

**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 the standardization of the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP), the identification of gaps in services for family members with special needs, community outreach activities, and improved information, training and education to stakeholders. During 2013, the OSN:

- Continued efforts to address gaps in services available to military families with special needs. In 2013, the OSN completed two important studies:
  1. The Benchmark Study identified the concerns of military families with special needs, the support they require, and the systems that have been effective in providing services. The report reaffirms the need for:
    - greater standardization and consistency across the military departments and geographically;
    - continuing EFMP Family Support services and establishing a single integrated EFMP Family Support capability for joint bases;
    - creation of tiered levels of support based on intensity of needs;
    - provision of ongoing training and education for staff and family members; and
    - establishment of peer-to-peer support programs for parents and other family members.
  2. The Medicaid Study involved field research conducted at six military installations, review and analysis of survey data, and a regulatory analysis. The focus of the study was to determine the extent to which military families with special needs access Medicaid, including home and community-based services (HCBS) waivers, and to examine issues experienced by families when attempting to access these services. Major findings from the study include:
    - Military families with special needs use Medicaid as a resource to obtain specific supplementary services and coverage, such as respite care, transportation, supplies like diapers for older children, durable medical equipment and nutritional products, like formulas, that are either not provided or not fully covered by TRICARE.
    - The Medicaid system is structurally incompatible with the needs of active duty families due to the variation across state Medicaid systems and portability issues when military families relocate across state lines.
- Was re-aligned within the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to the Office of Family Policy/Children and Youth (OFP/CY) in order to increase efficiency, enhance productivity and develop synergies between complementary functions within the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy (MC&FP).

- Revised the Department of Defense (DoD) Instruction 1315.19, to rename it the “Exceptional Family Member Program.” The projected date for signing of the Instruction is December 2014.
- Initiated the required actions to establish the mandated Advisory Panel under the Federal Advisory Committee Act to fulfill the requirements of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2011. Designated and alternate designated Federal Officers (DFOs) have received training and certification. Next steps will include approval by the Office of the Director for Administration and Management (ODA&M) to establish the Advisory Panel, the appointment of the DFOs by the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, and drafting the charter.
- Completed review of the current EFMP Information Technology (IT) portfolio and presented recommendations to the military departments at a meeting held in September, 2013. Consensus was reached on ten recommendations to improve the management of the EFMP (Table 1, pg. 6). The OSN initiated development of standardized documents and forms across the three components (identification/enrollment, assignment coordination, family support) of the EFMP and a central data repository for the collection and reporting of quantitative information that will not contain personally identifiable information.

Communication and outreach to military families and organizations that serve them, as well as those who serve and support individuals with disabilities, continue to be an important focus for the OSN. Military families with special needs, installation EFMP Family Support providers and military treatment facilities have requested and received over 44,000 OSN publications from the Military OneSource Fulfillment Center in 2013.

In the past year, the OSN’s communication efforts have also included:

- Meetings with other federal agencies, several national disability and military service organizations to share information about how the Department serves and supports military families.
- Revising the Special Needs/EFMP section on the Military OneSource website and expanding the OSN’s social media presence.
- Publishing 12 online learning modules covering a range of topics focused on the needs of families with special needs such as early intervention and special education, estate planning and guardianship and government assistance programs.
- Conducting a series of early intervention training webinars that were facilitated by the OSN and attended by over 130 early intervention providers.
- Expanding the “Education Directory for Children with Special Needs” to all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

## **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 NDAA 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 30<sup>th</sup> each year. The report is required to address:

- A description of any gaps in services available through the DoD 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 fifth 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 Director of the Office of Family Policy, Children and Youth also serves as the Acting Director of the OSN. One of the major functions of the OSN is establishing policy and overseeing the implementation of the EFMP and another is the responsibility for the oversight for the provision of early intervention services and special education within the 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.

