

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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Support for Military Families with Special Needs

Executive Summary

The Office of Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs (OSN) was established by Congress in 2010 for the purpose of enhancing and improving the Department's support for military families with special medical or educational needs worldwide. The OSN is charged with identifying gaps in services for military families with special needs and is responsible for standardizing the Department's Exceptional Family Member Programs (EFMP) through the development of uniform policy and procedures. The OSN also provides policy oversight of the Department's educational programming for eligible Department of Defense (DoD) dependents with disabilities ages birth to 21, under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and oversees and administers the Department's Advisory Panel on Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs. For purposes of this report, the term "Military Services" includes both active and reserve components, in accordance with each Service's EFMP eligibility requirements.

In 2015, the OSN made significant progress in all of its areas of responsibility:

EFMP Standardization Process: The OSN and the Military Services are employing a deliberate and systematic approach to EFMP standardization efforts, with a view to ensuring that program enhancements for families are piloted and fully tested before implementation. Several pilots to improve services to families with special needs are under development and will assist the Department in better meeting the needs of military families with special needs.

DoD IDEA Services for Eligible DoD Dependents with Disabilities Ages birth to 21: In June of 2015, the OSN revised and published 32 CFR Part 57, "Provision of Early Intervention and Special Education Services to Eligible DoD Dependents," which implements the non-funding and non-reporting provisions of the IDEA in the DoD.

Advisory Panel on Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs: The process of formally installing the Advisory Panel is underway.

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 include (but are not limited to):

- Meeting with 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, "The Exceptional Advocate," to military families with special needs, service providers, and leaders.

- Using a variety of social media outlets to communicate resources and services available to military family members with special needs.
- Meeting regularly with Defense Health Agency (DHA) to collaborate on means to identify gaps in services with an emphasis on the adult population of EFMP.

Background

The OSN was established in response to section 563(a) of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) Fiscal Year (FY) 2010, Pub. L. 111-84, which added section 1781c to title 10, United States Code (U.S.C.). The OSN supports military families with special medical and/or educational needs through development of 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 30th each year. The report is required to address:

- A description of any gaps in services available through the Department 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 seventh annual report submitted since the enactment of section 1781c of title 10, U.S.C.

Introduction

The OSN has three primary areas of responsibility, including the standardization of EFMP policy and procedures across the Military Services, maintenance of policy oversight of the DoD's IDEA educational services for eligible DoD dependents with disabilities under 32 CFR Part 57, and oversight and administration of the Department's Advisory Panel on Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs.

Programs

Oversight of EFMP Standardization Efforts

A principal responsibility of the OSN is the establishment of policy and oversight of the EFMP, which serves military family members with special medical or educational needs. The OSN has policy oversight responsibility for Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 1315.19, "Authorizing Special Needs Family Members Travel Overseas at Government Expense," which is currently being updated. A Proposed Rule was recently published in the Federal Register for public comment as Proposed Rule 32 CFR Part 75, "Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP)." Upon adjudication and finalization, all elements of the final rule will be incorporated in a revised DoDI.

The three component areas of the EFMP are identification/enrollment (completed by medical departments), assignment coordination (conducted between medical and personnel commands), and family support (provided in family centers). Each component area operates independently of the others and somewhat differently in each Military Department. Additionally, there is no system to link information about families with special needs to all component areas of the EFMP and all Military Departments. To address this gap 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.

More than 128,500 military family members are enrolled in the EFMP, and their needs are considered when the military sponsor is considered 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 enroll. This occasionally 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.

The EFMP standardization process is a continuous effort as it must be responsive to the changing needs of the DoD. OSN has worked with the Services to complete numerous high impact standardization projects. To identify gaps in support for the military families with special needs, OSN analyzed service programs and developed, piloted, and implemented standardization initiatives. One major gap identified early in the process was the different delivery models used by the Services to support families with special needs—differences that ranged from the way in which a family's particular needs were assessed, to the manner in which critical records about the family were transferred to a sister-Service installation (at the time of a military change of station or on a joint base). To mitigate this problem, a standardized Family Needs Assessment (FNA) and Transfer Summary were developed for use by all entities across DoD. Further, a standardized Quick Reference Guide (QRG) was created and disseminated to explain each Service's EFMP process with a view to assisting the staff providing services to affected families.

