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## **Fitness Programs - Are They Sustainable And Do They Work? Promoting Lifestyle Change In Vietnam Veterans.**

### **Abstract**

The Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service Heart Health Program (HHP) was funded by the Commonwealth Government through the Department of Veterans Affairs. The Vietnam Veterans Health study was highly suggestive of elevated physical health problems in Vietnam Veterans associated with a sedentary lifestyle. The HHP was funded over four years commencing in the 2000/2001 financial year. This paper presents data collected from the 1519 participants in the first twelve months of the program. Multiple approaches were used to gauge the effectiveness of the program including:

- before and after physiological measures, and the SF36;
- measures of participants' perceptions of gains made and of sustainability of the improved health outcome;
- measures of participants' satisfaction with the program;
- indepth interviews with a sample of participants to assess their experience of the programs;
- meta-analysis of individual program evaluation reports;
- comparison of health service expenditure for a small sample of participants before, during and after the twelve month program; and
- cost comparisons between program providers by State.

The paper reports on the outcomes on each of these parameters and, despite some difficulties with the quality of the data, concludes that the Heart Health Program is a very successful program with sustainable outcomes in the short to medium term. It also concludes that the gains made are not purely physical, but that social and mental health gains are evident both on the objective measures and in the lived experience of the participants.

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