

**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 2014, the OSN:

- Made significant progress on the EFMP Standardization Project by further refining initiatives reported last year, developing standard forms and processes for the Family Member Travel Screening and Family Needs Assessment and Services Plan, as well as building the core functionality of the EFMP Data Repository. Each of these efforts will be piloted in 2015. The OSN has also initiated the blueprint design for the Cross-Service EFMP IT System that each Service can use for its EFMP processes.
- Combined two committees, one required by Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 1342.12, "Provision of Early Intervention and Special Education Services to Eligible DoD Dependents," April 11, 2005, and another required by DoDI 1315.19, "Authorizing Special Needs Family Members Travel Overseas at Government Expense," February 16, 2011, into one. The newly established Overarching Coordinating Committee for Military Families with Special Needs oversees policies and programs for military families with special needs. The two subcommittees required by Department of Defense (DoD) policy will report their activities to the Overarching Coordinating Committee.
- Initiated required actions to formally establish the Advisory Panel on Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs and is working with the military Departments to identify candidates who are members of a military family with special needs for the Secretary's consideration.
- Implemented recommendations from studies conducted in 2013:
  - Conducted training and education on family support topics and is also actively pursuing the establishment of a peer-to-peer support program for military parents.
  - Worked in collaboration with the Military Community and Family Policy (MC&FP) Military Families Learning Network and conducted a three-part Medicaid training series, beginning December 10, 2014, and concluding February 18, 2015, geared to family support providers, families, and others.
  - Worked in collaboration with the military Services to develop a feedback instrument to measure family member satisfaction with EFMP Family Support Services. The instrument will be piloted in 2015 to determine if it adequately measures family member satisfaction.
  - Worked with the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) on a *2014 Quick Compass of TRICARE Child Beneficiaries: Utilization of Medicaid Waivered Services*.

- Convened a respite care working group to gather and compare information from each Service. The OSN also reviewed the TRICARE Extended Care Health Option (ECHO) respite care and commissioned a research summary to be completed regarding civilian respite care programs.

Communication and collaboration with military families with special needs, DoD stakeholders, national disability organizations, and military service organizations and the provision of uniform and consistent information about the EFMP continues to be a major focus of the OSN.

Communication efforts included:

- Participating in the Military-Connected Children with Special Health Care Needs and Their Families Conference sponsored by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the HSC Foundation.
- 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.
- Publishing the bi-monthly electronic newsletter titled, "The Exceptional Advocate," to military families with special needs, service providers, and leaders.

## **Background**

OSN was established in response to section 563(a) of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for 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 policies, enhancement and dissemination of appropriate information, support for families in obtaining referrals and services, and oversight of the activities of the Military Departments. Subsection (h) of section 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 of 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 sixth annual report submitted since the enactment of section 1781c of title 10, U.S.C.

## **Introduction**

Office of Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs. One of the major functions of the OSN is establishing policy and overseeing the implementation of the EFMP. The EFMP serves military families with special needs (medical and/or educational). It includes the three component areas of identification of a family member's special needs and enrollment in the program, assignment coordination, and family support. Another major function of the OSN

is the responsibility for the oversight for the provision of early intervention services and special education provided by the DoD.

Over 128,500 military family members are enrolled in the EFMP, and their needs are considered when the military sponsor is identified for an assignment to a remote or overseas location. 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 military family members from an overseas location due to lack of available medical care.

### **Gaps and Actions**

The OSN has been focused on implementing recommendations from the 2013 studies.<sup>1</sup> Family support training and education have been provided and, through collaborative efforts with the military Departments, the OSN has developed standardized forms and processes, produced quick reference materials for providers, and developed a system for EFMP data collection. In the past year, these efforts have included the following:

#### **Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP)**

##### **EFMP Standardization Project**

The Military Departments continue to 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. This has led to differences in the management of the three component areas. To address these gaps and enable families with special needs to have the same level of access to services regardless of Service affiliation and location, the OSN has engaged in a multi-year effort to standardize EFMP policies and procedures.

