

The Third Quadrennial Quality of Life Review

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

DADT	Don't Ask, Don't Tell
DMDC	Defense Manpower Data Center
DoD	Department of Defense
FRS	Family Readiness System
FY	Fiscal Year
MSEP	Military Spouse Employment Partnership
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
OPTEMPO	Operations Tempo
RCP	Recovery Coordination Program
SOF	Special Operations Forces
TAP	Transition Assistance Program
U.S.	United States
U.S.C.	United States Code
VA	Department of Veteran Affairs
WISR	Women in Service Review



1. BACKGROUND

As directed by section 118a of title 10, United States Code (U.S.C.), the Third Quadrennial Quality of Life Review assesses key quality of life topics highlighted in the most recent defense strategic guidance and plans, including the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance,¹ the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review,² the 2015 National Security Strategy,³ and the 2015 National Military Strategy.⁴

2. INTRODUCTION

“A strong military is the bedrock of our national security. To maintain our military edge and readiness, we will continue to insist on reforms and necessary investment in our military forces and their families.” —The 2015 National Security Strategy, p.7.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the capabilities, commitment, and adaptability of the United States (U.S.) Forces have been tested repeatedly while engaging in military conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, followed by large-scale drawdowns and force restructuring. Service members and their families endured the highest operations tempo (OPTEMPO) since the advent of the All-Volunteer Force in 1973. Families are a vital part of the All-Volunteer Force, as they too must weather a demanding military lifestyle, characterized by a high risk operational environment for Service members, frequent relocations, deployments, and family separations due to unaccompanied tours, assignments, and training. Support programs for military families have evolved over the past 50 years, with marked acceleration since 9/11. Until the beginning of this century, we largely relied on military families’ own resourcefulness and resilience to manage the military lifestyle. However, the unprecedented OPTEMPO after 9/11 mounted to the point that the Department of Defense (DoD) and Military Departments were compelled to augment family programs to strengthen military families’ ability to cope with life challenges associated with deployments.

Repeated and prolonged deployments of Service members in support of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan propelled support of military families to become a top national security issue. In 2010, President Obama identified the care and support of military families as a top national security priority, and initiated policy reviews under Presidential Study Directive 9, “Strengthening Our Military Families: Meeting America's

¹ Available at http://archive.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf.

² Available at http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/defenseReviews/QDR/2014_Quadrennial_Defense_Review.pdf.

³ Available at https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf.

⁴ Available at http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/2015_National_Military_Strategy.pdf.



Commitment.” In collaboration with other Federal agencies, the DoD and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have taken strategic actions to address the areas identified by the Interagency Policy Committee.⁵

After more than a decade of war, the U.S. Military hit a strategic turning point and transitioned into a new phase. As directed in the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance, the U.S. Military is becoming a smaller, leaner joint force that is agile, flexible, technologically advanced, and highly deployable to continue countering existing and emerging threats. Simultaneously, DoD needs to maintain a ready force with emphasis on our most important military advantage, the health and quality of the All-Volunteer Force. The ongoing fiscal austerity, however, makes it extremely challenging to achieve these two goals. The drawdown and the restructuring of the force shifted the focus of military family support from deployment support to reintegration after deployment, transitioning from military to civilian life, and long-term care for wounded warriors and their families.

In addition to the evolving national security environment, social and cultural changes also play a critical role in maintaining the most advanced warfighting capability of the world. The military community does not exist in a social vacuum. It is the fabric of the larger American society. The 2015 National Military Security Strategy stated that “the U.S. military must be willing to embrace social and cultural change to better identify, cultivate, and reward such talent” (p.14).⁶ As today’s military community is more diverse and geographically dispersed than previous generations, the challenge becomes: how does DoD continue to address the diverse needs in the military community and foster a sense of community given ongoing shifts in demographics and the balance of the force?

This review discusses continuing and emerging quality of life topics with strategic implications, focusing on the issues highlighted in the aforementioned strategic documents to inform future quality of life policies and programs.

