

# **ANNUAL REPORT TO CONGRESS**

**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 CONGRESS**

## **Support for Military Families with Special Needs**

### **Executive Summary**

The Office of Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs (OSN) has made significant progress since last year's report through community outreach, product development, initiation of a functional analysis of data systems and the establishment of family and health partnerships. Community outreach continued to be a focus through the development of webinars with Military OneSource, on-line eLearning modules and family information kits. A mobile website was created to assist families in the enrollment into the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) and to identify local family support providers. A special education directory for DoD families and assignment personnel is available online and in print versions.

Successes include the establishment of a Family Panel that provided the Director of the OSN with input from families while awaiting the formal establishment of the Advisory Panel directed by the amendments to Section 563 of the NDAA FY 2010 resulting from Section 582 of Ike Skelton NDAA FY 2011. Feedback from the Family Panel led to a Health Affairs/TRICARE Management Activity (HA/TMA) and OSN Working Group to address health benefits and consistency of care when changing duty locations. The Services successfully secured FY 2012 funding to maintain the 120 family support positions initiated through previous DoD bridge funding. Although these positions were funded through FY 2012, there are concerns regarding the longevity of Service funding for these positions given the fiscal landscape and other possible Service priorities.

Another challenge of the OSN is the fact that benefits and policy responsibilities are not under the authority of MC&FP leadership. OSN will rely on the HA/TMA partnership to address health concerns.

Improvements for the future include the finalization of the policy that provides guidance for all components of the EFMP to include expanded assignment coordination, tour stabilization and family support. Companion oversight criteria are currently under development to address the family support component. Analysis of the existing EFMP databases will transition to the next phase of decision-making with the Services to develop standardization and determine feasibility and possible solutions for a central database for each service.

There are no recommended legislative action 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 for Fiscal Year 2010 (NDAA 2010), Pub. L. No. 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) of 10 U.S.C. § 1781c 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 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 third annual report submitted since enactment of 10 U.S.C. § 1781c.

## **Introduction**

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 is a multi-component program serving military families with special needs (medical and/or educational), and includes identification of the family member's special needs and enrollment in the program, assignment coordination, and family support.

DoD Instruction 1315.19, "Authorizing Special Needs Family Members Travel Overseas at Government Expense," December 20, 2005, provides guidance to the Military Services on the identification, enrollment and assignment coordination aspects of the EFMP. EFMP enrollment is mandatory. Service members must enroll immediately upon identification of a family member's special need. DD Form 2792, Family Member Medical Summary and DD Form 2792-1, Special Education/Early Intervention Summary document the family member's special medical and/or educational needs. When a service member is being considered for an assignment overseas, the family member's special medical requirements are submitted to the receiving military medical component, the family member's special educational requirements are submitted to the DoD Education Activity, or to the military department concerned 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 always considered when the military sponsor is considered for an overseas 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 the less frequent early return of family members from an overseas location due to lack of available medical care.

DoD Instruction 1315.19 is in the process of being revised to include the requirements of the 2010 NDAA: family support, tour stabilization and expanded assignment coordination to locations within the U.S. as well as overseas. The policy is in formal coordination for finalization; it will be renamed the “Exceptional Family Member Program” and clearly define the three additional required components of the EFMP.

## **Gaps and Actions**

Office of Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs (OSN): The Principal Director for Military Community and Family Policy also serves as the Director of the office. The office of nine is comprised of individuals who have worked with the special needs population, including medical and special education professionals and a communications specialist. One OSN staff member is currently detailed for one year to the Administration on Developmental Disabilities (ADD) within the Department of Health and Human Services at the request of the Commissioner of ADD. This individual represents military family issues within the agency and brings a broader understanding of the military to services outside of the DoD for families with special needs. The OSN continues to work with the DoD/Joint Services EFMP Working Group. The Working Group ensures Service representation in the development of policy.

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 the amendments to Section 563 of the NDAA FY 2010 resulting from Section 582 of Ike Skelton NDAA FY 2011. 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. The feedback from the Panel was positive and many constructive ideas were presented for consideration. The Director of the OSN listened to the Panel's input and recommended next steps on the topics of navigating medical service provision, the need for increased awareness of the EFMP and the need to standardize consistent procedures across the Services. The OSN developed an action plan to incorporate many of the Panel's suggestions. The Panel has met twice (September 2011 and March 2012) and is updated monthly by the OSN on progress made toward their recommendations.

