

**ANNUAL REPORT TO THE CONGRESSIONAL
DEFENSE COMMITTEES**

on

Support for Military Families with Special Needs

Pursuant to

**Section 1781c(h) of Title 10,
United States Code**



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REPORT TO THE CONGRESSIONAL DEFENSE COMMITTEES

Support for Military Families with Special Needs

Executive Summary

The Office of Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs (OSN) has continued to make significant progress since last year's report through continuation of community outreach activities, analysis of the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP), feedback from families, and partnership with Health Affairs. During the past year, OSN:

- Revised the DoD Instruction 1315.19, renamed the "Exceptional Family Member Program," to include family support, tour stabilization, and expanded assignment coordination to locations within the United States (U.S.) as well as overseas. The projected date for signing of the Instruction is April 2014.
- Completed the first phase of an in-depth analysis of the current status of the services that each Military Department provides to families with special needs through their EFMP. The analysis included a review of the Services' policies, procedures, business processes, and forms in the three areas of the EFMP: (1) identification and enrollment, (2) assignment coordination, and (3) family support.
- Initiated a detailed analysis of EFMP-specific database systems currently utilized by the Services with a target completion date of fall 2013. Once this analysis is complete, OSN will work with the Services to develop standards and determine feasibility of adopting a common EFMP database to be utilized DoD-wide, including a discussion regarding whether to use current data systems or developing entirely new systems (or sub-systems). Standardization of EFMP will enable families with special needs to have the same level of access to services in the three areas of EFMP regardless of Service affiliation and location (for example, at a joint or sister Service installation).
- Convened a Family Panel consisting of ten family members representing the Military Services, including the Guard and Reserve Components, to provide input to the Director of the OSN on policy, programs, and services affecting military families with special needs,

Communication with military families with special needs and the provision of uniform and consistent information about the EFMP continues to be a major focus of the OSN.

Communication efforts include:

- Development of key messages about the EFMP that will be provided to families, service providers, and leadership through a variety of communication vehicles;
- Publication of an electronic newsletter in which readers can find articles, resources, tips, and news that service members and their families can use to remain informed on a variety of special needs-related topics; and
- Development of a guide for adults with special needs that provides information and resources to address a wide range of topics related to the concerns of adults with special needs.

OSN has initiated actions to establish the mandated Advisory Council under the Federal Advisory Committee Act guidelines. The OSN Designated Federal Officer is being identified,

and a charter and projection of timelines from start up until the first formal Council meeting are being drafted. Next steps will include request for nominations of Council members to represent the Services and the appointment of the Council's members by the Secretary of Defense.

A continuing challenge is assisting families in understanding that medical benefits and policy responsibilities are not under the authority of Military Community & Family Policy (MC&FP) leadership. OSN continues to rely on our Health Affairs/TRICARE Management Activity partnership to address health concerns.

DoD has taken significant steps to expand the Department-wide EFMP and to establish DoD-level oversight to provide a consistent level of support at all locations and to all members of the Military Services. OSN continues to move forward with the finalization of DoD policy and a detailed analysis of EFMP to determine the feasibility for standardization of the three component areas of the EFMP across the Military Services. There are no recommended legislative actions at this time.

Background

The Secretary of Defense established the Office of Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs (OSN) in October 2010 in response to section 563(a) of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) Fiscal Year (FY) 2010, Pub. L. 111-84, which added section 1781c to title 10, United States Code (U.S.C.). The OSN supports military families with special medical and/or educational needs, through development of appropriate policies, enhancement and dissemination of appropriate information, support for such families in obtaining referrals and services, and oversight of the activities of the Military Departments.

Subsection (h) section of 1781c of title 10, U.S.C., requires the Secretary of Defense to submit to the congressional defense committees a report on the activities of the OSN not later than April 30th each year. The report is required to address:

- A description of any gaps in services available through the Department of Defense for military families with special needs.
- A description of the actions being taken, or planned, to address such gaps.
- Such recommendations for legislative action as the Secretary considers appropriate to provide for the continuous improvement of support for military families with special needs.

This is the fourth annual report submitted since enactment of section 1781c of title 10, U.S.C.

Introduction

Office of Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs: The Principal Director for Military Community and Family Policy (MC&FP) also serves as the Director of the OSN. The office of six is comprised of individuals who have worked with the special needs population, including family support and special education professionals. The OSN is responsible for establishing policy and overseeing the implementation of the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) and the provision of early intervention services and special education within the Department of Defense (DoD). The EFMP serves military families with special needs (medical and/or educational). It includes the three component areas of identification of the

family member's special needs and enrollment in the program, assignment coordination, and family support.

DoD Instruction (DoDI) 1315.19, "Authorizing Special Needs Family Members Travel Overseas at Government Expense," December 20, 2005, Incorporating Change 1, February 16, 2011, provides guidance to the Military Services on the identification, enrollment, and assignment coordination aspects of the EFMP. Service members must enroll upon identification of a family member's special need. The family member's special medical and/or educational needs are documented on DD Form 2792, Family Member Medical Summary, and DD Form 2792-1, Special Education/Early Intervention Summary.

