

# Strengthening Defence and veteran couple relationships through relationship education



Australian Government  
Australian Institute of  
Family Studies



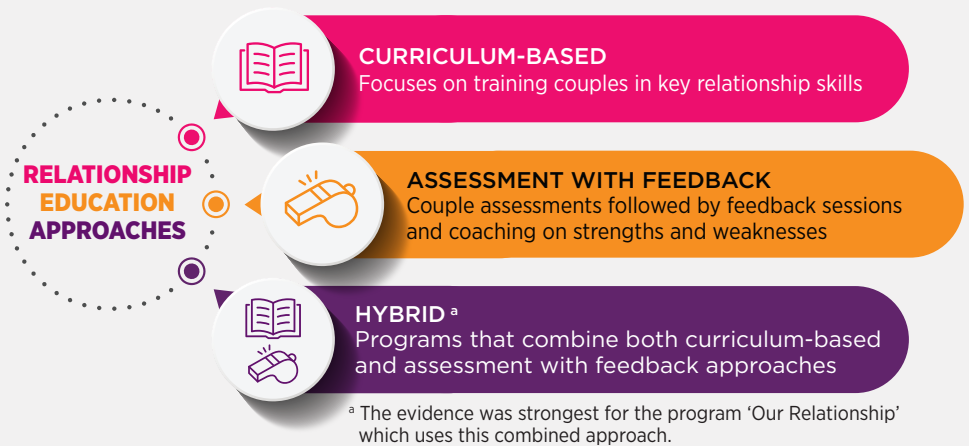
DVA commissioned AIFS to review the effectiveness of existing relationship education programs and identify how these programs could be adapted to meet the specific needs of current and ex-serving ADF members and their partners.

Compared to other social programs, relationship education programs have an extensive evidence base, having been tested in many high-quality studies (mainly in the USA), including with military and veteran couples. Generally, they create small-to-moderate improvements in a range of couple outcomes such as communication and relationship satisfaction.






This project is the first step in selecting and co-designing a relationship education program for current and ex-serving members and their partners.

## What we did

-  a **rapid evidence assessment** to identify existing relationship education interventions available in Australia and internationally and assess evidence of their effectiveness
-  a **quick scoping review** and **consultations** with policy and practice professionals, to identify the key relationship issues experienced by current and ex-serving members and to identify the existing services available to support their relationships
-  a series of **focus groups** with current and ex-serving ADF members and their partners, to obtain their views on existing programs and how they could be adapted to suit their specific experiences and needs



## What we found

-  Participants strongly endorsed providing military-adapted relationship education to current and ex-serving members and thereby intervening early to provide tailored support to strengthen relationships.
-  The rapid evidence assessment identified 4 programs that have been adapted and delivered to US military couples that are promising for delivery in Australia: *Our Relationship*, *ePREP*, *ELEVATE*, and *Marriage Checkup in Integrated Primary Care*.
-  Participants strongly endorsed the value of both *curriculum based* and *assessment with feedback* approaches, whether delivered through a hybrid program or by offering 2 separate programs.
-  Participants agreed that programs should be adapted to include Australian military and veteran specific information, and examples relevant to the Australian military context.
-  Participants believed programs should be delivered by a provider with a good understanding of military life but must also be independent from the DVA and Department of Defence.

## Next steps

- 01** As the review found a number of promising programs for adaption to the ADF context, with varying effectiveness for couples with different circumstances and needs, consideration could be given to **trailing** more than one program to compare outcomes and meet varied needs.
- 02** It is essential to properly **evaluate** selected programs to ensure they are effective in the Australian context. Existing evidence is largely from the USA due to the lack of rigorous evaluation of Australian programs.
- 03** To support take-up of any voluntary relationship education program(s) offered, they should be **promoted directly** to partners as well as members/veterans and with chain-of-command endorsement for serving members. Communication should clearly outline the benefits of the program to couples (even if they are currently doing well), linking positive relationships to the long-term wellbeing of members and their partners.