Over 128,500 military family members are enrolled in the EFMP, and their needs are considered when the military sponsor is considered for an assignment. A DoD military member's career may not be prejudiced by this process. Although EFMP enrollment is mandatory, not all DoD military 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**

OSN has conducted collaborative research has been conducted to validate systemic issues impacting military families with special needs, assess current available services and provide recommendations to improve the services and support families receive. In the past year, these efforts have included the following:

## Standardization of the EFMP

Currently, the Military Departments operate separate EFMPs. The component areas of the EFMP are identification/enrollment, assignment coordination, and family support, and each component area operates somewhat independently of one other. Additionally, there is no system to link information about families with special needs to all component areas of the EFMP and all Military Departments. Thus, communication and collaboration among medical, educational, personnel and family support components and among the Military Departments 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).

To address this gap, OSN is involved in a multi-year project that includes the following actions:

1. Initial piloting and implementation of standardized documents and DD forms across the EFMP's components of family support and assignment coordination. These documents and forms will promote a more consistent and streamlined delivery of EFMP services to military families with special needs, such as a more consistent and simplified Family Travel Screening process for families and staff. Cross-Service release is expected in FY14 for the following EFMP family support providers' products:
  - a. Quick Reference Guide: Provides a cross-Service guide on how to navigate the EFMP process across the three EFMP components.
  - b. Family Needs Assessment: Enables EFMP Family Support staff to identify the needs of EFMP Families and connect families with available resources.
  - c. Inter-Service Case Note Transfer Summary: Enables families to seamlessly transfer between installations of different Service affiliations by providing EFMP Family Support staff with the most relevant case history information.
2. Review of the current EFMP IT Portfolio for common functionality and identification of system requirements to recommend an IT roadmap. This future state will promote a standard experience and interaction regardless of Service affiliation. In an effort to provide cross-Service reporting, OSN is developing a central data repository to assist in the collection and reporting of demographic information to EFMP stakeholders.
3. Continuous analysis of EFMP processes across all Military Departments and EFMP components to develop recommendations that seek consistent, streamlined EFMP delivery and an improved family experience. At a meeting held in September, 2013, the OSN and EFMP Service representatives validated the future vision for the EFMP and agreed to the recommendations presented in Table 1 (pg 6). These recommendations will move DoD towards standardization of EFMP processes.

**Table 1. Recommendations**

Focus Area	Recommendation	Description
Stakeholders	1. Comprehensive EFMP Training	Provide standard level of EFMP training to stakeholders across the Military Departments and components, where possible.
	2. Credentialed Medical Screener	All Medical Screeners must be privileged providers.
Processes	3. Automatic Notification of Enrollment	Send enrollment notification to Sponsors, Family Support, and Personnel.
	4. Central Management of Cross-Service EFMP Data	Enter information into a centralized EFMP data system by designated staff, regardless of Service member's affiliation and location.
	5. Electronic Workflow for Forms	Whenever possible, create electronic versions of all EFMP and related forms for completion and submission by all involved stakeholders.
	6. Revisit the EFMP Criteria	Refine the current requirements of enrollment into the EFMP.
	7. Standard Family Travel Screening Process	Establish a consistent evaluation and documentation process in support of family member medical/educational determinations for overseas installations and other selected locations.
	8. Timely Identification of Family Members with Special Needs	Identify potential EFMP enrollees at the time of diagnosis of eligible condition.
Relationships	9. Improved Internal and External Collaboration	Enhance EFMP support and service delivery capabilities through greater collaboration with internal and external entities.
	10. Strategic Communications and Marketing	Employ strategic communication and outreach to facilitate standardization and build awareness of resources..

Advisory Panel on Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs. Prior to the NDAA FY 2011, the OSN had no formal method for receiving advice on the implementation of policy or how to improve family support services. To address this gap, and to fulfill the requirements of the NDAA FY 2011, the OSN has initiated the required actions to establish this Advisory Panel, as required by Section 563(d) of PL 111-84 of NDAA for FY10, as added by Section 582 (c) of the NDAA for FY11 PL 111-383, under the Federal Advisory Committee Act

guidelines. The OSN Designated Federal Officer (DFO) and alternate DFO have received training and certification. The charter and projection of timelines from start up until the first formal council meeting have been drafted. Next steps will include approval by the Office of the Director for Administration and Management (DA&M) to establish the Advisory Panel and the appointment of the DFOs by the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.