⁵ A summary of the review findings and Federal Government-wide approach to supporting military families in four priority areas can be found in the White House report, "Strengthening Our Military Families: Meeting America's Commitment." The report is available at https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/strengthening_our_military_families_meeting_americas_commitment_january_2011.pdf

⁶ http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/2015_National_Military_Strategy.pdf



3. CHALLENGES FACING TODAY'S MILITARY FAMILIES

Common Needs in the Uncommon Life. Today's U.S. Military continues to be family-oriented and geographically dispersed. Across the DoD Active Duty and selected Reserve components, there are over 2.12 million military personnel with 2.78 million family members, including spouses, children, and adult dependents.⁷ Approximately half of military personnel (51 percent) are married. Of those married, almost 10 percent are in dual-military marriages.⁸ The remaining 90 percent of married Service members are married to civilian spouses. Although those civilian spouses are not currently serving in the military, data from the 2015 DoD Survey of Active Duty Spouses indicated that 14 percent of civilian spouses had served in the military before.⁹ About 42 percent of military personnel have children. U.S. military personnel support a total of 1.76 million children. There were approximately 134,000 single Service members with children in 2015, accounting for about 6.3 percent of the force.¹⁰

Along with these changing demographic trends, the majority of military families live in civilian communities. Military service requires irregular and long duty hours, deployments, unaccompanied assignments and training, and frequent relocation. Given that the majority of Service members are married, parents, caregivers of their adult family members, or all of the above, the needs of high quality child care, support for spousal employment and education opportunities, relocation assistance, programs for military families with special needs, and other family support programs have significant strategic implications for force readiness.

U.S. military personnel are traditionally younger than the average age of the U.S. labor force.¹¹ Three-quarters of total military personnel (76 percent) are 35 years old or younger; 40 percent are 25 years old or younger; 36 percent are between 26 to 35 years old. These young Service members grew up with computers and digital communication devices, and are far more comfortable with social media and other digital communication platforms than the preceding generations. High-touch, personalized program delivery is highly valued and preferred. Military family support programs,

⁷ Reserve component statistics presented in this report are based on the Selected Reserve members. The other Ready Reserve components (individual Ready Reserve and the Inactive National Guard) are not included. The Standby Reserve and the Retired Reserve are also not included in the numbers in this report. Data source: The Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy (ODASD (MC&FP)) (2016). The 2015 Demographic Report: Profile of the Military Community. Washington, D.C.

⁸ A dual-military marriage refers to an Active duty member who is married to another Active Duty member or to a Reserve or Guard member. Data source: ODASD(MC&FP). (2016). The 2015 Demographic Report: Profile of the Military Community. Washington, D.C.

⁹ Data Source: Defense Manpower Data Center. (2015). The 2015 Survey of Active Duty Spouses.

¹⁰ Data Source: ODASD(MC&FP). (2016). The 2015 Demographic Report: Profile of the Military Community. Washington, D.C.

¹¹ The average age of the U.S. labor force in 2014 is 41.9 years old. See The Bureau of Labor Statistics (December 2015). Median age of the labor force, by gender, race and ethnicity. http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_table_306.htm.



delivered through over 200 installation-based Military and Family Support Centers and almost 700 Reserve component Family Assistance Centers and Family Programs, have been increasing footprints in digital engagement and community-networks, while installation-based programs continue to play a vital role serving the military community. DoD's goal is to deliver support services when needed, virtually or in-person, based on the most effective and efficient method of delivery for the next generation of Service members and their families. Keeping operational security requirements in mind, DoD will constantly seek the optimal balance between technological developments in digital communication, installation based services, and community partnerships to maximize the effective delivery of targeted quality of life programs. Generational and societal trends of communication technologies will significantly impact how we deliver support programs. The diversity in the military community will continue to be a key factor that drives quality of life priorities and programming within DoD.

Diverse Missions, Diverse Family Needs. The increasingly diverse modes of modern warfare to counter non-traditional threats challenge the conventional concept of warfighting and deployment. As the mode of modern warfare is rapidly changing, combat is no longer limited to air, sea, land, and space, but has also extended to cyberspace. Traditional deployment support is primarily designed for a large-scale, long-term deployment to a combat zone. The end strength of the conventional forces is shrinking and its OPTEMPO has significantly slowed down. On the other hand, the demands for the Special Operations Forces (SOF), cyber warfare, and drone technologies are expected to remain constant or expand in order to counter non-traditional threats. The deployment and training cycles of SOF are not aligned with those of the conventional forces units. Deployment of SOF members can be shorter, more frequent and unpredictable, compared to that of their conventional force counterparts. Furthermore, countering non-traditional threats through cyber warfare, drone technology, and intelligence activities, can be conducted in a virtual, remote environment.

As the U.S. military increasingly faces non-traditional threats, it is imperative that DoD increase the agility of our family support system. To address varying family needs stemming from the changing operational environments and mission requirements in modern warfare, DoD is building capacity and responsiveness through careful needs assessments and a network approach to family support.