When a service member is being considered for an assignment, the family member's special medical requirements are submitted to the receiving military medical component. When a service member is considered for an overseas assignment, the family member's special educational requirements are submitted to the DoD Education Activity, or to the military department responsible for children under the age of three. These two activities make recommendations to the military personnel system whether the overseas community has the services necessary to meet the family member's needs.

Over 126,000 military family members are enrolled in the EFMP, and their needs are considered when the military sponsor is considered for an assignment. A member's career may not be prejudiced by this process. Although EFMP enrollment is mandatory, not all Service members follow through with enrollment. This leads to delays or cancellation of assignments, or less frequently early return of family members from an overseas location due to lack of available medical care.

Gaps and Actions

Standardization of the EFMP

The NDAA FY 2010 established a requirement for OSN to develop a system for record keeping, reporting, and continuous monitoring of resources for families with special needs. To fulfill this requirement, it is necessary to standardize policies and procedures across the Military Services. Currently the Services operate separate EFMPs, the component areas of which (identification/enrollment, assignment coordination, and family support) may also operate somewhat independently of each other. There is no system to link information about families with special needs to all components areas of the EFMP and all Services. Thus, communication and collaboration among medical, educational, personnel and family support components and among the Services is limited.

Standardization of the EFMP will enable families with special needs to have the same level of access to services in the three component areas of EFMP regardless of Service affiliation and location (for example, joint base assignment or being assigned to a sister Service location).

Actions taken by OSN in response to the requirements of the NDAA FY 2010 include:

1. Revision of DoDI 1315.19 to include family support, tour stabilization, and expanded assignment coordination to locations within the U.S. as well as overseas. The Instruction has been renamed the "Exceptional Family Member Program" and clearly defines the three required components of the EFMP. The Instruction is in the final steps of the coordination process.

2. Conducting an in-depth analysis of the current status of services that each Military Service provides to families with special needs. This included a review of their policies, procedures, business processes and forms, and site visits to headquarters, regional offices, and installations. This review was completed summer 2012.
3. Initiating a detailed analysis of EFMP-specific database systems currently utilized by the Services. The analysis includes a feasibility determination for standardization of an EFMP database that would intersect all the Services to include practicability of using current data systems or recommendations for developing new systems (partially or in full). This review is scheduled to be completed by fall 2013.

The OSN and the Services will collaborate on recommendations from the analysis prior to a formal presentation of a suggested way forward to the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.

EFMP Family Panel. A family panel consisting of members of military families was formed to provide input to the Director of the OSN on policy, programs, and services affecting military families with special needs, while awaiting the formal establishment of the Advisory Panel directed by section 582 of the Ike Skelton NDAA FY 2011, which amended section 563 of the NDAA FY 2010 (title 10 U.S.C. § 1781c). The OSN reached out to the Services to nominate members of military families from the National Capital Region representing a variety of ages, disabilities and military ranks for their input to improve the quality and accessibility of services. Ten family members representing the Military Services, including the Guard and Reserve Components, were invited to participate on an EFMP Family Panel. Meetings were convened in September 2011 and in March 2012. The panel met for its third and final meeting in September 2012. The Director of the OSN listened to the Panel's input and recommended next steps to improve communication for better access to military healthcare systems, to heighten awareness of the EFMP, and to encourage standardized practices and procedures across the Services.

Health Affairs/TRICARE Management Activity (HA/TMA). Families have reported issues regarding health benefits including the Extended Care Health Option (ECHO), and consistency of care when changing duty locations. HA/TMA is responsible for overall health and benefit policy through the direct care (military treatment facility) and purchased care (TRICARE) systems. OSN has collaborated with HA/TMA as medical benefit questions are presented and has included a link on the EFMP webpage to fact sheets and other resources available from HA/TMA that address topics such as ECHO and transferring TRICARE enrollment.

Advisory Council. As directed by the Office of the Director of Administration and Management, OSN has initiated actions to establish the mandated Advisory Council under the Federal Advisory Committee Act guidelines. The OSN Designated Federal Officer is being identified, and a charter and projection of timelines from start up until the first formal council meeting are being drafted. Next steps will include request for nominations of council members to represent the Services and the appointment of the Council's members by the Secretary of Defense.

Communication. Communication with military families with special needs and the provision of information about the EFMP remains a major focus of the OSN. Communication efforts undertaken by OSN include:

1. Collaboration with the Office of Military Community Outreach, MC&FP's public affairs office providing oversight for promotional efforts for MC&FP policies and programs, in development of a comprehensive communication plan designed to deliver uniform and consistent information about the EFMP. Key messages about the EFMP will be delivered to families, service providers, and leadership through a variety of communication vehicles.
2. Publication of the Exceptional Advocate. The Exceptional Advocate is a monthly electronic newsletter for military families with special needs, service providers and leaders. Each month, readers find articles, resources, tips, and news that service members and their families can use to remain informed on a variety of special needs-related topics.
3. Development of 12 on-line learning modules covering a range of topics focused on the needs of families with special needs. Topics include an overview of the EFMP, services for children birth to 21 under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, adults with special needs, and planning for the child's future (for example, estate planning, guardianship, government assistance programs).
4. Development and publication of the *Guide for Adults with Special Needs*. The guide provides information and resources to address a wide range of topics related to the concerns of adults with special needs, whether they are adult children, adults diagnosed with a condition or disability, or caregivers. The guide is available both online as a download or can be ordered and shipped, at no cost to families, from MilitaryOneSource (MOS).
5. Revision and updating of information on the EFMP page as part of the redesign of the MOS website.