Military Family Readiness Council. With the enactment of Section 574 of the NDAA for FY 2013, PL 112-81, the OSN Director was made a voting member of the MFRC. In 2013, the MFRC selected the standardization of the EFMP as one of their foci. The OSN provided an overview of ongoing standardization efforts to the MFRC on 1 May, 2013.

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

1. Collaborating with MC&FP's Military Community Outreach Office who provides oversight for promotional efforts for MC&FP policies and programs. Communication plans designed to deliver uniform and consistent information about the OSN, special education, early intervention, and EFMP resources and policies have been developed. OSN messages are shared with other key DoD stakeholders, military service organizations, service providers and community organizations.
2. Participating in the Defense Health Agency (DHA) pediatric working group to assist in the preparation of the NDAA FY 2013, Section 735, Study on Health Care and Related Support for Children of Members of the Armed Forces. The OSN provided information about EFMP family support and EFMP enrollment data and has further collaborated with DHA by providing content recommendations for the special needs content on the TRICARE website.
3. Publishing the Exceptional Advocate. The Exceptional Advocate is a bi-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.
4. Publishing 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).
5. Revising and updating of information on the EFMP page as part of the redesign of the MOS website.
6. Meeting with several national disability and military service organizations to provide information about how the Department serves and supports military families with special needs through programs, such as the EFMP. The OSN met with:
  - Parent-to-Parent USA
  - National Military Family Association
  - Blue Star Families

- Special Olympics
  - National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research
  - U.S. Department of Transportation
  - Institute of Medicine
  - Interagency Committee on Disability Research
7. Contributing information about the EFMP, Military OneSource support to military families with special needs (including autism), and current research being conducted to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for the Report to Congress on Activities Related to Autism Spectrum Disorders and Other Developmental Disabilities Under the Combating Autism Act of 2006 and Combating Autism Reauthorization Act of 2011.

Early Intervention and Special Education Services. OSN has oversight responsibility for DoD Instruction 1342.12, "Provision of Early Intervention and Special Education Services to Eligible DoD Dependents," April 11, 2005. The Instruction has been revised to incorporate amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (chapter 33 of title 20, U.S.C.), so that implementing DoD issuance reflects the requirements of the non-funding and non-reporting provision of IDEA. On December 13, 2013 the Instruction was published in the Federal Register with a deadline for public comments of February 11, 2014. Finalization and publication of the revised Instruction is projected for May 2014.

DoDI 1342.12 requires the Military Departments and DoDEA to establish a system to ensure compliance with the requirement to provide early intervention services and special education to eligible family members. The DoDI also requires DoD to validate monitoring activities conducted by both the Military Departments and DoDEA and to determine the overall status of compliance within DoD. The monitoring of activities is especially important as the Department is also required to comply with relevant portions of IDEA. The OSN has operational oversight for monitoring early intervention, special education, and related services and conducts two on-site monitoring visits annually. In conjunction with an on-site visit, the monitored component is required to submit a report on the status of required corrective actions. For this reporting period, OSN conducted one site visit to Fort Benning, GA which identified no new issues or concerns in providing services to children with special needs. The second visit was attempted to be scheduled but had to be postponed due to scheduling difficulties associated with government furloughs. While OSN was not able to conduct this second site visit, OSN still maintains oversight by continually monitoring compliance reports submitted by the Services and DoDEA on the provision of services. OSN fully expects to complete both required site visits for 2014.

