

## Heterosexual couples

Many challenges can accompany prostate cancer for men and their families. Based on interviews with 15 heterosexual couples who attend PCSGs we learned about the strategies couples used to address prostate cancer.



### Teamed couples

Men and women described facing prostate cancer together as committed couples and framed this as an extension of their relationship. Men described the central and essential role of women in supporting them in their journey through prostate cancer. An 81-year-old man confirmed, *“She is like a sounding board. You’ve got to talk things over with your wife.”* Similarly women typically echoed this sentiment as a 72-year-old woman assured us *“I’m on this journey with my husband, and it’s my life too and to be a support to him.”*

### Lead and follow

The balance between women’s support and men’s autonomy gave rise to couple dynamics whereby the ability to both lead and follow depending on the particular situation, was key. Most couples had been together for more than a decade, and as a 64-year-old woman explained, she understood when to lead and when to follow by providing support to her husband:

*I think he may perceive my opinion as not being, maybe not having validity for him in some moments - so it has to feel right for him, I mean he will often come to me and ask my opinion, but I’m really aware of how, I think some of it is about his vulnerability really like ‘I can only take in so much right now, I’m doing as much as I can,’ I’m sure, yeah.*

Within the context of attending PCSG meetings while many men suggested there were important opportunities for their wives to talk to other women facing similar challenges. A 70-year-old man acknowledged that he was not always able to comfort his wife by waylating her concerns about his well-being. He went on to suggest that woman at the group could assist in that regard:

*And so women are better at reassuring them [other women]. And they can talk about their own experience as a wife or partner. And how they dealt with it... in ways that probably they might not share with their husbands.*

Overall, PCSGs can offer couples some guidance about how best to manage the delicate balance between wanting to support one another within their prostate cancer journey amid empowering men to make efficient and effective decisions about their health. In addition, PCSGs provided an important avenue for some participants to go outside their relationship to solicit support and information from others.