Long-Term Care for the Wounded, Ill, and Injured Warriors. Continuous support for our recovering Service members and their families and caregivers is one of the Department's top priorities. Service members may suffer a wound, illness or injury at any point during their career, not only in combat situations. A hallmark of DoD's commitment to our recovering wounded, ill, and injured Service members, their families, and caregivers is proactive support from initial point of injury or illness until return to duty or transition to care and support by VA. To ensure they receive the



appropriate services and care coordination, the Office of Warrior Care Policy provides policy and program oversight throughout that process.

Through collaborative work by DoD and VA, a streamlined care management system called the Recovery Coordination Program (RCP) is in place that utilizes Recovery Care Coordinators and Comprehensive Recovery Plans for improved care, management and transition for all Active Duty wounded, ill, and injured Service members.

To provide additional support, there are three additional elements to the RCP. First, the education and employment Initiative engages Service members in the early stage of their recovery process to identify their current skills, career opportunities that match those skills, and additional skills they will need to be successful. This process operates on a regional support model and involves an innovative collaboration with VA to provide vocational rehabilitation services at an earlier stage than before. Second, there is Operation Warfighter, a DoD internship program that matches qualified wounded, ill and injured Service members with federal internship opportunities to help them gain work experience during the recovery and rehabilitation process. Third, Military Adaptive Sports Program provides recovering Service members with an opportunity to participate in reconditioning activities and competitive athletic opportunities outside of traditional therapy settings throughout the recovery and transition process. Physical activity and sport have successfully been used as forms of rehabilitation for injured veterans since World War II and its benefits include reduced stress level, fewer secondary medical conditions, higher achievement in education and employment, increased mobility and increased independence. In 2010, the DoD Warrior Games was established as a venue to enhance the recovery and rehabilitation of wounded, ill, and injured Service members and veterans through participation in adaptive sports competition. In addition to the benefits of reconditioning activities, the DoD Warrior Games also serve as an opportunity for Service members and veterans to develop a social support network and a sense of community with other athletes with similar challenges.

DoD also recognizes the short-term and long-term burden on caregivers of the wounded, ill, and injured Service members. DoD provides resources and caregiver support including the Military Caregiver Personalized Experiences, Engagement, and Resources Forum Initiative, the Caregiver Resource Directory, monthly Military Caregiver Virtual Forums, Military Caregiver webinars for professionals working with caregivers, and other specialized resources and events. The Special Compensation for Assistance with Activities of Daily Living Program provides compensation to Service members with a permanent, catastrophic line-of-duty injury or illness who require caregiver support to perform personal functions in everyday living in order to live outside a residential institutional care facility. This program compensates Service members by offsetting the loss of income by a primary caregiver who provides Service members for the in-home non-medical care and assistance with activities of daily living.



In addition to the continuing care for the wounded, ill, and injured warriors, it is important to deepen our understanding about the lasting impacts of deployment on military families through research. The compound effect of the unique military life styles has been studied, but in a limited scope. Although large-scale deployments in support of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan are over, there are still unanswered questions about the long-term effects of deployments on military families, particularly children of deployed Service members and families and caregivers of the wounded, ill, and injured. Longitudinal research that builds on what currently exists will provide the best information of how military members and their families fare over time, and is needed in order to better prepare the military community for the next military conflict in the future.

Support Across the Military Life Transitions. The mobile military lifestyle, frequent relocation in particular, poses a unique set of challenges for military spouses and children. Relocation has significant undesirable effects on spouses' careers, preventing upward career movement and disrupting efforts to pursue education.¹² Of those who are in the labor force, about 1 in 4 civilian spouses in the labor force are unemployed.¹³ It is an ongoing challenge for military spouses to pursue their educational goals and professional careers throughout the Service member's career. DoD provides the Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program to assist military spouses with educational and career planning, focusing on portable careers which fit well with a mobile military life. To help jump start spouse careers, DoD offers the My Career Advancement Account Scholarship to eligible spouses of Service members.¹⁴ In June 2011, DoD launched an outreach initiative, called the Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP). Over 330 employer partners and military support organizations have joined this initiative to recruit, hire, promote and retain military spouses. Over 5.8 million jobs have been posted on the MSEP Career Portal, which resulted in more than 100,000 spouses being hired.

Military children move across state lines and overseas much more often than most of their civilian peers. The DoD Child Development Programs provide quality, accessible, and affordable child care to Service members and their spouses, operating over 770 Child Development Centers and school age care facilities at over 300 locations worldwide, with approximately 2,600 Family Child Care homes. To address the need to increase awareness and availability of child care options, DoD has developed the

¹² In FY2012, approximately 32 percent of Active Duty members changed their permanent duty stations. Data source: Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) Active Duty Personnel Master Files.