In 2013, the OSN and the Military Services validated recommendations to assist in EFMP standardization. In 2014, the OSN and the Services began to develop and refine initiatives to achieve the validated recommendations for EFMP standardization. The table below summarizes the OSN's work in the past year and the next step.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Defense Exceptional Family Member Program Benchmark Study, accessed February 23, 2015, <http://www.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/ResourceGuides/EFMP-Benchmark.pdf>

Medicaid and Military Families with Children with special Healthcare Needs: Accessing Medicaid and Waivered Services Final Project Report, accessed February 23, 2015, <http://www.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/EFMP/EFMP-MedicaidReport.pdf>

**Table 1.**

Focus Area	Gaps Identified	Standardization Goals	FY14 Actions	Next Steps
IDENTIFICATION / ENROLLMENT	<p><b>GAP:</b> Each Service has some unique enrollment procedures, ranging from usage of standard criteria to notification procedures. Potential EFMP enrollees are not identified in a timely manner</p> <p><b>IMPACT:</b> Families may have difficulties in enrolling at joint bases or sister-Service installations, may lack awareness of their enrollment status, and may not be identified until Assignment Coordination</p>	<p>Families will be identified in a timely manner and correctly enrolled into the EFMP at any installation regardless of Service affiliation, and notified of their EFMP status</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examined capabilities to automatically notify stakeholders of EFMP enrollment, and developed guidance to issue to the Services</li> <li>• Initiated ongoing review of current EFMP criteria to determine if it needs to be revised</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>LONG-TERM:</b> Determine if current criteria needs to be revised, and continue periodic reviews</li> <li>• <b>LONG-TERM:</b> Explore use of Electronic Health Records to facilitate timely identification of potential EFMP enrollees</li> </ul>
ASSIGNMENT COORDINATION / (FAMILY MEMBER TRAVEL SCREENING)	<p><b>GAP:</b> Each Service has a different screening and medical review process for military dependent travel, ranging from staff qualifications to process steps</p> <p><b>IMPACT:</b> Families and staff may navigate the process incorrectly in a joint base or sister-Service environment, leading to a complicated and extensive process that may not correctly identify potential EFMP enrollees or accurately determine their needs</p>	<p>Families will experience a consistent Family Member Travel Screening (FMTS) process and their needs will be determined accurately and consistently</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed standard forms for the FMTS process</li> <li>• Developed initial standard qualifications for screeners</li> <li>• Developed standard screening processes for potential use by the Services</li> <li>• Completed pilot planning for all proposed changes to the screening process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>FY15:</b> Prepare FMTS forms for piloting</li> <li>• <b>FY15:</b> Finalize standard qualifications and process changes</li> <li>• <b>FY15:</b> Pilot the new FMTS forms, processes, and credentials</li> <li>• <b>LONG-TERM:</b> Release new forms, processes, and staffing requirements</li> <li>• <b>LONG-TERM:</b> Train all staff involved in the screening on the new processes</li> </ul>
FAMILY SUPPORT	<p><b>GAP:</b> Each Service provides family support differently, ranging from assessing families' needs to transferring necessary records to an installation of a different Service affiliation</p> <p><b>IMPACT:</b> Families may receive inconsistent family support services. Additionally, the Services lack understanding of each other's EFMP processes, making it difficult for staff to assist Service members of a different Service affiliation</p>	<p>Families will receive improved and consistent support in identifying services and resources at any location regardless of Service affiliation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Updated the Quick Reference Guide (QRG) to explain each Service's EFMP processes across all three components</li> <li>• Delivered training on the Family Needs Assessment and Services Plan (FNA) to family support staff to enable consistent documentation of families' needs</li> <li>• Released the FNA for Service-wide adoption</li> <li>• Determined that the Inter-Services Transfer Summary (ISTS) would be piloted in FY15</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>FY15:</b> Pilot the ISTS</li> <li>• <b>FY15:</b> Release the ISTS across the Services</li> <li>• <b>LONG-TERM:</b> Deliver training for ISTS to staff</li> </ul>

<b>CROSS-COMPONENT (TECHNOLOGY)</b>	<p><b>GAP:</b> Each Service uses different IT Systems across their components, with limited sharing of data within a Service's components and no sharing of data across Services</p> <p><b>IMPACT:</b> Some processes lack automation across the EFMP components, and EFMP information that is necessary for the successful delivery of EFMP services is not accessible to different Services in a joint base or sister-Service environment</p>	<p>Families and staff will have streamlined and consistent interactions with improved EFMP technology and their necessary EFMP information will be more easily managed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Built the core functionality of the EFMP Data Repository, which will allow Services to submit non-Personally Identifiable Information / non-Protected Health Information EFMP demographic data to OSN for storage and reporting purposes</li> <li>• Initiated the blueprint design for the Cross-Service EFMP IT System that each Service can use for their EFMP processes, and including automated processes and forms, where possible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>FY15:</b> Finalize the build of the EFMP Data Repository</li> <li>• <b>FY15:</b> Pilot the Data Repository</li> <li>• <b>LONG-TERM:</b> Update blueprint design of Cross-Service EFMP IT System</li> <li>• <b>LONG-TERM:</b> Identify host and agent for Cross-Service EFMP IT System</li> <li>• <b>LONG-TERM:</b> Following the completion of the blueprint design, coordinate the development activities of the cross-Service EFMP IT System</li> <li>• <b>LONG-TERM:</b> Leverage EHR in future IT System</li> </ul>
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Standardization efforts in FY 2015 will focus on the Next Steps mentioned in the above table. Based on the level of impact to families and projected implementation feasibility, three standardization initiatives have been identified for piloting:

- **Family Member Travel Screening (FMTS) Pilot:** Test the efficacy of new processes and forms to determine the feasibility of a standardized FMTS process across the Military Services for military family member travel screening.
- **Data Repository Pilot:** Test a centralized cross-Service Repository by facilitating the collection of EFMP data from the Services for the purposes of standardized reporting.
- **Inter-Services Transfer Summary (ISTS) Pilot:** Test the efficacy of a newly developed ISTS form to determine its effectiveness in transferring Family Support case notes across the Services.

Additionally, OSN will continuously analyze EFMP processes and IT Systems across the Services and EFMP components to potentially develop additional recommendations that seek consistent, streamlined EFMP management and an improved experience for Service members and their families. This includes measuring the performance of EFMP processes and determining the level of standardization among cross-Service and Service-specific EFMP training materials.

**Overarching Committee for Military Families with Special Needs**

DoDI 1342.12, "Provision of Early Intervention and Special Education Services to Eligible DoD Dependents," April 11, 2005, and DoDI 1315.19, "Authorizing Special Needs Family Members Travel Overseas at Government Expense," February 16, 2011, require the establishment of a committee to oversee policies and programs for military family members with special needs.

Due to overlapping membership and responsibilities of the committee, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness approved combining the committees into one overarching committee that would provide oversight and fulfill the responsibilities of both Instructions. Two subcommittees, as required by DoDI 1342.12 and DoDI 1315.19, will report their activities to the Overarching Coordinating Committee annually. In addition, this committee will receive recommendations from the Advisory Panel on Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs which was established by section 582 of the NDAA for FY 2011.

Executive-level staff were appointed to serve as the representatives on the DoD Overarching Coordinating Committee for Military Families with Special Needs. The Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness chairs the committee.

### **Advisory Panel on Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs**

Prior to the implementation of section 582 of the NDAA for FY 2011 (which amended section 563 of 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 directly from families. To address this gap and to fulfill the requirements of section 582, an interim panel was formed and met three times. They provided input to the Director of the OSN on policy, programs, and services affecting military families with special needs. The military Services nominated family members from the National Capital Region representing a variety of ages, disabilities and military ranks. Since 2012, the OSN has initiated the required actions to formally establish this Advisory Panel and is working with the military Departments to identify candidates who are members of a military family with special needs for the Secretary's consideration.

### **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act**

**Early Intervention and Special Education Services.** OSN has oversight responsibility for DoDI 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 (chapter 33 of title 20, U.S.C.). On December 13, 2013, the Instruction was published in the Federal Register with a deadline for public comments of February 11, 2014. The revised Instruction has been signed and will be published by July 1, 2015.

DoDI 1342.12 requires the Military Departments and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) to establish a system to ensure compliance with providing early intervention services, special education, and related services 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 OSN has operational oversight for monitoring early intervention, special education, and related services and generally 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. Due to sequestration, no monitoring visits occurred in FY 2014. Though site visits did not occur this year, OSN maintained oversight by monitoring compliance reports and data submitted by the Services and DoDEA on the provision of services. OSN expects to conduct site visits in 2015.

The OSN chaired the DoD Inter-component Coordinating Committee which met quarterly in 2014 for continuing collaboration on DoD early intervention, special education, and related services. OSN, DoDEA, and Services representatives attended all meetings. Issues of primary importance in 2014 included:

- the exploration of transferring the Educational and Developmental Intervention Services (EDIS) Early Intervention Services and Related Services to DoDEA
- standardization and submission of DoDEA Special Education and military medical department EDIS programs Annual Compliance Report to OSN
- standardization of processes and forms of the military medical department EDIS Early Intervention Services
- compliance monitoring of DoDEA special education and EDIS programs, and
- collaboration in the provision of EDIS early intervention and related services to students in non-DoD Schools Program schools.