Health Affairs/TRICARE Management Activity (HA/TMA). Families reported issues regarding health benefits including the Extended Care Health Option (ECHO), respite care, 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 were presented as well as working together to link to official HA/TMA resources through <http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/tf/efmp>. OSN has partnered with HA/TMA to develop an ECHO respite care frequently-asked question sheet and are pursuing further endeavors to address family feedback to include a webinar highlighting benefits for beneficiaries with special needs.

Communication. Communication with military families with special needs remains a major focus of the OSN and the Military Services. In collaboration with the Services, the OSN has developed two on-line learning modules for military families (*EFMP Overview* and *Services for Children from Birth through Two*). EFMP outreach and communication materials were developed and distributed to EFMP Family Support providers, including information packets for families. In addition, the OSN has conducted webinars through Military OneSource and developed a monthly eNewsletter.

Families expressed a need for one source for information on special needs. During a projected redesign of the Military OneSource website, the OSN will revise information currently available on both Military OneSource and the MilitaryHOMEFRONT websites. The OSN is collaborating with the Services to ensure that their websites provide a common set of information for families with special needs. The Military OneSource website will be designed to link families to the appropriate Service-specific information. The OSN will also engage the family panel members in a review of content and how the content is displayed for feedback on ease of access.

An EFMP mobile website was developed with an accompanying quick response (QR) code. The mobile website provides access to information about the EFMP, access to family support providers, EFMP enrollment personnel, enrollment forms and podcasts on issues such as the EFMP, relocation and emergency preparedness. It can be viewed at:  
<http://apps.mhf.dod.mil/pls/psgprod/f?p=EFMPMOBILE:HOME:0>

Establishment of a Joint Database/Case Management System. The Military Services operate separate EFMPs, the components of which (identification/enrollment, assignment coordination and family support) may also operate somewhat independently of each other. Only one Service has a data management system that incorporates all three components, but that system cannot interface with the other Service EFMPs or with the Military Health System. There is no system to link information about families with special needs to all components and all Services. Thus communication and collaboration among medical, educational, personnel and family support components and among the Services is limited. The OSN has initiated a Functional Analysis of current databases and case management systems. The Functional Analysis examines existing systems and will project future needs for sharing information. This is a long-term project that is the first step to determine possible solutions and feasibility of a joint system that will network EFMP family support, personnel and military health systems to provide information as needed for enrollment, assignments and family support. The OSN and the Services will collaborate on recommendations from the Functional Analysis prior to a formal presentation of a suggested way forward to the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.

Community Outreach. The OSN conducted an Open House at the Pentagon on September 28, 2011 to showcase the EFMP. The Department of Defense civilian and military leadership, Congressional staffers, military members and civilian employees assigned to the Pentagon were invited to learn about the three components of the EFMP for military families with special medical or educational needs: identification and enrollment, assignment coordination, and family support. The Open House provided an opportunity to explain the purpose and components of the EFMP, as well as how to access information and referral services

through EFMP family support. The OSN, each Military Service Headquarters, Military OneSource and selected local installations displayed their respective family support program information, products and points of contact. Personnel were available to answer questions and provide EFMP guidance to service and family members who visited their tables.

The OSN purchased and distributed books and electronic journal subscriptions to the Services' installation libraries and family centers worldwide to create an Exceptional Family Member library. This set of references is intended to assist professionals, adult and child family members in accessing material on disability-related topics, such as understanding autism spectrum disorders, managing chronic health care needs, and exceptional parenting. In addition, special education law resources were provided to several of the Services' legal offices and selected medical offices.

Community Support Services. DoD provided funding to the Military Services through FY 2011 to hire additional family support personnel to assist military families with special needs with identifying and accessing beneficial programs and services. Beginning in FY 2012, the Services provided funding to maintain the additional staffing. All installations have either a full- or part-time staff person, or (in smaller locations) a point of contact for military families with special needs. Installations with greater numbers of families with special needs may have multiple family support personnel. Each Service has developed training for newly hired staff. The OSN developed an *EFMP Family Support Reference Guide* and disseminated it to all EFMP family support providers (to include Reserve and Guard Components) as a guide to providing family support and networking with community support systems. The reference guide is also available for download on the MilitaryHOMEFRONT website.