The Military Medical Departments have agreed to standardize the Educational and Developmental Intervention Services (EDIS) early intervention processes and documents. EDIS early intervention services are provided at U.S. and overseas installations that have DoD Education Activity schools. In support of the collaborative standardization effort, OSN facilitated a series of seven training webinars, presented by a nationally recognized early intervention specialist, focused on the Individualized Family Service Plan Process Document. Over 130 early intervention providers from the U.S., the Pacific, and Europe attended each webinar training.

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, OSN collaborated on the following studies:

1. Education Services for Military Dependent Children with Disabilities. A three-phase study was completed with The Ohio State University to identify the availability of early intervention services for children age birth to three, and special education services for children age birth to 21 in public agencies and schools near installations with a large military population that serve military children. The online “Education Directory for Children with Special Needs” is the product of this review. The Directory provides families with information they need to make informed decisions about the availability of educational services within the 50 states and the District of Columbia. It assists them with making a smooth transition from one public school district to another within the United States. The directory is available on Military OneSource 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. A predominant theme found throughout the report was the need for greater standardization and consistency across Military Departments and geographically. The report also included:
  - the need to continue to provide EFMP family support services
  - the provision of ongoing training and education for EFMP family support staff and family members
  - the need to establish a single integrated EFMP family support capability for joint bases
  - the creation of tiered levels of support based on intensity of need
  - the establishment of peer-to-peer support programs for parents and other family members, e.g. siblings. The final report concluded that families are generally very satisfied with the family support they receive from the EFMP.
3. Family Support Process and Outcome Metrics Project. The Family Support Process and Outcome Metrics Project is being conducted by Cornell University and will develop standardized metrics across the DoD for EFMP Family Support activities. The outcome of this project will provide a standard process that the OSN and Military Departments can use to assess family support services provided and how well Service member and family member needs are being met.
4. Medicaid Study. West Virginia University concluded the field research and data and regulatory analyses to determine the extent to which military families with special needs access Medicaid, including home and community-based services (HCBS) waivers, and to examine the issues families face when attempting to access these services. The major findings of the Medicaid Study identified that:
  - Military families with special needs use Medicaid as a resource to obtain specific supplementary services and coverage. State residency eligibility requirements, the

demand for Medicaid services outstripping funding and availability, and the lengthy Medicaid waiver waiting lists in States complicate families' access to Medicaid for certain types of supplemental services and equipment, that are either not provided or not fully covered by TRICARE.

- The Medicaid system is structurally incompatible with the needs of active duty families due to the variation across state Medicaid systems and portability issues when families move across state lines.
- Military families are more likely to access Medicaid due to the family member's health condition rather than qualification under eligibility related to low income status.
- There is a lack of capacity within military family support and medical case management to effectively assist families in their efforts to understand and access Medicaid.

While the OSN has qualitative information about issues families have with the portability of Medicaid, there is a need for quantitative information to support/verify what is being reported anecdotally. OSN has collaborated with DMDC on a *Quick Compass Survey of TRICARE Child Beneficiaries: Utilization of Medicaid Waivered Services* that will be conducted in the Spring 2014. The Quick Poll is designed to provide us with information on the number of families accessing Medicaid, the type of services needed/received, reasons for accessing Medicaid vs. ECHO, and experiences when relocating. Survey results will be available Fall 2014.

5. Accreditation. EFMP Family Support services were included in the accreditation process conducted by the Council on Accreditation (COA) at 12 installations in 2013. Of those 12, seven were fully accredited and one is in the process of accreditation. Four installation EFMP family support programs were not reviewed because the programs had not been implemented for at least 6 months prior to the accreditation visit. COA plans to conduct a single-service review and confirm full EFMP services are being provided and the length of time they have been provided.

### **Legislative Action**

There are no recommended legislative actions at this time.

### **Summary**

The OSN will continue to provide oversight of DoD early intervention and special education services. OSN remains committed to the standardization of the EFMP and the provision of a consistent level of support at all locations and to all members of the Military Departments. Communication and outreach remain an important focus for the OSN as well as the consideration and implementation of recommendations from the major studies conducted in 2013.