

Office of Special Needs EFMP Podcast— Exceptional Family Member Program Standardization – CONUS Assignment Coordination Enhancements

Office of Special Needs

Episode transcript

Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the Office of Special Needs EFMP podcast. This is an official podcast of the Defense Department. I'm Bruce Moody.

The Defense Department recently published a new policy that ensures support provided to families with special needs is consistent from service to service. This podcast series is devoted to breaking down this new policy in order to help families understand what's in the Exceptional Family Member Program, how it has changed and why. And joining us to work our way through this podcast, returning to the podcast, is Tomeshia Barnes, who leads the Department of Defense's Office of Special Needs. Tomeshia, welcome to the podcast.

Tomeshia Barnes:

Thank you for allowing us the time to talk about the Exceptional Family Member Program, Bruce.

Bruce Moody:

It's great to have you on the podcast. It's great to have you returning to this podcast and working through all the aspects of this policy. Today we're going to focus on assignment coordination. Before we get into the enhancements of assignment coordination, refresh for us our memory on what assignment coordination is as it relates to the Exceptional Family Member Program. What is this function and why is it so important?

Tomeshia Barnes:

Assignment coordination involves the collaboration between designated EFMP personnel and military personnel to ensure the consideration of medical and educational needs of family members when the family's relocating to a new duty station.

One of the goals when we look at assignment coordination is we really want families to be relocated to locations that have the care and support available to meet the needs of all of the family members. In addition, we also want to be cognizant of the needs of the services. So again, you have the mission, as well as being responsive to the career development of the service member. But why assignment coordination is so important is, it's the mechanism that allows the research and the work to be conducted to really look at what a family needs and to measure if the services and care and supports are available at that new duty station. So we want to make sure that the needs of that family can be met wherever a family goes.

Bruce Moody:

What would be the criteria considered during an assignment review?

Tomeshia Barnes:

What a great question, Bruce. So during that assignment review, the following factors are considered: So, you've got to consider the availability of the military treatment facility and TRICARE providers. We also consider the TRICARE access to care standards. The criteria includes distance to care, importantly the wait time for medical providers. So not just if the medical service is available, but how long will it take for a family to receive services that they need. The severity of the family member's needs, the frequency of the care.

And what's the most important part? I would say the most important criteria that is considered during the assignment review is the individual needs of the family. So we have standard criteria, but there's also that human aspect and the individualized needs of that family that's also considered and taken into account when that assignment coordination process is being conducted.

So it's very important to note that the EFMP does not finalize assignments and that the finalization of assignments is a part of the personnel function. With that said, the career needs of the service member is always a factor, the mission of the military services and the needs of the family. So I would say that the driving factor in determining the next duty station for a service member is those three components.

Bruce Moody:

What enhancements will we see to the assignment coordination process as a result of standardization?

Tomeshia Barnes:

So a couple of key things I'd love to mention here. One is that standard criteria. It's so important for families and service members to know what's being used to make this determination. How are you making a recommendation on travel? So what are you using to determine this? So we definitely wanted to provide that standard criteria.

Also, there's a component within the assignment coordination process that requires the service to notify the service member of the reason an order for an assignment is declined. So again, you go back to that transparency and providing them with the information on not only what the decision that was made, but why that decision was made.

Then a very important piece, that I love, within the enhancements is the ability for a service member to request a second review or reconsideration of the assignment. That enables the service member to supply additional information based off the needs of the family. I love to say that it just provides the ability for a service member to advocate for the needs of their families based on different situations, new medical information, it could be a potential change in educational services. It just allows that opportunity for them to connect with the EFMP staff to ensure that the assignment location is indeed a location that can meet their needs.

Bruce Moody:

So to bring that all together, how will these enhancements benefit families?

Tomeshia Barnes:

One of the most important pieces is transparency. When we look at the previous DoDI, it's just with a lack of transparency, not just among service members and families, but also just our internal and external stakeholders. There was just a lack of clarity on what is the program and what should happen within this program. And what should happen within assignment coordination. So it provides that transparency to families.

Another piece is communication of decisions. I think that when you have communication and you understand the process, it allows families and service members to really advocate for themselves, but also to ensure that what DOD should be providing is being provided. So it allows a level of accountability within the process as well. I think really that second review is just another mechanism of supporting the needs of the family because all of this is about supporting the needs of military families and helping them access and navigate the care and support that they need regardless of where they are around the world.

Bruce Moody:

We're going to put some links in the program notes where people can find more information and support. I'd like you to just talk a little bit about what people can expect. One is to MilitaryINSTALLATIONS and the other is to Military OneSource.

Tomeshia Barnes:

So we know that navigating and accessing service supports could be very confusing. Just even as you're learning more about the EFMP, you'll say, "Well, who can help me? Where do I go?" So one great resource right on your installation is the EFMP Family Support Office. That online tool MilitaryINSTALLATIONS, it'll actually assist you with locating your EFMP Family Support Office and providing you with the contact information so that you can reach out and get the assistance that you need.

Another great resource is Military OneSource, and you can contact them directly by phone or set up a live chat, and they're here to help. It could be an EFMP-related need. It doesn't have to be an EFMP-related need. But they're here to help you as you're navigating, just throughout your military life cycle they're here to help.

Another great resource is the Office of Special Needs Feedback Form. As we continue to work to enhance and approve the Exceptional Family Member Program, we would like to hear from service members and our families. I encourage you to take the time to provide us feedback using that form as we continue to work to enhance and improve the program. It is the input and feedback from service members and families that is an integral component of the enhancement and improvement effort. So just a closing comment is please visit the OSN Feedback Form and provide us a little feedback that can help us improve the program.

Bruce Moody:

Tomeshia Barnes, thank you so much for joining us. We'll continue this conversation on another episode as we continue to talk about this new policy.

Tomeshia Barnes:

Thank you, Bruce. Looking forward to it.

Bruce Moody:

Thanks for joining this episode of the Office of Special Needs EFMP Podcast, brought to you by the Defense Department. Be sure to subscribe because we're covering all of the EFMP standardization enhancements and we want you to know about it. Be sure to subscribe to this podcast. Be sure to let us know what you think. As always, we thank you for listening to this podcast and we encourage you to visit militaryonesource.mil for more information.

I'm Bruce Moody, thank you so much for listening. Take care. Bye-Bye.