spaces for men to interact and engage with one another with hands-on activities
- (ii) Men's sheds are appropriate settings in which to deliver health and wellbeing initiatives
- (iii) Men's sheds are ideally placed to improve the health, wellbeing, and socialisation of men in regional communities
- (iv) Men's sheds can provide intergenerational mentoring and support the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have accepted responsibility for the entire content of this manuscript and approved its submission. All authors contributed to the data analysis and drafted the manuscript.

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