

**Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission  
Sex Discrimination Commissioner's Listening Tour 2007-2008**



**Issues for Australian Men and Boys:  
A discussion at the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission  
Sydney, 3pm, Monday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2008**

**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Participants:**

**Greg Andresen**

Researcher, Men's Health Australia - [www.menshealthaustralia.net](http://www.menshealthaustralia.net)

Researcher and Presenter, Dads on the Air 2GLF 89.3FM - [www.dadsontheair.net](http://www.dadsontheair.net)

Phone 0403 813 925, email [greg@dadsontheair.net](mailto:greg@dadsontheair.net)

**Micheal Woods**

Senior Lecturer, Men's Health Information & Research Centre - [menshealth.uws.edu.au](http://menshealth.uws.edu.au)

University of Western Sydney

Phone 0414 710 696, email [m.woods@uws.edu.au](mailto:m.woods@uws.edu.au)

**Maggie Hamilton**

Author, Publisher and Media Commentator on social trends - [www.maggiehamilton.org](http://www.maggiehamilton.org)

Author, "What Men Don't Talk About"

Phone 02 8425 0111, email [maggie.hamilton@pacific.net.au](mailto:maggie.hamilton@pacific.net.au)

**Elizabeth Broderick**

Sex Discrimination Commissioner and Commissioner Responsible for Age Discrimination

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

**Cassandra Goldie**

Director, Sex & Age Discrimination Unit

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

**Dr Sarah Squire**

Senior Policy & Research Officer, Sex & Age Discrimination Unit

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

## SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION

The Commissioner started by describing the objectives and methodology of the Listening Tour and assuring us that men's issues and perspectives are important to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC). To date they have run men's and women's focus groups, spoken to men and women at workplaces, unions, business round-tables, academic round-tables, community groups and public consultations, in both city and regional areas. HREOC is looking to make connections and establish relationships with a wide range of men's and women's organisations around Australia during the tour. The themes and issues raised will guide the Commissioner's work over the coming five years.

Overall this was a very productive meeting with all six participants engaging in the discussion. The Commissioner commenced by sharing some of the stories she had heard from men on the Listening Tour so far. The Commissioner and her staff demonstrated their interest and concern for a wide range of issues affecting Australian men and boys. Their equitable stance could be best captured by the Commissioner's statement, "we're working towards true gender equality, not a battle of the sexes". Below is a summary of the points raised by various participants in the 90-minute meeting (for a full record of the meeting please see the Full Report at [http://www.menshealthaustralia.net/files/HREOC\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](http://www.menshealthaustralia.net/files/HREOC_Full_Report.pdf)).

- Men often feel immense pressure as the primary breadwinner, especially in casualised workforces with little job security
- Men often find it harder than women to access flexible work practices to undertake family responsibilities because of restrictive workplace cultures & unequal provisions for men and women
- Women often choose partners because of their earning potential, which adds more pressure to the male role, yet many men work for decades in jobs they dislike to provide for their families
- There is interest in and support for a National Men's Health Policy, particularly among men working in the community sector
- Ante- and post-natal support for fathers is required as standard practice rather than the smattering of ad-hoc services that presently exist
- Family law issues including the new Family Relationship Centres are important to men
- Issues for elderly men include age discrimination in many workplaces and recruitment practices, elder abuse, transport issues, the burden of being a carer, social isolation, and feeling that they are no longer useful to society
- Men are often reluctant to raise their own issues, especially in public forums, often prioritising the needs of their partner and children and the issue of workplace culture
- Society expects men to be strong, independent and uncomplaining, but this means that services need to engage men more effectively as men won't seek out services in the same way women do
- Services for men need to be gender-sensitive to men's needs. For example, using word-of-mouth to advertise the service to the community, explicit masculine naming, an activity-based focus, peer-support and informal education opportunities
- There is a myth that men won't attend services. They will do so when services are provided in an appropriate manner, such as Occupational Health Nurses
- Men often have inadequate emotional and psychological preparation prior to retirement
- The hysteria around child sexual abuse by men stops many men from taking up mentoring, teaching or childcare roles due to the fear of being labelled a pedophile
- There is an opportunity to connect under-fathered children with socially isolated older men

- There is a need for early childhood services to better engage with men and fathers
- Community nurses need to be trained to be more aware of the needs of new fathers
- A national paid parental leave system and quality, affordable childcare are desperately needed by Australian mothers and fathers
- More research is required into how family-friendly work practices can benefit business
- The media should be creatively utilised to help shift unhelpful workplace cultures that see fathers taking time off work to care for their children as abnormal or undesirable
- Many women make the smart decision to work (and earn) less but spend more time with their families rather than working long hard hours and having little family life. Many men don't feel that they have this option
- The crisis in boys' education needs to be addressed with solutions such as tailoring curricula and classroom environments to the way boys learn, introducing single-sex classes for boys and girls where appropriate, and re-introducing boy-friendly books to reading lists
- There is a need for more male teachers
- There is a stark gender inequity within Australia's health spending, with more money being spent on women's health and research than on men's health and research, despite the fact that men's health is far worse than women's health on a range of indicators
- The NSW Men's Health budget is a mere \$300,000 per annum
- The proposed National Peak Body for the men and boys sector could be a very useful point of contact for HREOC as it seeks to address male issues and perspectives in the future.

To end the discussion, the Commissioner asked each of us, "If there was one thing I could achieve over the next five years, what would it be?"

- Greg said he would like to see the myth dispelled that many issues are "women's issues" - that violence and discrimination and work-life balance, for example, only affect women - and that women are still a "downtrodden class". Men and women alike need help. Some of their issues are similar, while others are different.
- Micheal said he would like the Commissioner to look at the intersection of gender with class, age, ethnicity, etc, so that a more subtle analysis could be made of where resources could be most effectively targeted.
- Maggie said she would like to see HREOC harnessing the mass media more effectively, leading to an increased public awareness and engagement with the issues, which could then drive changes in public policy, workplace cultures and individual values.

HREOC encouraged us to send them any research or articles of interest with regard to the issues we had raised, especially on boys education and disparities in health funding.

*A full version of this report is available from [http://www.menshealthaustralia.net/files/HREOC\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](http://www.menshealthaustralia.net/files/HREOC_Full_Report.pdf). A briefing paper is available from [http://www.menshealthaustralia.net/files/HREOC\\_Briefing\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.menshealthaustralia.net/files/HREOC_Briefing_Paper.pdf).*