

Executive Summary
Military Family Readiness Council Meeting
Nov. 22, 2013

On Friday, Nov. 22, 2013, the Military Family Readiness Council meeting was held at the Pentagon Conference Center. The purpose of this meeting was to review previous business and discuss the annual council recommendations to be sent forward for consideration by the secretary of defense.

A full transcript of the meeting and attendance of members and advisers present is available.

Cmdr. Peter Hoegel, designated federal officer, opened the meeting by welcoming council members, advisers and public guests. He added that in his DFO capacity, it is his duty to ensure that the meeting complied with the standards set by the Federal Committee Advisory Act. He then proceeded with a review of the rules and regulations the council must follow while conducting business. He advised that minutes from the meeting would be posted as soon as possible to the MFRC page hosted by Military OneSource, and all submissions presented to the council for review would be available upon request. Concluding his comments, he turned the floor over to the chairperson, Mrs. Jessica Wright, acting undersecretary of defense, personnel and readiness.

Mrs. Wright welcomed all present, thanking them for their patience regarding the previously canceled October meeting. She stated that the day's business was to discuss, consider and codify the fiscal year 2013 recommendations that the council would send forward to the secretary of defense. She encouraged members to be vocal and collaborative while keeping in mind that the council's mission is to produce clear, actionable recommendations for consideration. Concluding her opening comments, Mrs. Wright turned the floor over to Cmdr. Hoegel to review previous council business.

Previous business

Cmdr. Hoegel reviewed the public submissions received for the Aug. 5, 2013 meeting, highlighting the many received regarding TRICARE's coverage of applied behavioral analysis for autism spectrum disorder. Submissions expressed concerns with several areas including:

- Credentialing and supervision of ABA providers
- Availability of treatment and reimbursement rates for ABA treatments
- Eligibility and screening
- Duration of treatment
- Maximum age requirements

To address these concerns the council invited Dr. Jonathan Woodson, undersecretary of defense, health affairs, to brief the council. His comments included:

Key points

- There is no change for either active-duty family members or non-active-duty family members receiving applied behavior analysis for autism spectrum disorder under the TRICARE Basic Program.
- There is no change for active-duty family members enrolled in the Extended Care Health Option Autism Demonstration who are receiving ABA reinforcement for ASD. There is no change in out-of-pocket cost for active-duty family members.
- Non-active-duty family members currently receiving ABA under the TRICARE Basic Program may continue without changes. Non-active-duty family members who desire ABA reinforcement services, in addition to ABA, can access that under a new ABA pilot program.

New business

Cmdr. Hoegel next reviewed the four new submissions received by the council. These included the following:

- 1) A submission from Mr. Stephen Peters, president of the American Military Partner Association, requesting the council's review of the top five needs of same-sex military spouses and their families including:
 - Protection of military spouses stationed in non-marriage equality states
 - Status of forces agreements and OCONUS command sponsorship
 - Issues of discrimination by the National Guard in four states
 - Concerns about military chaplain support for same-sex couples
 - Non-discrimination policies based on sexual orientation for uniformed service members
- 2) From Mr. Jeremy Hilton and Ms. Wendy Kruse concerning TRICARE coverage for military families, including the TRICARE for Kids program. Their suggestions included:

- To study and address TRICARE pediatric care policies, including items such as access to care, specialty care, reimbursement policies, special needs and the relocation impacts on children, especially those with special needs
 - Recommend forming a working group comprised of various DoD employees, service and professional organizations, parents and other subject matter experts to ensure that the health needs of military children are met
- 3) From Ms. Kara Oakley, concerning TRICARE for Kids recommendation for greater collaboration with the Children's Hospital Association to ensure that unique health needs of military children are met — submission included a report prepared by the Children's Hospital Association addressing the Military Children Health Care Study requirements mandated in Section 735 of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2013, also known as TRICARE for Kids
- 4) From Ms. Melissa Hendrix, an Air Force spouse, expressing concerns about the Exceptional Family Member Program, detailing the stress of permanent change of station moves with an autistic son and also expressing concerns about waiting lists for care, reimbursement for therapies and military personnel assignment policies

Mrs. Wright advised the council that they would next review each submission and decide on an avenue of response, either by answering via an information paper, addressing at the next MFRC meeting or furthering submissions for recommendation. She assured all present that each submission is taken seriously and thoroughly vetted for proper consideration.

Prior to discussion regarding the current submissions, Cmdr. Hoegel reviewed council proceedings from 2013, including a review of the council's focus areas:

- Improving joint base services and improving family program integration of Guard and reserve families
- Coordinating efforts with the chairman and the Joint Chiefs of Staff's cross-functional teams, which includes assessing military family needs, reducing duplication, enhancing program effectiveness, strengthening the force, enhancing resiliency, increasing public awareness, investigating transition gaps and building community capacity
- Review and standardization of the Exceptional Family Member Program

Cmdr. Hoegel presented a review of topics addressed at earlier fiscal year 2013 meetings including:

January 2013

The council received briefs on the assessment of family programs and the collection of evidence of the programs' effectiveness, and the Department of Defense-wide Common Services Task Force.

May 2013

The council discussed the development of the Family Readiness System evaluation plan and received briefs on the Army Health Promotion Risk Reduction program portfolio and community support for families with special needs.

August 2013

The council received briefs on TRICARE's autism and applied behavioral analysis coverage, access to family programs for National Guard, reserve and geographically dispersed active-duty service members, military financial education and the Defense Suicide Prevention Office on suicide prevention education for families.

Cdmr. Hoegel closed his comments by encouraging members to review the length and tone of the 2012 council recommendations for guidance in developing their 2013 recommendations. He further reminded the council that their recommendations do hold weight and are taken into consideration by those in leadership as demonstrated by appearing, as Mrs. Wright has previously mentioned, in House Report 113-102, the National Defense Authorization Act for 2014.

2012 recommendations:

- 1) Review existing programs and prepare them for full-scope program evaluation.
- 2) Include evaluation components when a new program is developed and implemented — when possible these programs should be modeled on research-based programs.
- 3) Include funding for assessment in the program's budget.
- 4) Recommend standardizing the Exceptional Family Member Program across the services.

Current business

Mrs. Wright opened the floor for member discussion of possible 2013 recommendations submitted by council members.

- 1) Ms. Brown recommended a review of programs across the services in an effort to evaluate effectiveness and identify opportunity. This evaluation should be approached in partnership with the non-profit community to ensure an understanding of the overall family support environment, to capitalize on non-government support that is available in communities and to mitigate any potential harm to the support environment.

- 2) Ms. Moakler recommended consideration of transitioning EFMP families, both as they move from installation to installation, as well as when they transition out of the service, with reference to the National Council on Disabilities Report of 2011.
- 3) Lt. Gen. Clarke recommended that DoD identify and share programs that reach military families off installation, because as we face further fiscal constraints, collaboration among the services will be a force multiplier as the military community strives to meet the needs of service members, veterans and families.
- 4) Vice Adm. Moran recommended that DoD focus on an improved communication plan to keep service members and their families informed of the changes to programs, benefits and services impacted by the budget deliberations and sequestration. Additionally, considering an estimated one million service members are expected to transition out of the military within the next five years, the vice admiral recommended that a robust transition assistance plan be included in any force downsizing plan to ensure service members and their families experience a smooth transition out of the military.

Discussion of Ms. Brown's recommendation

Concerns were expressed that the recommendation may be a duplication of efforts of what DoD and the services currently have in process in regard to program evaluations. The non-government military community council members each expressed the need for non-profits to be involved in assisting in program evaluations to better represent the needs of military families. While certain efforts, such as the Military Community and Family Policy five-year program evaluation, are too far along in the process to include non-profits, there are other opportunities to actively involve the non-profit community in program evaluation. Discussion concluded with Mrs. Wright requesting that each of the services bring back to the council where they are in the process of their interval program evaluations and for the non-profit community representatives to bring suggestions of the manners and areas in which they would like to be included. With that, the recommendation was not sent forward for further consideration at this time.

Discussion of external new recommendation regarding TRICARE for Kids

Ms. Chandler requested the council's consideration of a new submission from a collaboration, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, Military Officers of America Association, Military Special Needs Network, National Military Family Association, Children's Hospital Association

and the March of Dimes, regarding Section 735 of the 2013 National Defense Authorization Act, known as TRICARE for Kids. She requested that the MFRC endorse the concepts and intent of Section 735 of the 2012 NDAA and urge the secretary of defense to ensure that the review and implementation of the recommendation are conducted in a collaborative, meaningful and expedited manner. Supporting her recommendation, Ms. Chandler emphasized that there were two reports that were forwarded to the council, one from the Military Special Needs Network and the second from the Children's Hospital Association, which thoroughly investigates TRICARE for Kids adding information directly contributed from experts and military families. After considerable discussion it was determined that the council would recommend that the current DoD Health Affairs pediatric working group, tasked with formally responding to Congress regarding the implementation of TRICARE for Kids, would review the two reports and consider the external stakeholders' reports before making their recommendations to Congress.