Another identified gap was in information and training for families and service providers. To address this gap, numerous standardized resources have been developed and provided—through a variety of mediums—including fact sheets, brochures, online training, webinars, videos, toolkits, and an electronic newsletter for families and service providers. Monitoring to identify other gaps in support of program improvements and develop new resources remains a consistent and ongoing process.

The EFMP standardization process began with the NDAA for FY 2010; however, it will be a continuous effort, evolving as the needs of military families and the military change. There are numerous projects/initiatives involved in the standardization process, many of which have already been completed, including the many training and information resources, base-line studies, the FNA and QRG, and much more. Other initiatives are ongoing (e.g., the family member travel screening project – the longest-term and most complex project, which has been the subject of discussion in numerous meetings over several years; the Process and Outcome Metrics pilot for family support; the Military Parent-to-Parent pilot; the EFMP Data Repository; and others).

Additionally, OSN will continuously analyze EFMP processes and IT systems across the Services and components to ensure identification of additional recommendations that contribute to our objective of 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.

The chart below details several EFMP standardization efforts that were completed by OSN between 2010 and 2015:

Selected EFMP Standardization Efforts Completed by OSN 2010-2015 <i>EFMP standardization is an ongoing process that is responsive to the changing needs of the DoD</i>		
FOUNDING 2010-2011 <i>OSN discovered there was no baseline data across the 4 Services and 3 components</i>	EFMP FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS 2011-2013 <i>OSN conducted an in-depth analysis of services available</i>	EFMP STANDARDIZATION IMPLEMENTATION 2013- 2015 and ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Study on needs of military families with special needs ✓ 5 Family Toolkits ✓ 3 Reference Guides for military families and EFMP staff ✓ Establishment of the online Exceptional Advocate newsletter ✓ Multiple online resources in 8 languages including more than 35 fact sheets and learning modules which are hosted on Military OneSource ✓ Multiple promotional marketing materials including posters and banners ✓ Educational Directory for Children with Special Needs ✓ Facilitation of cross-program collaboration through the Subcommittee on Inter-Component Coordination (SICC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 15 site visits to military installations to review Service-specific EFMP processes across the 3 components ✓ Analysis of Service-specific processes across the 3 components ✓ 12 “current state” process maps ✓ A comprehensive mapping of the EFMP IT systems across the Services, 4 Service-specific system flow diagrams, and 15 technical data sheets ✓ 8 informational brochures for military families with special needs ✓ Multiple EFMP promotional videos ✓ More than 30 training modules for military families with special needs and military personnel which were released on Military OneSource and YouTube ✓ 6 webinars tailored to Service Providers ✓ FNA and Services Plan form development and pilot ✓ EFMP QRG ✓ Prototype for an electronic EFMP enrollment form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 9 FNA training sessions and an FNA training video for Family Support Providers ✓ Inter-Service Transfer Summary (ISTS) form development, a streamlined FNA/ISTS form ✓ Establishment of Family Center EFMP accreditation standards ✓ Initial design of the Future State Technology Roadmap ✓ EFMP Data Repository development and pilot and a standardized Data Dictionary Standard Family Member Travel Screening process and cross-Service forms, combining and standardizing nine forms from across the Services ✓ Update of 32 CFR 57 ✓ Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) Quick Poll Study on Medicaid Usage by Military Families ✓ 10 training webinars for Family Support Providers

Oversight of IDEA Services for Eligible DoD Dependents Ages birth to 21

The OSN provides policy oversight of the DoD's IDEA programming for eligible DoD dependents. In 2015, the DoD provided early intervention services through the Military Medical Departments' Educational and Developmental Intervention Services (EDIS) programs to 828 children with disabilities ages birth-3 years. The DoD also provided special education and related services to 8,116 students with disabilities ages 3-21 years through the Department of the Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) school system. OSN works with the Military Medical Services and DoDEA to coordinate the provision of IDEA services and to ensure proper implementation of the IDEA.

OSN has policy oversight responsibility for 32 CFR Part 57, "Provision of Early Intervention and Special Education Services to Eligible DoD Dependents," dated June 25, 2015. The policy was revised and reissued in 2015 as an instruction and an accompanying manual, both of which incorporate the 2004 amendments to IDEA (chapter 33 of title 20, U.S.C.).