Additionally, the OSN, in collaboration with the military healthcare systems, Special Needs Program Managers identified disparities across the Services in the provision of military medical early intervention services for military families with young children with special needs. In order to address the disparities, OSN and the Services cooperated in the development of standardized guidelines, processes and forms used by the military medical departments' EDIS Early Intervention Services. As part of the standardization efforts, from October 2013-June 2014, a series of eight EDIS Early Intervention Services webinars were conducted and focused on the Individualized Family Service Plan Process Document. Over 130 early intervention providers attended each training webinar.

**Research.** The 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 and research reviews:

- **Education Services for Military Dependent Children with Disabilities.** In 2013 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. The online "Education Directory for Children with Special Needs" was 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 the Military OneSource website. In FY 2014, the Education Directory received 14,886 total visits and 35,496 page views. The School-Age Directory received 17,639 page views and the Early Intervention Directory received 7,235 page views.

In August, 2014 the OSN conducted usability testing with nine participants who were members of military families and service providers. More than half of the participants had children with special needs and had moved several times with school aged children. The objective of the usability testing was to:

- Understand how military families use the site
- Identify information families found most useful
- Determine what, if any, additional resources would help families to manage moving school districts

Overall, the usability testing feedback received from participants was generally positive. Recommendations received from the usability testing, such as the number of clicks it takes for users to reach desired information, are being reviewed and implemented where appropriate.

- **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. A copy of the Benchmark Study report can be found on Military OneSource.<sup>2</sup> Since publishing the report, the OSN has conducted training and education on family support topics and is also actively pursuing the establishment of a peer-to-peer support program for military parents and hopes to launch a Pilot peer-to-peer network in 2015.
- **Family Support Process and Outcome Metrics Project.** In 2013, Cornell University began developing program and family outcome measures for the EFMP family support services to ensure standardized reporting and program effectiveness across the Military Services. The DoD and Services' EFMP representatives have developed a feedback instrument that will be piloted in 2015 to determine if the instrument is adequately measuring family member satisfaction with EFMP Family Support Services. Families using these services will report their involvement and level of satisfaction with the support services received. Information will be used by the OSN for administrative oversight, including monitoring resource utilization and policy development.
- **Medicaid Study.** In 2013, West Virginia University concluded the field research and data and regulatory analysis 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. A copy of the Final Project Report can be found on the Military OneSource website.<sup>3</sup> Since the report was published, the OSN has been working in collaboration with the MC&FP Military Families Learning Network and conducted a three-part Medicaid training series, beginning December 10, 2014, and concluding February 18, 2015, geared to family support providers, families, and others. The webinars provided general information about various aspects of Medicaid and provided guidance on where to turn for resources and information. The webinars were well attended with over 100 participants during the first session. The webinars will be archived and available on the Military Families Learning Network's eXtension.org website.

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<sup>2</sup> Department of Defense Exceptional Family Member Program Benchmark Study, accessed February 23, 2015, <http://www.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/ResourceGuides/EFMP-Benchmark.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Medicaid and Military Families with Children with special Healthcare Needs: Accessing Medicaid and Waivered Services Final Project Report, accessed February 23, 2015, <http://www.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/EFMP/EFMP-MedicaidReport.pdf>

In addition to working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture on educating family support providers and others on Medicaid and HCBS waivers, the OSN has been evaluating the scope of the Medicaid and HCBS waiver issue and working closely with the Defense State Liaison Office (DSLO) and DMDC to help facilitate improved access for families.

