# Unpacking the Man Box

What is the impact of the Man Box attitudes on young Australian men's behaviours and well-being?
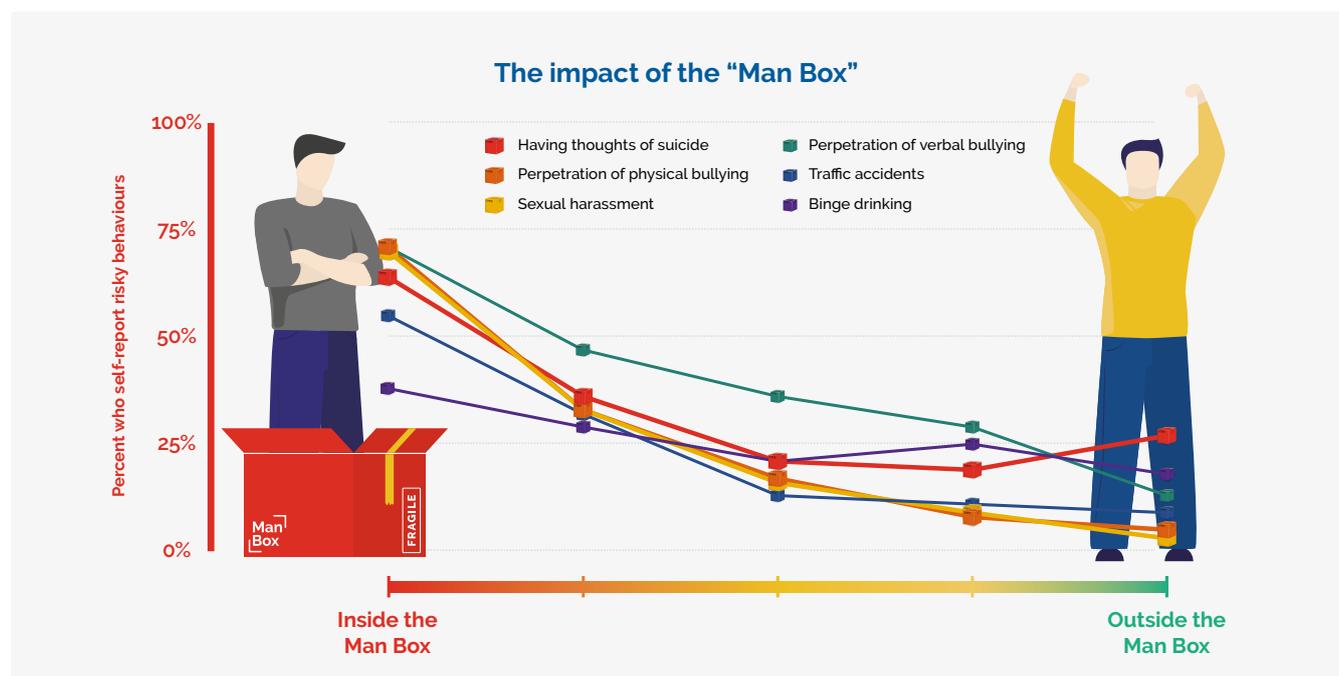
## What is the Man Box?

The Man Box attitudes are a set of beliefs within society that place pressure on young men to act in a certain way because of their gender.

In our initial 'Man Box' study (2018) we explored how young men encounter the Man Box rules in society and whether they endorse them personally by asking their views on 17 messages about how a man should behave.

Our findings were clear: The Man Box is alive and well in Australia today with the majority of young men agreeing there are social pressures around being a 'real man'.

A significant minority of young men personally endorse many of these rules, particularly related to acting tough, being the primary income earner and being in control.

Worryingly, there is also a strong connection between young men believing in these rules and them experiencing poor life outcomes including mental ill-health, alcohol abuse and road accidents. Further to these poor life outcomes, young men who endorse the Man Box rules are more likely to carry out violence, online bullying and sexual harassment.



The impact of the "Man Box"

Legend:
- Having thoughts of suicide
- Perpetration of physical bullying
- Sexual harassment
- Perpetration of verbal bullying
- Traffic accidents
- Binge drinking

Y-axis: Percent who self-report risky behaviours (0%, 25%, 50%, 75%, 100%)

Inside the Man Box — Outside the Man Box

## The Man Box Pillars

The Man Box attitudes fall under seven pillars described in the table on the next page. Each pillar includes two or three questions, or rules, which are used to assess the extent to which respondents personally endorse or feel pressure from society to endorse stereotypical definitions of what it means to be a man.

There is a gap between young men's perception of the social pressures of the Man Box rules and their personal endorsement of these rules.

Young men hold more progressive views on what it is to be a 'real man' than what they believe society is telling them. These findings show that many young men feel pressure to behave in ways that align with the Man Box rules in order to be seen as a 'real man', despite not personally endorsing these beliefs.

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# Man Box rule

| | Social message | Personal endorsement |
|---|---|---|
| | Percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree that: | Percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree that: |
| | **"Society as a whole tells me that…"** | **"In my opinion…"** |

**Pillar 1: Self-sufficiency**

| Man Box rule | Social message | Personal endorsement |
|---|---|---|
| A man who talks a lot about his worries, fears, and problems shouldn't really get respect. | 49% | 25% |
| Men should figure out their personal problems on their own without asking others for help. | 54% | 27% |

**Pillar 2: Acting tough**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| A guy who doesn't fight back when others push him around is weak. | 60% | 34% |
| Guys should act strong even if they feel scared or nervous inside. | 69% | 47% |

**Pillar 3: Physical attractiveness**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| It is very hard for a man to be successful if he doesn't look good. | 57% | 42% |
| A guy who spends a lot of time on his looks isn't very manly. | 48% | 32% |
| Women don't go for guys who fuss too much about their clothes, hair and skin | 44% | 39% |

**Pillar 4: Rigid gender roles**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| It is not good for a boy to be taught how to cook, sew, clean the house or take care of younger children. | 38% | 23% |
| A man shouldn't have to do household chores. | 39% | 19% |
| Men should really be the ones to bring money home to provide for their families, not women. | 56% | 35% |

**Pillar 5: Heterosexuality and homophobia**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| A gay guy is not a 'real man'. | 47% | 28% |
| Straight guys being friends with gay guys is totally fine and normal (positive statement). | 64% | 83% |

**Pillar 6: Hypersexuality**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| A 'real man' should have as many sexual partners as he can. | 47% | 25% |
| A 'real man' would never say no to sex. | 56% | 24% |

**Pillar 7: Aggression and control**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Men should use violence to get respect if necessary. 35% 20% | 35% | 20% |
| A man should always have the final say about decisions in his relationship or marriage. | 43% | 27% |
| If a guy has a girlfriend or wife, he deserves to know where she is all the time. | 44% | 37% |

## Why unpack the Man Box?

Unpacking the Man Box aims to understand the unique contribution of masculinity and its pillars to the well-being of young men. We know that there are many factors that impact people's lives such as their occupation, where they live, sexuality, education level and cultural heritage. Unpacking the Man Box seeks to determine the unique influence of Man Box attitudes while controlling for these factors on different areas of their lives, including:

a. mental health, wellbeing and help seeking from friends/professionals;
b. body satisfaction;
c. relationship satisfaction;
d. binge drinking;
e. traffic accidents;
f. accessing pornography; and
g. physical violence, sexual harassment and bullying.

Unpacking the Man Box also seeks to examine the unique impact of Man Box sub-pillars as well as the characteristics of men who are most at-risk of personally endorsing Man Box norms.

**Check out Fact Sheets 2 - 4 or the Unpacking the Man Box report to find out more.**