Official Recommendation 1:

The Military Family Readiness Council recommends that the Office of the Secretary of Defense Health Affairs Working Group, which is preparing the required report to Congress on NDAA 13, Section 735, known as TRICARE for Kids, consider/review the Military Special Needs Network's report and the Children's Hospital Association's report when preparing the required report to Congress. **Voted upon and passed by council**

Discussion of Ms. Moakler's recommendation

This recommendation focuses on transition assistance regarding EFMP families and how, either moving from installation to installation or with the downsizing of the services, many families with special needs members encounter challenges with healthcare, special education and long-term supports. Ms. Moakler added that there is a National Council on Disability report from 2011 that could be considered, which offers several recommendations on how to improve these areas for families with disabilities, specifically how to successfully navigate the Medicaid waiver system. This issue would sit outside of council's 2012 recommendation to standardize EFMP across the services. After continuing discussion it was determined to put forth the following recommendation:

Official Recommendation 2:

The Military Family Readiness Council recommends to the secretary of defense the continued focus on standardization and consistency for EFMP policies for all services as service members transition between installations, to include collaboration and continuity with community resources, and as service members transition from the service to civilian life. **Voted upon and passed by council**

Discussion of Lt. Gen. Clarke’s recommendation

This recommendation focuses on how service members and their families off installation, end-users, obtain information on the military resources that are available to them. Older methods of communication, such as emails and newsletters may not be as effective with the younger population of service members. While non-profits, such as MOAA and Blue Star Families, as well as DoD components, including Reserve Affairs and MC&FP, often survey the military population, additional efforts to target effective outreach vehicles need to be determined.

Official Recommendation 3:

The Military Family Readiness Council recommends the secretary of defense analyze how end-users within the Reserve Component, who are geographically dispersed, and active-duty service members and families, who live on and off installations, learn about military services and how to improve communication of those existing services. **Voted upon and passed by council**

Discussion of Vice Adm. Moran’s recommendations

Vice Adm. Moran’s first recommendation focuses on the need to have an improved communication plan to keep service members and their families informed of changes to programs, benefits and services resulting from budget deliberations and sequestration. Substantively similar to recommendation three, the difference from Lt. Gen. Clarke’s recommendation lies in the urgency of communication improvements. The decision was made to incorporate the vice admiral’s recommendation into the third recommendation by altering the wording and moving the improve section to the front, indicating the urgency to improve communication and separate it from waiting until end-user analysis is completed.

Official Recommendation 3 Revised:

The Military Family Readiness Council recommends the secretary of defense improve communication of existing services to service members and families and further analyze how end-users within the Reserve Component, geographically dispersed, and active-duty service members and families, who live on and off installations, learn about military services.

The vice admiral’s second recommendation concerning continued focus on robust transition assistance will be addressed in fiscal year 2014 council meetings.

Before closing the recommendation section of the meeting, Mrs. Wright inquired if there were any more recommendations from council members. Lt. Gen. Ferriter asked for clarification

regarding whether or not DoD civilian employees are under the purview of the council. It was decided that this area would be pursued at a later date after guidance regarding the MFRC and civilian DoD employees is established.

Ms. Brown sought clarification in response to two submissions received from the American Military Partner Association questioning if there is a working group addressing the organization's concerns. Mrs. Wright advised that there is an entire section, Military Personnel Policy, that is working on the issues at hand and many of the AMPA's concerns have been addressed. Either an information paper or a briefing at a later council meeting will fully address their concerns, but due to time limitations it could not be done during this session. However, Mrs. Wright assured all present that the concerns of the AMPA are being heard and addressed at every DoD level.

Ms. Fertitta inquired if a recommendation could be made to improve joint base services and family program integration of Guard and reserve families. However, it was determined that more information would be required to formulate formal recommendations, thus this item would become a fiscal year 2014 focus area, along with the vice admiral's transition assistance program review request.

With no additional recommendations from the council, the motion to close this section of the meeting was put forth and seconded. Recommendations were to be packaged and forwarded to the secretary of defense.

Fiscal year 2014 council focus areas

Confirming for the council, Mrs. Wright reiterated that transition assistance, including consideration of spouses and children, as well as the reserve family program network, would be the focus area for fiscal year 2014. To assist with additional focus areas, Ms. Chandler requested that the council review General Dempsey's priorities and focus areas he has set for fiscal year 2014. These are available and will be provided to members at a later date.

Additional areas of interests include an investigation into what surveys are currently being conducted by DoD, determining the feasibility of including DoD service agreements, same-sex spouse status updates and a review of the current DoDI defining family readiness.

Conclusion

Mrs. Wright closed the meeting commenting that the next MFRC meeting would be in either January or February 2014, with the goal of having four meetings per year. She thanked council members for their patience, candor, flexibility and senses of humor in working so hard over the

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past year. Mrs. Chandler added comments thanking the undersecretary for her leadership and guidance of the council.

Cmdr. Hoegel advised that minutes would be available on Military OneSource and a summary would be distributed for staffing. Thanking all participants, he closed the meeting at 3:29 p.m.