Military service can be rewarding but also challenging for airmen, guardians, and their families. For example, frequent relocations require navigating housing and movement of household goods and can lead to difficulties for spouses wanting employment. Another aspect of military service that presents difficulties for family and friends is coping with a service member’s loss of life. To help address these challenges, the Department of the Air Force (DAF) has several programs that are implemented via Military and Family Readiness Centers (M&FRCs), namely the Relocation Assistance Program (RAP), Employment Assistance (EA), and Air Force Families Forever (AFFF). RAP provides education and referrals to assist airmen, guardians, and their families with issues surrounding permanent change of station (PCS) moves. EA supports service members, U.S. Department of Defense civilian employees, and family members in achieving employment. AFFF provides long-term information and referrals to eligible next of kin of deceased airmen and guardians. DAF Manpower, Personnel, and Services, Air Force Services (A1S), asked RAND Project AIR FORCE to assist with the design of evaluations for these programs.

To develop a comprehensive understanding of the existing evidence on airman, guardian, and family readiness programs, related programs, and individuals’ experiences navigating related challenges, we conducted a review of the literature on each of the programs and the underlying challenges the program seeks to address. We also interviewed M&FRC flight chiefs to get their perspectives on program implementation and development.

The success of each of the programs is unclear because of limited feedback and evaluation.

Factors believed to reduce effectiveness of each of the programs are limited personnel capacity, inadequate manning, and inadequate administrative oversight.
- A factor commonly believed to positively affect program effectiveness is active support and engagement from the unit commander.
- The logic models map the various assumptions regarding what resources the programs need to run, how they run, and what effects they have, and they provide a road map for the development of a program evaluation.
- Potential sources of data to measure elements of the logic models include administrative records, surveys, and qualitative assessments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations parallel those made for the companion report on the True North Program (Matthews et al., 2024):

- Adopt and communicate the program logic models in ways that ensure stakeholders know and understand them.
- Continue to engage stakeholders in the evaluation design process.
- Implement measures that align with the program logic model.
- Present the results of evaluations in ways that are clear and useful for stakeholders.
- Modify the program logic models as needed, drawing from the results of evaluations.
- If A1S considers creating or using additional databases to track measures, involve stakeholders in its development.