STAFF ARTICLE

Men's groups in long-term care that feel like a bench circle

Updated October 2025

Men often join less often when programs default to crafts and choral singing only. That gap shows up in attendance sheets across Ontario personal care homes and Alberta lodges alike. A steady men’s group can reduce isolation with tool talk, trades stories, and calm pacing. This piece is for recreation staff who want practical formats, Canadian flavour, and dementia-safe pacing.

Why a separate men’s circle helps

Some men speak more freely when the topic is tools, trades, fishing, or the first car they fixed. Mixed groups still matter. A men’s circle adds a predictable time for those preferences. Keep the door open. Partners and friends of any gender can sit at the edge when the room feels welcoming.

Aim for six to ten participants so everyone gets airtime. Two staff or one staff plus a trained volunteer is enough if you brief risks first.

Formats that work in Canadian homes

Shop bench table. Bring a box of safe hardware: wooden spools, sanded blocks, measuring tapes with rounded ends. Pass one item and ask what job it reminds people of. In Saskatchewan, elevator and grain talk lands well. On the coast, swap in rope and tackle stories.

Radio and road hockey memories. Play short clips of Hockey Night in Canada theme or old CFRA ads. Keep chat on colours and hometown teams. Ask who listened on Saturday night. Keep volume low for hearing aids.

Map and licence plate game. Use a laminated map of provinces. Residents name a town they worked in. Stickers on towns, scores optional.

Newspaper scan. Large print community paper, sports section only if news is gentle. Choose calm headlines.

Coffee and fix-it stories. Thermos of decaf, mugs with handles easy to grip. Prompt: **What did you build that lasted?**

Dementia-safe pacing

Use concrete objects before abstract questions. One item per three minutes. If someone repeats a story, thank them and bridge to the next object. Use **Tell me about a garage you knew.**

End while energy is still positive. Ten to twenty minutes beats a long slide into fatigue.

When rivalry shows up

Some men enjoy gentle competition. Others prefer listening. If you run a trivia sheet, keep teams mixed by ability and keep scoreboards private. Redirect pools talk to **friendly guess.** Grey Cup week can focus on food and hometown pride.

Volunteers and trades alumni

Invite a retired carpenter for a twenty-minute demo of safe hand tools. Brief volunteers on infection control and consent. Film only with releases.

Partner with high school shop classes only when your organization already has school visitation policy. Many homes prefer alumni from the building instead.

Measure success with comfort in mind

Track comfort alongside head count. Note who spoke twice. Note who preferred to listen. Share wins in staff huddle: **Bill taught us how to sharpen a chisel safely.**

Scheduling and room setup

Men’s groups often land best mid-morning after breakfast meds and before lunch prep. Stagger timing with women’s flower arranging if both draw from the same volunteer pool. A corner with good light and a round table reduces hierarchy. Keep the door open so staff can see in.

Limit clutter on the table. One box of objects beats ten loose items rolling onto laps.

Indigenous and rural memories

Men who worked traplines, rodeo circuits, or fishing boats may prefer water and morning sound prompts. Keep a second prompt list ready: **Tell me about early mornings on the water** or **What sound meant work was starting?** Inuit residents in southern homes may prefer topics about family travel rather than southern sports.

Welcome every gender at the bench.

Integration with CFL and hockey for everyone

Grey Cup and hockey weeks can visit the men’s circle briefly. Show a team map. Ask who coached kids in minor league. Retired referees sometimes love telling one calm story about keeping games fair.

Keep news loops off in the room. Choose calm highlight clips when residents ask.

Evaluation questions for quarterly review

Did at least two quiet listeners attend? Did anyone leave early with a thank-you at the door? Did staff learn a new skill story to share respectfully in huddle? Did object safety pass IPAC review?

Quality quotes with consent matter as much as numbers.

Troubleshooting low attendance

Rename the group if **men’s** feels stiff. Try **builders and fixers** or **coffee and stories.** Move time slot once. Partner with chaplaincy for a neutral host if recreation therapist gender balance affects comfort.

Promote through personal invite at breakfast rather than a loud poster.

Your next step: pick one object from maintenance that is clean and safe, print a one-page prompt sheet, and schedule a twenty-minute trial at the time coffee club used to meet. Ask participants if the name **men’s bench** fits or if they want another title.

BetterCare printable recreation resources for Canadian long-term care, personal care homes, and retirement residences. Share with your team. Adapt for local policy and clinical direction.