Military OneSource was established by the Department of Defense 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. Military OneSource has proven especially important for military families with special needs. One important component has been a program developed by Military OneSource in collaboration with the OSN to provide telephonic consultations with consultants in the field of special needs. This service is available to military members and their families as often as 12 times per year. Over 2,500 military families received special needs consultations with the specialty consultants in calendar year 2011.

Military OneSource also disseminates products for families such as the *DoD Special Needs Parent Toolkit* (available in 8 different languages electronically), the *Special Care Organizational Record (SCOR) for Children with Special Health Care Needs*, and the *SCOR for Adults with Special Health Care Needs*, which are available both online as a download or mailed directly at no cost to families.

Research. DoD has been collaborating with the United States Department of Agriculture under a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that addresses certain research efforts by land-grant universities and the Cooperative Extension Service. Under this agreement, the following research has been conducted:

- Education Services for Military Dependent Children with Disabilities. From October 2010 to November 2011, Ohio State University conducted a second phase of the project focused on a review of special education services in the states of Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Missouri, New York, and Oklahoma. These states were selected because of the high concentration of military personnel. The project included a comprehensive review of the access and availability of evidence-based educational practices for military dependents with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), intellectual disabilities (ID), and emotional disorders (ED) ages 3 to 21. A review of early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities (birth to three) in the ten identified states plus the five states included in the first phase of the project was also conducted.

A product of the review has been the development of the “Education Directory for Children with Special Needs” produced in both online and print versions. The directory is intended for DoD families and assignment personnel. It provides information they need to make informed assignment decisions about the availability of services and to assist them with making a smooth transition from one public school district to another within the U.S. The directory is available online via Military HOMEFRONT at [http://apps.mhf.dod.mil/pls/psgprod/f?p=EFMP\\_DIRECTORY:HOME:0:::EKMT:19.10.10.0.0.0.0.0](http://apps.mhf.dod.mil/pls/psgprod/f?p=EFMP_DIRECTORY:HOME:0:::EKMT:19.10.10.0.0.0.0.0).

The results of this study continue to assist DoD and the Services in developing a system to identify the availability of educational services for children with significant disabilities and aid in the EFMP assignment coordination process within the United States.

- Benchmark Study. Cornell University and the Beach Center of the University of Kansas are conducting a benchmark study to identify the concerns of military families with special needs, the support they require, and the systems that have been effective in providing services. The research team will conduct focus groups with military families from all branches of Service. Research will be conducted with civilian and military populations. The anticipated outcomes will be recommendations for the military in establishing community support programs including staffing models, metrics, evaluation standards, and a family satisfaction scale.
- Medicaid Study. West Virginia University has conducted field research, data and regulatory analyses for the Medicaid Study. Qualitative data has been gathered from the six joint base installation site visits in each of the three TRICARE regions. The study has attempted to determine the extent of access to Medicaid waiver services support for military families with special needs for those types of equipment and services not covered by TRICARE as they move from one state to another during required military moves. An analysis of findings is being conducted and findings will be applied to formulate proposals for legislative or policy changes if indicated.
- The Ohio State University, Pennsylvania State University and the OSN have set up a formal collaboration through the United States Department of Agriculture to address the follow-up activities recommended by the 2009 Education Services for Military

Dependent Children with Autism report. The recommendations include: 1) the development of guidance for assignment coordination personnel on the use of the online Education Directory, 2) a training needs assessments of family members and family center providers and 3) an electronic clearinghouse of evidence-based training programs and resources on a variety of disabilities for access by Exceptional Family Member Program family support service providers and family members.

### **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 Armed Services. The office continues to move forward with the development of DoD policy through collaboration with the Military Services, which will ultimately be responsible for policy execution. Family information kits and outreach materials will further educate families and ensure they are aware of the EFMP components of identification and enrollment, assignment coordination, and family support services, that are available to them. The collaborations with the land grant universities and the Functional Analysis will help identify best practices of EFM programs as well as develop standardization and determine feasibility and possible solutions for a central database for each service to access. The partnership with HA/TMA will address health benefit and policy issues. We look forward to sharing EFMP challenges and successes in future reports to Congress.