Monitoring the Provision of IDEA Services. 32 CFR Part 57 requires the Military Departments and the DoDEA to establish monitoring systems to ensure that early intervention services and special education and related services are provided to eligible DoD dependents in compliance with the IDEA and 32 CFR Part 57. 32 CFR Part 57 also requires the 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 responsibility for monitoring early intervention, special education, and related services on behalf of the DoD, 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 any required corrective actions. In addition to onsite monitoring, OSN also maintains oversight of systemic compliance by monitoring compliance reports and data submitted by the Services and DoDEA on the provision of services.

In 2015, OSN began the process of comparing the DoD's IDEA monitoring standards to those used by the U.S. Department of Education and by the Departments of Education in several states. OSN will determine whether the DoD's IDEA compliance monitoring can be made more efficient and effective and ensure that the DoD continues to monitor IDEA implementation in a way that is reflective of national priorities in IDEA programming. This work is ongoing in 2016, with a projected completion date of 2017.

32 CFR Part 57: Coordinating Committee. 32 CFR Part 57 requires the establishment of a DoD coordinating committee to recommend policies regarding the provision of early intervention and special education services. The OSN chaired the DoD SICCC which met quarterly in 2015 for continuing collaboration on DoD early intervention, special education, and related services. OSN, DoDEA, and Service representatives attended all meetings. Issues of primary importance in 2015 included:

- The exploration of transferring 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.

To address the issues listed above, the OSN hosted a Rapid Improvement Event in October of 2015 to explore the future placement of EDIS services. OSN also provided advice and technical assistance to the Military Medical Departments as they worked to standardize EDIS early intervention services processes and forms, joined with DoDEA to monitor the provision of special education services in Korea, and invited representatives from DoDEA to speak with SICC members on the issue of EDIS services in non-DoD schools. OSN is currently working on a revision to the annual compliance reporting process, with a projected completion date of 2017.

IDEA Technical Assistance and Training. As part of its oversight of IDEA programs, the OSN provides technical assistance and training to DoD program administrators and service providers. A selection of OSN's training and technical assistance activities is provided below:

- After the release of the updated DoDI 1342.12 in June of 2015, OSN provided technical assistance to the Military Medical Departments' EDIS program managers and DoDEA headquarters special education staff on major revisions to the instruction and implications for implementation.
- The OSN collaborated with Army Medical Command's (MEDCOM) early intervention coordinator, early childhood experts at the University of Illinois, and the Military Families Learning Network, to create and deliver a series of four webinars on the subject of socio-emotional development in infants and toddlers with disabilities. These webinars were well attended by both DoD service providers and as providers from state and local agencies that serve military families.
- Working in collaboration with Army MEDCOM's early intervention program, the OSN secured funding to support training of early intervention providers in the Military Medical Departments' EDIS programs.

Oversight of the Advisory Panel on Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs

The OSN administers and oversees the Advisory Panel on Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs. The Panel was established by Congress in 2011 for the purpose of providing informed advice to the OSN on the implementation of EFMP policy and programming throughout the DoD. The Panel also provides information to the OSN on programming for children with disabilities, including information about programs available through other departments and agencies of the Federal Government and from state and local governments.

Prior to the implementation of section 582 of the NDAA for FY 2011 (which amended section 563 of the NDAA for FY 2010), the OSN had no formal method for receiving advice directly from families on the implementation of policy or the improvement of family support services.

To address this gap and to fulfill the requirements of Section 582, an interim panel was formed and met three times. The OSN has initiated the required actions to formally establish this Advisory Panel, and the process to select Panel members is underway. The initial panel will consist of active component family members. OSN plans to seek Panel members from both the active and reserve components as positions on the Panel open in the future.

