

A Theory of Change for Men's Behaviour Change Programs

Diverse programs, common aims and how we create change

This Relationships Australia (RA) project was conducted in partnership with the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and uses a Theory of Change to articulate the aims and expected benefits of RA men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs). The Theory of Change provides a clear framework to guide MBCP evaluation across the RA Federation.

Responding to family violence

MBCPs are a key component of Australia's service response to family violence for men who have used violence against current or former partners, and in some cases, their children.

Programs are usually delivered as in-person, group-based interventions, which seek to address harmful attitudes and behaviour, encourage accountability, and improve the safety and wellbeing of women and affected family members.

The state and territory organisations that form the RA Federation offer a diverse range of MBCPs, often running multiple groups concurrently. These operate within distinct geographic and legislative contexts and under various funding models.

Our challenge was to develop a common Theory of Change that was generalisable across programs, and which could also be used more widely across the service sector.

A stronger evidence base

The evidence base for the efficacy of MBCPs is somewhat uncertain. We know that they can lead to meaningful change in men's attitudes and behaviour. However, we don't know how often, for which men, and under what circumstances, or which program features are essential to achieve this change.¹

MBCP evaluations often find it difficult to secure participation from group participants and their partners in sufficient numbers to generate robust data.

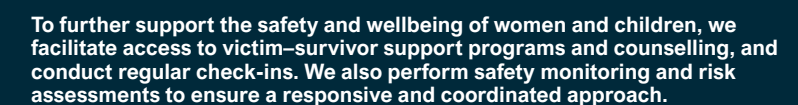
We identified an opportunity for RA organisations across Australia to collaborate on a large-scale study to generate a stronger evidence base for MBCPs and advance evaluation efforts in this space—guided by a common Theory of Change.

What we did

We conducted an audit of current MBCP offerings across the RA Federation. We collected information about underlying theoretical models, funding requirements, group structure, program activities, and other program details. This enabled us to identify the features common to RA MBCPs across Australia.

We then designed a Theory of Change, informed by a targeted literature review and developed in close consultation with RA staff involved in program delivery. This included 2 co-design workshops with practice representatives from each state and territory. These staff are experienced in working with men who have used violence and possess a deep knowledge of behaviour change programs and how they work.

¹ Bell, C., & Coates, D. (2022). *The effectiveness of interventions for perpetrators of domestic and family violence: An overview of findings from reviews (What works: Overviews of Reviews)*. ANROWS. www.anrows.org.au/publication/what-works-to-reduce-and-respond-to-violence-against-women-overview-of-reviews-series



How we represented the Theory of Change

The Theory of Change is represented in both narrative and diagrammatic forms to support different uses, including communication and evaluation. The diagram is shown on the previous page, and both versions are available on the RA website.

The outcomes, presented in the diagram under 'What we expect to change', reflect the changes MBCPs are intended to generate during programs, on program completion, and longer term.

While outcomes are shown in a staged sequence, complex behaviour change is rarely linear.

The pace and extent of change will vary significantly between individuals and are influenced by factors such as readiness to engage, motivation to change, and the social norms and systems that surround individuals, families and communities.

Our representation of the Theory of Change is designed to reflect this complexity. The use of 'wavy' lines between outcomes is a visual cue to signal that change is often iterative and non-sequential: many men may require multiple attempts and forms of support to meaningfully shift their behaviours and ultimately sustain change.²

Using the Theory of Change

The Theory of Change provides a generalisable description of the MBCP intervention and the foundation against which to evaluate programs.

RA will be using this Theory of Change as the basis for a multi-state MBCP evaluation study, along with a framework designed by AIFS. This study will use data from men in the programs, victim-survivors, facilitators and administrative sources to assess the effectiveness of RA MBCPs and inform ongoing service development. Other organisations may also use this as the basis for their own evaluation frameworks, as we work to build a more consistent evidence base across Australia.

In developing a generalisable Theory of Change for the RA Federation and the sector more broadly, we aim to support meaningful behaviour change among men who have used violence, and in turn improve the safety of women and children.

Learn more

Email

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Visit

relationships.org.au/mbcp-toc or scan the QR code.



About us

Relationships Australia (RA)

Relationships Australia is a leading, not-for-profit provider that supports individuals, couples, families and communities to have safe and respectful relationships. We are committed to evidence-informed practice and are involved in a variety of research projects that support our advocacy efforts. We integrate the best available research and data evidence across our service offerings.

We provide counselling, family dispute resolution, trauma support, mental health services, and a diverse range of other family and community support, professional training and education programs. These are delivered through a network of over 100 service locations across all Australian states and territories.

As a community-based organisation with over 75 years' experience and no religious affiliations, our services are for all members of the community, regardless of religious beliefs, age, gender, sexual orientation, cultural background or economic circumstances.

Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS)

The Australian Institute of Family Studies is the Australian Government's key research agency in family wellbeing. Our role is to conduct high quality, impartial research into the key trends and emerging issues affecting Australian families, to inform government policy and programs and promote evidence-based practice in the family service sector.

Our position at the intersection of government, academia and the child and family services sector means our research has real-world impact – supporting policy makers and practitioners to target and shape interventions to address the diverse needs of Australian families.

We aim to explore the 'what', discover the 'why', and identify the 'so what' to help improve outcomes for children, families and their communities.

² Helps, N., Bell, C., Schulze, C., Clark, O., Seamer, J., Buys, R., & Vlasis, R. (2025). *The role of men's behaviour change programs in addressing men's use of domestic, family and sexual violence: An evidence brief* (Vol. 1). ANROWS. www.anrows.org.au/publication/the-role-of-mens-behaviour-change-programs-dfsv