¹³ The 2015 Survey of Active Duty Spouses showed that 23 percent of civilian spouses in the labor force are unemployed. Please note that spouses who are serving in the Armed Forces are excluded from the denominator.

¹⁴ A Scholarship up to \$4,000 may be provided to spouses of Service members who are on title 10 orders and in pay grades E-1 to E-5, W-1 to W-2, and O-1 to O-2, for an associate's degree or education and training needed for occupational licenses or credentials.



website, MilitaryChildCare.com. This site allows all DoD eligible customers to check the availability of military-operated child development programs worldwide. Currently, 63 percent of installations (137 installations) are participating in this effort. Frequent relocations across states can hinder educational opportunities for military children because of different policies applied to transferring students. DoD developed the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children (hereafter called “the Compact”) in collaboration with the Council of State Government, Federal, state and local officials as well as national stakeholder organizations. Since 2008, the Defense State Legislative Office has been working to educate state lawmakers about the Compact to assist transitioning military children by providing uniform policy on eligibility, enrollment, placement, and graduation in participating states. By fiscal year(FY) 2014, all 50 states and the District of Columbia had adopted the Compact.

In FY 2015, nearly 189,500 Active Duty members, along with about 82,000 spouses and 11,000 children, left the military. Nearly half (44 percent) of all separations were voluntary, followed by retirement (29 percent) and involuntary separation (25 percent).¹⁵ Transitioning to civilian life is a stressful time not only for Service members, but also for their spouses and children.

The Transition Assistance Program (TAP) provides training and information to help Service members better prepare for transition to civilian life. The TAP was redesigned in 2013 through an interagency collaboration among DoD, VA, Department of Labor, Small Business Administration, and other Federal agencies. The redesigned TAP adopted the Military Life Cycle transition model to provide Service members with a continuous opportunity throughout their military career to prepare for post-military career success. Rather than concentrating all transition preparation within the final year of service, the TAP aligns key transition activities with pre-determined “touch points” built into the programs of each Service. This model enhances Service members’ readiness and ability to progress in their military careers, while providing skills and tools they can use to position themselves well for their eventual transition to civilian life.

While preparing Service members for smooth transitions throughout their military career, DoD will also continue providing programs and services to support military spouses and children to pursue their educational achievement and professional career goals in the mobile military life. Helping military spouses and children thrive in their pursuit of educational and career goals is a key to the Service member’s readiness, which will prepare the whole family for smooth transition into civilian life at the conclusion of the Service member’s military career.

¹⁵ Reasons for separation for the remaining two percent were deaths and unknown. Data Source: DMDC Active Duty Loss Transaction File.



Breaking down Barriers to Serve. In addition to providing an array of programs and services to help strengthen the health of the All-Volunteer Force, DoD continuously reviews and modernizes policies pertaining to quality of life issues and family support programs to help DoD better meet the needs of all Service members and treat all Service members with dignity and respect.

As Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter stated in his speech on DoD transgender policy, the most important qualification for men and women in uniform should be their ability and willingness to serve.¹⁶ Adaptation and modernization of the organization are not limited to tactical and operational requirements in the battlefield, but must also be extended to institutional practices within the force. Some regulations were outdated in that respect and hindered military personnel’s ability to focus on their core missions. A series of recent policy changes within DoD have removed barriers to serve, officially including gay and lesbian Service members and their same-sex spouses and transgender Service members in the military community.

In December 2010, President Obama signed the *“Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” Repeal Act of 2010*, which provided for the repeal of section 654 of title 10, U.S.C. (commonly known as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT)). Effective September 2011, DADT was repealed, and all affected policies and regulations, over 90 in total, were revised accordingly. Following the repeal, DoD turned its attention to benefits. In June 2015, DoD updated its military equal opportunity program to protect Service members against sexual-orientation based discrimination.

To allow all qualified Americans to serve in the military, in July 2015, DoD initiated an extensive study on open service by transgender Service members, and to develop an implementation plan. In June 2016, the Secretary of Defense announced the ending of the ban on transgender Service members, issuing two key policy documents pertaining to Military Service by transgender individuals.

Gender-based exclusion from direct ground combat positions was another area where DoD made policy changes after a comprehensive study of the subject. In 2011 and 2012, DoD conducted an extensive review of all laws and policies governing the assignment of women in the Armed Forces. The Women in Service Review (WISR) resulted in the repeal of the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule in 2013. Subsequently, over 30 primary studies and reviews were conducted to inform the implementation of the policy change from 2013 through 2015. This nearly five-year review concluded with the policy decision that DoD will integrate women into

¹⁶ Statement by Secretary of Defense Ash Carter on DOD Transgender Policy (July 13, 2015). Available at <http://www.defense.gov/News/News-Releases/News-Release-View/Article/612778>

approximately 213,600 remaining positions in 52 military occupational specialties.¹⁷ DoD will monitor the impact of these policy changes on military families and optimize support systems and programming as necessary.

