



EFMP Blueprint for Change

Enhancing the Support for Military Families Impacted by Disabilities

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Department of Defense should create an independent commission, consisting of subject matter experts from the public and private sector to recommend best practices to support military families impacted by disabilities.

BACKGROUND

*“NCD has concluded that far-reaching systemic changes are needed in our nation’s health, education, and long-term service systems to address the significant barriers faced by EFMs [Exceptional Family Members]. NCD thus seeks support from Congress, the military, and the Administration to build the critical federal partnerships necessary to effect systemic change and ensure that the men and women serving our country can do so knowing their Family Members with disabilities will have the supports and services they need.”*¹ National Council on Disability (NCD), Nov 2011.

The systemic changes NCD called for a decade ago continue to be sorely needed by struggling military families, as demonstrated by multiple GAO reports², Congressional hearings³, and DoD IG complaints⁴.

DISCUSSION

To support our military families with disabilities and reform the military service’s Exceptional Family Member Programs (EFMP), it’s time to attack the problem differently, bringing to the table subject matter experts at the state and federal level, community partners, advocacy organizations and military families.

On 14 Jan 2011, President Obama signed Presidential Directive No 9, “[Strengthening Military Families](#)”, creating a whole-of-government approach to supporting military families. With the relaunch of [Joining Forces](#) in 2020, President Biden and the First Lady have committed to doing the same. An example of this whole-of-government approach is the Department of Defense integrating the strategies for suicide prevention from the Centers for Disease Control’s (CDC) model of public health. Senior military leaders should be looking across the federal government for models to support military families impacted by disabilities.

On 1 June, 2022, the Maternal Child and Health Bureau (MCHB) provided such a model, releasing a “[Blueprint for Change](#)”; providing a “*national framework for a system of services for children and youth with special health care needs (CYSHCN) where they enjoy a full life and thrive in their community from childhood through adulthood.*”⁵ This blueprint provides an evidence-informed roadmap for the Department of Defense and the military services to institute the change needed to support our military families with disabilities.

Another HHS agency, the Administration for Community Living (ACL), is well situated to support military families with disabilities. ACL previously tackled these issues with the Military 360 project, part of an ACL Program of National Significance. Although funding was cut in 2012 due to sequestration, one state, New Jersey, continues to fund its Military 360 project, working with Joint Base

¹ <https://ncd.gov/publications/2011/Nov282011#toc4>

² <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-400t>

³ <https://armedservices.house.gov/2020/2/subcommittee-on-military-personnel-hearing-exceptional-family-member-program-are-the-military-services-really-taking-care-of-family-members>

⁴ <https://www.dodig.mil/reports.html/Article/2405084/project-announcement-audit-of-the-dod-exceptional-family-member-program-in-the/>

⁵ <https://mchb.hrsa.gov/programs-impact/focus-areas/children-youth-special-health-care-needs-cyshcn/blueprint-change>

Exceptional Families of the Military



McGuire-Lakehurst-Dix (JBMDL) and supporting military families. The program was recently highlighted by the Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force as a best practice⁶.

Partnering with the MCHB and the ACL are two examples of federal agencies potentially partnering with DoD and the military services. There are also advisory committees, like the Defense Health Board, who's 2017 report on pediatrics⁷, appears to have been put on a shelf and forgotten. There are partners, like the Multi-Assistance Center (MAC) at Morgan's Wonderland⁸ and the TRICARE for Kids Coalition⁹, a group of non-profit advocacy groups, all supporting military families. We need to bring these groups to the table.

RECOMMENDATION

DoD should create an Independent Review Commission, conducting a 120-day sprint reviewing and making recommendations to enhance the support provided to military families impacted by disabilities.

DoD has a recent history accomplishing this type of review. In July of 2021, reflecting on the [Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military](#), the Deputy Secretary of Defense, Dr. Hicks, noted,

*“what we did here is a very good model for how we should approach other major challenges, particularly people challenges... We obviously brought in outside experts, we had a very evidence-based approach, and we engaged stakeholders throughout the department.... We are dedicated to pushing change that moves fast and delivers. To me, this is the way we should address any other types of challenges, whether it is about military justice or anything else in the department.”*¹⁰

The Department of Defense and the Military Services need to implement Dr. Hicks's recommendation in reforming the support it provides military families impacted by disabilities. These at-risk military families need its leaders in the public and private sectors putting the pieces of the puzzle together, so they see “change that moves fast and delivers”



⁶ <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/2511269/2020-vice-chiefs-challenge-winners-announced/>

⁷ <https://health.mil/Reference-Center/Reports/2017/12/18/Pediatric-Health-Care-Services-Report>

⁸ <https://morganswonderlandmac.com/>

⁹ <https://tricareforkids.org/>

¹⁰ <https://www.c-span.org/video/?513459-1/deputy-defense-secretary-testify-military-sexual-assault-part-1>