

MEMORANDUM

TO: Health Policy Branch, Health Canada

FROM: Peter Jon Mitchell, Program Director, Family

DATE: June 1, 2026

SUBJECT: The Importance of Fatherhood: Considerations for Health Canada's Men and Boys' Health Strategy

WHO WE ARE

Cardus is a non-partisan think tank dedicated to clarifying and strengthening, through research and dialogue, the ways in which society's institutions can work together for the common good.

ISSUE AND BACKGROUND

Recent data shows that young men feel demoralized.¹ One contributing factor is that men are struggling to achieve the families lives they desire. Not only does this affect men's own happiness, but it impedes their role in positively influencing the next generation of men.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the Men and Boys' Health Strategy:

Recommendation 1: Validate men's desire for healthy family life. The strategy must clearly recognize men's desire for family life, and that the benefits to men and the next generation of men derived from healthy marriages, partnerships, and fatherhood.

Recommendation 2: Identify barriers to entry into family life. Benefits based on household income can act as a marriage penalty, disincentivizing marriage and partnership unintentionally. The strategy should champion policy reforms that remove and avoid such barriers.

Recommendation 3: Educate men towards healthy marriage, partnership, and fatherhood. While marriage and fatherhood are not for everyone, the strategy should encourage educating men about the benefits of family life. Research shows that young adults who complete their education, marry, and then have children, in that sequence, reduce their chances of living in poverty.²

RATIONALE

(1) Healthy marriage, partnership, and fatherhood is good for men.

Young men desire a healthy family life. A forthcoming Cardus survey report finds that 62 percent of unmarried men ages 18 to 44, report that getting married is an important, personal aspiration.³ The survey also found that men want to be fathers. Most men desire a healthy family life and evidence suggests that healthy marriage is good for men.

¹ Davis et al., "America's Demoralized Men, Part 1", *Institute for Family Studies*, March 2026, <https://ifstudies.org/report-brief/americas-demoralized-men-part-1>.

² W. Wang and B. Wilcox. "The Power of the Success Sequence for Disadvantaged Young Adults", *American Enterprise Institute, Institute for Family Studies*, May 2022, <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/successsequencedisadvantagedya-final.pdf?x91208>.

³ "Cardus Fertility Survey."

Married men are less engaged in risk behaviours and experience better health outcomes than their unmarried peers.⁴ Conversely, the *Real Face of Men's Health 2025 Canada Report* states that being unmarried is among the most common factors associated with male suicide ideation.⁵

Married men tend to be more economically productive than their non-married peers. The economic advantage remains evident even among lower skilled men. Economist Nicholas Eberstadt found that married men with lower employment skills were more likely to be in the labour force compared to unattached men with similar employment skills.⁶

(2) Involved husbands, partners, and fathers shape the next generation of men.

Dads provide a complementary role in parenting. Evidence suggests that involved fathers are linked to positive outcomes in children including educational attainment, better mental health, and lower rates of delinquency.⁷

There is much concern about negative influences on young men, yet young men report that moms and dads rate as the most influential people in their lives.⁸ Today's involved husbands, partners, and fathers are supporting tomorrow's men.

Fathers, regardless of their marital status, are important in the lives of their children. Yet it is also true that the dissolution of families is a significant challenge in their abilities to parent. Sociologist David Popenoe argues that the decline of marriage has affected fatherhood. He writes, "Men tend to view marriage and childrearing as a single package. If their marriage deteriorates, their fatherhood deteriorates."⁹ Investing in healthy marriages and partnerships is an investment in fatherhood.

Boys and young men do not live in social silos. Families are the supportive social architecture that serves as an essential social safety net. In his research on underhoused men, Augsburg University scholar Timothy Pippert observes, "The most important and effective social institution at keeping its members from living on the street is the family. Family safety nets of financial and emotional support are what keep the ranks of the homeless from exploding on a daily basis."¹⁰

CONTACT

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and assist with future considerations on this issue. Please do not hesitate to contact us at pmitchell@cardus.ca.

⁴ A. Mrozek and P. Mitchell. *...Do? Why Marriage Still Matters*, (Cascade Books, 2024), 21.

⁵ M. Sinclair and UBC, "The Real Face of Men's Health Report." *Movember Institute of Men's Health*, June 9, 2025, <https://ca.movember.com/movember-institute/the-real-face-of-mens-health-report>.

⁶ Eberstadt, Nicholas. "Family Structure and the Decline of Work for Men in Postwar America." In *Unequal Family Lives: Causes and Consequences in Europe and the Americas*, edited by N. Cahn, J. Carbone, L. DeRose, and B. Wilcox, (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 136-39.

⁷ B. Smith, S. Schoppe-Sullivan, and J. Fagan, "Dads Rock: The Evidence." *American Institute for Boys and Men*, July 13, 2024, <https://aibm.org/research/dads-rock-the-evidence/>

⁸ Davis et al., *America's Demoralized Men, Part 1*.

⁹ D. Popenoe, *Life Without Father: Compelling New Evidence That Fatherhood and Marriage Are Indispensable for the Good of Children and Society 1st ed.*, (Free Press, 1996), 25.

¹⁰ T. Pippert, *Road Dogs and Loners: Family Relationships Among Homeless Men*, (Lexington Books, 2007), 64.