- The DSLO identified the access of Medicaid HCBS Waivers for military families with special needs as one of its top ten key issues to address in 2014. The DSLO has been working through its regional liaisons to engage and educate state policy makers. The DSLO has identified a possible strategy for military Service members to retain their earned priority for receiving Medicaid HCBS waivers. This strategy includes allowing Service members to enroll their family member with special needs in the state they designate as their legal residence. Service members and their families can be allowed to maintain a legal residence to reduce the turmoil experienced in transferring legal affiliations every two to three years. Similarly, allowing military families to maintain enrollment of family members with special needs in one state would allow them to progress along with other citizens of the state in obtaining waivers and allow the military family to sustain a relationship with the care managers within that state concerning the administration of the waiver services.
- OSN collaborated with DMDC on a 2014 *Quick Compass of TRICARE Child Beneficiaries: Utilization of Medicaid Waivered Services*. The Quick Compass was designed to provide the OSN 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. The Quick Compass was divided into seven topic areas: Background information (demographics); EFMP; TRICARE Extended Care Health Option; Medicaid; Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services Waivers; and Care Coordination. Administration began on March 27, 2014, with the mail-out of announcement letters. Data was collected on the web between March 27 and May 15, 2014. The Survey was a census of 52,663 active duty members considered eligible based on the presence of children with special needs. Completed surveys were received from 8,127 eligible respondents. The overall weighted response rate for those eligible was 20%. The results of the Quick Compass were published in February 2015 and publically released by DMDC (<http://www.dtic.mil/get-tr-doc/pdf?AD=ADA610440>).
- Sports and Recreation for Children and Youth with Developmental Disabilities Research Review. The University of Minnesota completed a preliminary research review of sports and recreation programming. Specifically, the review provides an overview of barriers faced by participants and families, and identifies thirteen key components of successful inclusive sports and recreation programs. The review discusses best practices for adapting the physical and institutional environment as well as instructional styles and program activities to meet the needs of young people with developmental disabilities. A brief summary of current practices with the Department, implications and suggestions for future research, and a list of helpful resources were also provided. The Research Review has been shared with MC&FP's Morale, Welfare, and Recreation office and Office of Family Policy, Children and Youth.

- **Respite Care for Families with Special Needs Research Review.** A review of respite care for families with special needs was conducted as a result of the Benchmark Study. Military families cited respite care as one of the most important benefits of enrollment in the Services' EFMP. Although respite care is not formally part of the DoD policy, the OSN agreed to assist the Services to try and broker a way forward to standardize respite care across the Services. The OSN convened a working group to gather and compare information from each Service. The OSN also reviewed the TRICARE ECHO respite care, and completed a research summary regarding civilian respite care programs.

### **Accreditation/Certification.**

Military Family Readiness Standards for the delivery of EFMP Family Support services are included in the Military Family Readiness Program accreditation process conducted by the Council on Accreditation and/or in the Military Family Readiness Program certification process conducted by the military Services as a part of an internal review. EFMP Standards are applied when support to families with special needs is included in the portfolio of direct services delivered by the program seeking accreditation/certification. In the event that direct support is delivered by another source based on a referral, the program would be required to demonstrate having met the standards for Information and Referral, to ensure that the special needs of the family seeking support were addressed by another service provider.

### **Communication and Collaboration.**

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

- Collaborating with MC&FP's Military Community Outreach Office that provides oversight for promotional efforts for 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.
- Participating as a voting representative in the Defense Health Agency Pediatric Integrated Product Team to assist with developing long and short-term goals and objectives that address the findings in section 735 of the NDAA for FY 2013, Pediatric Report to Congress titled, "Study on Health Care and Related Support for Children of Members of the Armed Forces."
- Publishing the Exceptional Advocate. The Exceptional Advocate is a bi-monthly electronic newsletter for military families with special needs, service providers and leaders. Every other 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. There are 7,977 subscribers receiving the bi-monthly electronic newsletter.
- Revising and updating information on the EFMP page as part of the redesign of the Military OneSource website.

- Participating in the *Military-Connected Children with Special Health Care Needs and Their Families Conference* sponsored by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the HSC Foundation. A copy of the conference summary and recommendations can be found on the HSC Foundation website.<sup>4</sup>

The meeting objectives included:

- Examining current knowledge about the demographics and health status of military children with special health care needs
  - Identifying the gaps in knowledge about these children and how these gaps may be addressed
  - Recommending next steps for research and services to improve the health and quality of life for military children with special health care needs.
- 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
    - National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research
    - Institute of Medicine
    - Interagency Committee on Disability Research.

Military OneSource (MOS). 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. An average of 67 families received special needs consultations monthly with specialty consultants in 2014. Military families with special needs, installation EFMP Family Support providers, and military treatment facilities have also requested over 29,190 OSN publications from the Military OneSource Fulfillment Center in 2014.

### Legislative Action

There are no recommended legislative actions at this time.

### Summary

The OSN continues to provide oversight for the provision of the DoD early intervention, special education, and related services. The Department remains committed to the EFMP standardization and looks forward to sharing the results of the pilots and the implementation of recommendations from research conducted in future reports to Congress.

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<sup>4</sup> The HSC Foundation, accessed February 23, 2015, <http://www.hscfoundation.org/nichd>