Reduce the Cost of Doing Business. The 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance urged the Department to continue its effort to lower the “cost of doing business” by slowing down the growth rate of manpower costs, and furthering the efficiencies in its business processes and practices. The FY 2013 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) established the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission to review and identify areas where reform is required and offer recommendations to modernize pay and benefits of the Uniformed Services. The Commission conducted an 18-month extensive review and submitted its final report in January 2015, making a total of 15 recommendations in the areas of pay and retirement, health benefits, and quality of life.¹⁸

In response to one of the Commission’s recommendations, modernization of the retirement system for uniformed personnel is a monumental change for the Department. The FY 2016 NDAA established the new blended retirement system for military personnel. Beginning in January 2018, newly joined Service members will be automatically enrolled in the Blended Retirement System, in which Service members can receive automatic and matching Thrift Savings Plan contributions and mid-career continuation incentive, in addition to monthly retired pay for life if completing 20 years of service. The new blended retirement system increases the portability of retirement benefits. Under the legacy retirement system, only 20% of Service members are eligible for monthly retired pay since Service members must complete at least 20 years of Active military service to receive retirement benefits. On the other hand, 85% of all Service members will receive some retirement benefits under the new blended retirement system.¹⁹

Community-Based Approach to Military Family Readiness. Today’s military families are increasingly interwoven into civilian communities across the Nation. This includes not only National Guard and Reserve families, but also Active Duty Service members and their families. In the past, family support programs were installation-centric which was based on the assumption that the majority of military families live on installations. Today nearly three-quarters of Active Duty families live off-installation

¹⁷ A summary of major findings is available at http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/Fact_Sheet_WISR_FINAL.pdf.

¹⁸ <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS00/20150204/102859/HHRG-114-AS00-20150204-SD001.pdf>.

¹⁹ DoD. (October 2016). Introduction to Blended Retirement. Retrieved from <http://militarypay.defense.gov/BlendedRetirement>.



housing.²⁰ Taking these demographic and geographic trends into consideration, DoD has been increasing its emphasis on community-based resources and service delivery through a network approach.

To promote a community-based network of family support, DoD established the Family Readiness System (FRS) in 2012.²¹ FRS offers diverse options for accessing integrated services to help military families easily find the support they need for everyday life in the military. FRS is a network of agencies, programs, services, and people, and the collaboration among them, which promotes the readiness and quality of life of Service members and their families. In addition to physically available access points, such as installation Military and Family Support Centers, FRS incorporates resources available in other modalities of service delivery. Military OneSource is the DoD's premier information and referral resource for military families, which is available online (www.militaryonesource.mil) and by phone (1-800-342-9647). Military OneSource is being updated to allow users to seamlessly navigate to and from local resources, and connect them to resources beyond the installation, maintaining high-touch service delivery where needed, embedded in community.

A community-based approach to military family readiness underscores the importance of partnerships and collaboration among all those who serve military families as promoted by the White House's Joining Forces initiative. To develop a well-connected support network, DoD will continue engaging all sectors of society to give Service members and their families the right resources and support at the right time in their communities.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This Third Quadrennial Review discusses how DoD is approaching key quality of life issues with strategic implications, based on societal and organizational trends and climates, programs, policies, and needs. In response to the changing nature of today's All-Volunteer Force and its missions and lessons learned from the military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, DoD will continue investing in military family support and modernizing the Department's approach to family readiness to address increasingly diverse needs.

²⁰ According to the 2014 Status of Forces Survey of Active Duty Members, 71% of married Active duty members live off-installation. Data Source: Defense Manpower Data Center (2015).

²¹ FRS was established in the Department of Defense Instruction 1342.22, "Military Family Readiness," published in July 2012.



Despite the ongoing fiscal challenges, DoD is working tirelessly to find an equilibrium between sustaining valuable family support services and seeking further efficiencies in overhead costs, business practices, and other support activities. DoD is investing in research and evaluation to deliver only the best, most effective programs to meet the identified needs of our Services members and their families. Therefore, these investments and modernization must be evidence-based.

DoD is collaborating with other Federal agencies and with state and local governments and communities to maximize resources to strengthen the network of resources that support our military members. Although the environment and the technology in national security are constantly evolving, the cornerstone of sustaining our All-Volunteer Force remains constant — to ensure that Service members and families have the community support to maintain quality of life in the military and force readiness.