

# Making Connections

Improving Mental Health and Wellbeing Among Men & Boys



Photo: Adina Vang



Photo: Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Prevention Institute and the Movember Foundation are changing the paradigm for mental wellbeing for men and boys. Together we are engaging 16 communities across the U.S. in a major initiative to develop and activate strategies to enhance communities' social, physical and economic environments in ways that can improve mental wellbeing for men and boys. We will share what we learn along the way.

**Making Connections for Mental Wellbeing** employs an innovative approach that creates a robust community of practice to help leverage the power of communities and connection to create greater opportunities for wellbeing and resilience.

## The Initiative

- Multi-year initiative led by Prevention Institute and funded by the Movember Foundation with opportunity for co-investment.
- Ambitious investment in a diverse range of communities that are developing and implementing community-driven strategies to address conditions in the social, economic, and built environment to improve mental wellbeing for men and boys.
- Focus on high-need populations, including men and boys of color, military members, veterans, and their families.
- Selected sites span the country in urban, rural, and suburban locations.
- Partners include tribal, community-based, public health, healthcare, and veterans' organizations.
- Community-driven strategies that draw on indigenous knowledge and customs to develop the most effective and culturally-relevant approaches.
- Training and technical assistance by Prevention Institute to support communities in identifying the most effective processes, tools, and approaches to improve mental health outcomes. Knowledge is shared through convenings, site visits, one-on-one consultations, and a peer learning network.
- Comprehensive, independent evaluation by the University of South Florida that includes theory-of-change development and assessment.

This initiative was launched following a groundbreaking Prevention Institute landscape analysis on the mental health of boys and men, *Making Connections for Mental Health and Wellbeing Among Men and Boys in the U.S.* Below are some of the key findings from the analysis.



Photo: Nebraska Association of Local Health Directors

## Challenges

**The medical model** has been the dominant approach for addressing mental health.

**Trauma affects both physical health and mental health. Some populations, including boys and men of color and veterans, may be at even higher risk** of experiencing trauma due to factors such as greater exposure to violence and fewer economic opportunities.

**Many conditions in the U.S., including growing inequality and an unstable economy, contribute to stress, sadness, fear, and anxiety.**

Although equal numbers of men and women meet criteria for psychiatric disorders during their lifetimes, **men are at greater risk for many disorders.**

**Stigma and socialization put males at risk** for being mentally unhealthy and for not seeking care or treatment that could help prevent and address mental health problems.

The mental health system is **fragmented and lacks the capacity** to adequately address the mental health needs in the U.S.



Photo: Fathers Uplift

## Solutions

There is **strong evidence that prevention and early intervention can help improve** mental health. Changing limited definitions of masculinity and addressing stigmas can increase opportunities for men to seek care that can help prevent and address mental health problems.

Mental health is **not only an individual issue, but also a societal issue** that can be addressed with broader community-based and policy-level approaches.

There are promising strategies to **improve the underlying conditions** in the social, economic and built environments that contribute to stress, sadness, fear, and anxiety in both communities and individuals. There is an opportunity to further develop and activate these strategies to enhance opportunities for mental wellness.

**Resilience is a critical protective factor** for mental wellbeing. **Resilience can be fostered** in individuals, families, and communities.

**Indigenous and lay-people approaches are emerging that support healing** and mental wellbeing.



# Community Partners



**Office of School and Adolescent Health (OSAH),** New Mexico Department of Health, Albuquerque, New Mexico  
Populations of focus: Youth in Albuquerque's International District, including African-American, urban Native-American, first generation American, native New Mexican Latino, and military-involved youth.

**Local Initiatives Support Corporation Resilient Communities, Resilient Families (RC/RF) program,** Boston, Massachusetts  
Populations of focus: Men of color in Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan.

**Farmington Valley Health District,** Canton, Connecticut  
Populations of focus: Active and retired veterans in East Granby and nine other towns within Farmington Valley.

**Sinai Health System,** Chicago, Illinois  
Populations of focus: African-American and Latino men and boys in the communities of North Lawndale, South Lawndale, and Chicago Lawn.

**Denver Men's Health Connection (DMMHC) project,** Denver Department of Human Services, Denver, Colorado  
Populations of focus: Adolescent and transition-age young men living in the five ZIP code areas in the City and County of Denver with the highest percentage of hotline calls for child abuse and neglect.

**Hope Health Inc.,** Florence, South Carolina  
Populations of focus: Men and boys and veteran populations of Florence in the rural Coastal Plain region.

**Kokua Kalihi Valley,** Honolulu, Hawai'i  
Populations of focus: Native Hawaiian, Asian, and Pacific Islander young men in the ahupua'a of Kalihi.

**Houston Health Department,** Houston, Texas  
Populations of focus: Boys and young men of color in the Kashmere, Wheatley, and Scarborough high school neighborhoods of Houston.

**Kankakee Community College,** Kankakee, Illinois  
Populations of focus: Student veterans and community veterans in the Kankakee area.

**Nebraska Association of Local Health Directors (NALHD),** Lincoln, Nebraska  
Populations of focus: Veterans and their families in the 76 rural and frontier counties served by NALHD member local public health departments.

**Violence Prevention Coalition of Greater Los Angeles,** Los Angeles, California  
Populations of focus: Boys and men of color in south Los Angeles (LA) and the surrounding LA County communities.

**New Orleans Health Department,** New Orleans, Louisiana  
Populations of focus: African-American men and boys ages 8-24 in New Orleans.

**Oklahoma Area Tribal Epidemiology Center,** Oklahoma City, Oklahoma  
Populations of focus: American Indian boys and men in the Oklahoma City Indian Health Service Area.

**United Women of East African Support Team,** San Diego, California  
Populations of focus: East African refugee young men in the City Heights area of San Diego.

**Lao Family Community Empowerment, Inc.,** Stockton, California  
Populations of focus: Hmong elders, adults and young men and boys in the Stockton area.

**Tacoma Pierce County Health Department,** Tacoma, Washington  
Populations of focus: Men and boys of color and masculine, and otherly identified people in the Parkland, Hilltop, and East Side communities.



Photo: Kokua Kalihi Valley

## Making Connections

- Broadening understanding of how mental wellbeing is **connected to community-level approaches**.
- **Connecting men and boys** in the places where they spend their time and through the activities they enjoy doing.
- **Reconnecting men and boys to cultural identity** and expanded notions of masculinity.
- **Supporting connection in coping with stressors** – past, present and future.
- **Connecting men and boys to each other**, their families, and their communities.
- **Connecting systems, institutions, and community organizations** to mental health and wellbeing and to each other in stronger safety nets.



### About Prevention Institute

Prevention Institute is a nonprofit, national center dedicated to improving community health and wellbeing by building momentum for effective primary prevention. Primary prevention means taking action to build resilience and prevent problems before they occur. The Institute's work is characterized by a strong commitment to community participation and promotion of equitable health outcomes among all social and economic groups.

### About the Movember Foundation

The Movember Foundation is a global men's health charity that raises funds that deliver innovative, breakthrough research and support programs that enable men to live happier, healthier and longer lives. In the annual Movember campaign in November, men are challenged to grow a moustache or make a commitment to get active and MOVE. Millions have joined the movement, raising \$715M and funding over 1,000 programs.