Early Intervention and Special Education Services. DoDI 1342.12, "Provision of Early Intervention and Special Education Services to Eligible DoD Dependents," April 11, 2005, requires the Military Departments and DoDEA to establish a system to ensure compliance in the provision of early intervention services and special education. The Instruction also requires DoD to ensure compliance with the Instruction, to validate monitoring activities conducted by the Military Departments and DoDEA, and to determine the overall status of compliance within DoD. Monitoring is important to the Department because the schools and the Military Departments are required to comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (chapter 33 of title 20, U.S.C.). The OSN has operational oversight for monitoring early intervention, special education, and related services and conducts two on-site monitoring visits annually. The monitored component is required to submit a report on the status of required corrective actions. Reports of corrective action are submitted to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) (MC&FP) addressing the issues identified in the monitoring report. For this reporting period, OSN monitored services at Royal Air Force Lakenheath, England, and Fort Benning, Georgia.

Military OneSource: MOS was established by the DoD as a "one-stop" call center to provide resources and support to Active Duty, Guard and Reserve service members, and their families anywhere in the world 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. MOS has proven especially important for military families with special needs. Over 2,500 military families received special needs consultations with the specialty consultants in calendar year 2012.

Research. DoD has collaborated with the U. S. Department of Agriculture under a memorandum of understanding that addresses certain research efforts by land-grant universities and the Cooperative Extension Service. Under this agreement, the following research has been conducted:

1. Education Services for Military Dependent Children with Disabilities. In 2010, the Ohio State University conducted a review to identify special education services for children age 3 to 21 in public schools near installations with a large military population that serve military children.
 - a. Phase 1, completed in December 2010, focused on services for children with autism in the five states with the highest number of military members.
 - b. Phase 2 of the project expanded the review to include not only services for children with autism, but also the disability categories of emotional impairment and intellectually disabilities, and the availability of early intervention services for children birth to three. Phase 2 looked at 10 additional states plus updated the information for the initial 5 states.
 - c. Phase 3, initiated October 2012, expanded the initiative to encompass the remaining states. Review will be completed October 2013.

A product of the review has been the development of an online “Education Directory for Children with Special Needs”. The directory provides families with information they need to make informed decisions about the availability of educational services and to assist them with making a smooth transition from one public school district to another within the United States. The directory is available online via MOS at <http://www.militaryonesource.mil/efmp>.

2. Benchmark Study. Cornell University and the Beach Center of the University of Kansas completed a study identifying the concerns of military families with special needs, the support they require, and the systems that have been effective in providing services. Their final report, to be completed by June 2013, will include recommendations for OSN and the military departments for the standardization and enhancement of EFMP family support services across DoD.

The Family Support Metrics project, a continuation of the Benchmark Study, supports the Department in its efforts to standardize outcome data for families using the EFMP family support program. Cornell University, in coordination with OSN, is conducting a study to develop standardized metrics across the DoD on program activities and family outcomes for the EFMP family support services. The set of reporting requirements based on research findings will provide actionable data so that the OSN and military Services can assess services being provided and how well Service member and family member needs are being met.

3. Medicaid Study. West Virginia University conducted field research and a data and regulatory analyses to determine to what extent military families with special needs are accessing Medicaid waiver services and to examine the issues families face when attempting to access these services. Families have reported difficulty accessing Medicaid for certain types of supplemental services and equipment, not covered by TRICARE, as they move from one state to another during required military moves. Qualitative data was gathered from six joint base installation site visits in each of the three TRICARE regions and an analysis of

findings was conducted. The final report will be completed by June 2013. Findings from the study will be applied to formulate proposals for legislative or policy changes if indicated.

4. **Accreditation.** The Office of the DASDefense (MC&FP) contracted with the Council on Accreditation (COA) to develop national accreditation standards for DoD family readiness programs. COA develops standards that help organizations achieve contextual accreditation, a strategy to strengthen, measure and validate organizational effectiveness while focusing on the unique needs and aspirations of the people it serves. OSN staff worked with COA to draft standards that reflect the EFMP family support program. EFMP family support services were included in the accreditation process conducted at five installations accredited in 2012. COA is compiling an analysis of findings of family support services for OSN review.

Legislative Action

There are no recommended legislative actions at this time.

Summary

DoD has taken significant steps to expand the Department-wide EFMP and to establish DoD-level oversight to provide a consistent level of support at all locations and to all members of the Military Services. OSN continues to move forward with the finalization of DoD policy, and a detailed analysis of EFMP to determine the feasibility for standardization of the three component areas of the EFMP across the Military Services.