Gaps Identified in DoD Services for Military Families with Special Needs and Actions Taken to Address Gaps

Congress has given OSN responsibility for identifying gaps in DoD's services for military families with special needs. The OSN must also develop plans to address gaps in services provided. In the past year, these efforts have included the following:

DoD Overarching Coordinating Committee for Military Families with Special Needs. As part of the standardization process, OSN determined that a systemic gap in the DoD's programs for people with special needs existed due to the difficulties inherent in working across multiple DoD components and organizational chains. Decisions related to special needs programming must be vetted by multiple components, but there was no mechanism for bringing high-level leadership together for consideration of the DoD's special needs programming as a whole. To remedy this gap, the OSN worked to establish the Overarching Coordinating Committee for Military Families with Special Needs. Both 32 CFR Part 75, "Authorizing Special Needs Family Members Travel Overseas at Government Expense," dated February 16, 2011 (currently under revision with a view to being retitled as, "Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP)"), and 32 CFR Part 57, "Provision of Early Intervention and Special Education Services to Eligible DoD Dependents," dated June 25, 2015, require the establishment of a committee to oversee policies and programs for military family members with special needs.

Due to overlapping membership and responsibilities, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness approved combining the two committees into one overarching committee that would provide oversight of compliance with, and fulfill the responsibilities set forth in, both Instructions. Two subcommittees, as required by 32 CFR Part 75 and 32 CFR Part 57, will report their activities to the DoD Overarching Coordinating Committee annually. Executive-level staffs were appointed to serve as representatives on the DoD Overarching Coordinating Committee for Military Families with Special Needs. The committee's inaugural meeting was held in 2015. The Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness chairs the committee. This has provided the DoD with a way to ensure that high-level, coordinated attention is given to issues related to family members with special needs.

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 with the universities on a number of 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 - 3 years, and special education services for children

age birth - 21 years from 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 in 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.

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 Service EFMP representatives developed a feedback instrument that was piloted from October 2015 to March 2016 to determine if the instrument adequately measured family member satisfaction with EFMP Family Support Services. Families using these services reported their involvement and level of satisfaction with the support services received. Once Cornell completes the final report, the results will be shared with the Services and a way ahead planned. OSN will use the information for administrative oversight, including monitoring resource utilization and policy development.

Medicaid and Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS). 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 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.

Respite Care for Families with Special Needs. Respite care continues to be cited as an important benefit for enrollment in the Services’ EFMPs. It has not been part of the DoD policy, but based on Service input and feedback, OSN will add language about respite care to proposed DoDI 1315.19, as well as including a reference in DoDI 1342.22, “Military Family Readiness System,” dated July 3, 2012, when it is next revised.

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

Outreach and Engagement

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

- Collaborating with Military Community and Family Policy's (MC&FP) Military Community Outreach Office that 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.
- Participating as a voting representative in the DHA Pediatric Integrated Product Team to assist with developing long and short-term goals and objectives that address the findings of the July 2014 Report to the Congressional Defense Committees entitled, "Study on Health Care and Related Support for Children of Members of the Armed Forces."
- Publishing "The Exceptional Advocate," 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 is part of the redesign of the Military OneSource website.
- Working in collaboration with the MC&FP Military Families Learning Network, 15 professional staff training webinars were presented in 2015 that focused on caregiving and early intervention services.
- 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:
 - National Disability Rights Network
 - 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. Military OneSource was established by tDoD 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. An average of 110 families per

month received special needs consultations with Military OneSource specialty consultants in 2015. Military families with special needs, installation EFMP Family Support providers, and military treatment facilities also requested over 70,000 OSN publications from the Military OneSource Fulfillment Center in 2015.

Legislative Action

OSN and the Military Services met with professional staffers from the Senate Armed Services Committee in November 2015 to provide an update on the EFMP and the standardization progress. A deliberate, methodical, and systematic approach is being taken to ensure that each improvement works as intended. The objective is to ensure that families are not frustrated with “enhancements” that have not been piloted and tested before implementation.

Because of this approach, the system requires a number of safeguards to ensure success. Several pilots to improve services to families with special needs are in the works and will assist the Department in improving the delivery of services to support military families with special needs. These initiatives (among others) include standardizing the family member travel screening processes and the associated forms across DoD (which will benefit all families, not only those with special needs); piloting a Parent-to-Parent mentoring program based on a national research-based model; and a Process and Outcome Metrics pilot that will allow families to provide feedback on the family support services they receive. The Department remains committed to 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.

The Department believes that current statutes in this area are sufficient.

Summary

OSN will continue to enhance and improve DoD support for military families with special medical or educational needs through ongoing EFMP standardization efforts, policy oversight and monitoring of the implementation of 32 CFR Part 57, and oversight of the Advisory Panel on Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs.