

# ANNUAL REPORT TO THE CONGRESSIONAL DEFENSE COMMITTEES

on the Activities of the Office of Special Needs —2019

Pursuant to 10 U.S.C. § 1781c(h)



April 2020

The estimated cost of this report or study for the Department of Defense (DoD) is approximately \$3,960 in 2018 - 2019. This includes \$0 in expenses and \$3,960 in DoD labor.

Generated on 2020Feb28 RefID: 9-903D077

## **Introduction**

The Office of Special Needs (OSN) presents the 2019 annual report as required by 10 U.S.C. § 1781c(h). This report provides a description of gaps in services identified throughout the Department of Defense (DoD) and actions applied in programs and services for Service member families with special needs.

During 2019, OSN continued measurement of the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) in four focus areas: standardization, systemic oversight, strategic communication, and process improvement. OSN placed emphasis on initiating methodologies across the Military Departments to address Family Support staffing concerns, consistent assignment coordination and Family Support, and systematic performance and evaluation metrics of activities conducted by each Service's EFMP. These efforts are key in continuously working to maintain forward momentum toward program improvements and addressing the Government Accountability Office (GAO) May 2018 study.<sup>1</sup>

## **Standardization**

The EFMP consists of three major components: Identification and Enrollment, Assignment Coordination, and Family Support. Responsibility for each of the components resides with either Medical, Personnel, or Family Support functional areas.<sup>2</sup> The Department's standardization efforts resulted in several key initiatives in 2019.

Standardization of the Family Member Travel Screening (FMTS) forms and processes has been a major undertaking. The FMTS forms and processes facilitate consistent cross-Service navigation and coordination of potential travel concerns identified during the assignment process. Concerns identified during the travel screening process may include medical, educational, and/or dental needs for all Service member families with notification of orders to overseas and remote locations.

OSN, in collaboration with the Services' medical representatives, conducted four, 3-day classroom training sessions in 2019. The trainings were designed to prepare approximately 400 medical and administrative staff from over 200 military treatment facilities worldwide. OSN also developed and launched a virtual training curriculum and the FMTS Supplement, a comprehensive job-aid for medical staff. The Office of Management and Budget approved the five standardized Department of Defense (DD) forms in June 2019. The release and DoD-wide adoption and implementation of the forms and processes is pending policy finalization.

OSN developed, funded, and implemented a two-year joint Service pilot to validate the 2018 EFMP Family Support Case Management and Staffing Tool. The tool is designed to assess staffing requirements by measuring EFMP Family Support staff workload and EFMP family

---

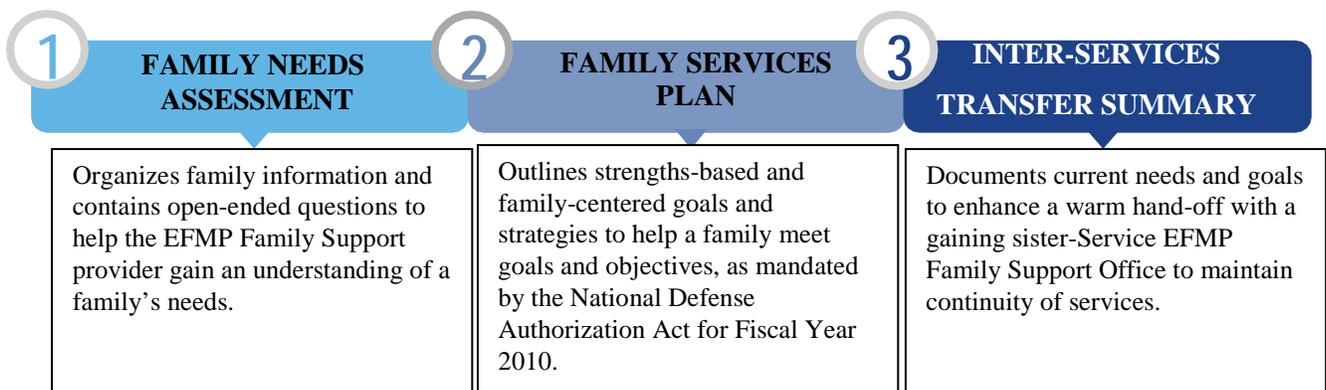
<sup>1</sup> GAO 18-348, "DoD Should Improve Its Oversight of the Exceptional Family Member Program," <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-18-348>, (May 8, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 1315.19, "The Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP)," (April 19, 2017).

needs. The pilot was initiated at eight installations determined by Service recommendations, qualitative factors, and quantitative data collected during the initial review of the staffing tool. The pilot began in November 2019 and added one full-time equivalent staff member at six of the eight installations; the remaining two installations provide data using their current personnel. Throughout the duration of the pilot, participating installations capture and report their daily workload using a standardized collection instrument and data definitions. OSN receives data collections on a bi-weekly basis and conducts monthly updates with participants.

OSN released the EFMP Family Needs Assessment (FNA) as a DD Form in March 2019. The standard DD Form helps to provide a more consistent experience for Service member families regardless of their location and Service affiliation. The EFMP FNA has three components: 1) the Family Needs Assessment; 2) the Family Services Plan; and 3) the Inter-Services Transfer Summary (*Figure 1*). The EFMP FNA guides the family needs assessment process by which the EFMP Family Support provider, in partnership with the family, assesses, documents, and prioritizes the unique needs of the family. During this voluntary process, a family will determine if they wish to complete an Individualized Services Plan.

**Figure 1. EFMP FNA Tool Guide**



*Note: The EFMP FNA supports consistent, enhanced, and continuous EFMP Family Support and has three sections.*

In March 2019, OSN implemented an information campaign to the Services designed to increase awareness about the availability of this new form and to provide specific completion instructions. Additionally, The Exceptional Advocate Military OneSource e-newsletter published articles about the FNA and Military OneSource hosted announcements via social media platforms. In coordination with the Services, OSN established a new set of data points and corresponding definitions to monitor the use of the EFMP FNA. OSN began successful collection of the EFMP FNA data across the Services in July 2019.

OSN continued development of the EFMP Family Support Core Competency Training Curriculum to support increased standardization and improve delivery of EFMP Family Support across the Services. As part of Release 1.0, OSN is responsible for the development and release

of two new training modules on MilLife Learning.<sup>3</sup> The trainings focus on completing quality case notes and the FNA. They are designed to provide access to information that supports a consistent programmatic knowledge base, increase standardization, and improve delivery of EFMP Family Support services across the DoD. Release 1.0 of the curriculum also contains a list of trainings available on MilLife Learning and Military Families Learning Network (MFLN)<sup>4</sup> for use by EFMP Family Support staff. In 2019, nine webinars provided approximately 2,500 continuing education units to DoD program administrators and service providers worldwide. The webinars provide a mechanism to focus on shared common language and offering strategies to assist in addressing gaps in services.

### **Systemic Oversight**

OSN evaluates, measures, and identifies EFMP Family Support service delivery and trends to prioritize areas of focus for improvement across the Department. The data-driven approach provides feedback, valuable insight for internal quality improvement, and an assessment of the impact of changes in current operating procedures. Oversight of the program assists with standardization, operational efficiency, improved military readiness for families with special needs, and compliance with federal laws and DoD guidelines.

In 2019, OSN continued to collect quarterly data submissions from the Services and coordinated with them to obtain additional information and further refinement of the EFMP Data Repository. The data repository centralizes management and aggregates EFMP data from across the Services to provide oversight and improve OSN’s monitoring capabilities of the three EFMP component areas. At the end of the fourth quarter of 2019, 82 percent of 67 data elements were collectible across the Services. The table below provides required information pursuant to 10 U.S.C. § 1781c(f). Improvements to data collections, at the Service- and installation-level, are addressed through enhancement to the repository.

**Table 1. EFMP Enrollment Snapshot across the Services**

Approximately **103,600 Sponsors**<sup>1</sup> (**8 percent of Service members**<sup>2</sup> across the DoD) are enrolled in the EFMP

Approximately **139,200 family members**<sup>1</sup> (**9 percent of family members**<sup>2</sup> across the DoD) are enrolled in the EFMP

Source:<sup>1</sup> Data estimates reported from each of the Services to the Office of the Secretary of Defense (Fiscal Year 2019, Q4). <sup>2</sup> Data estimates reported in the Military OneSource Demographics Report (Fiscal Year 2018).

Note: All years referred to are calendar years unless otherwise noted. Totals on report are an estimate, therefore actual totals may differ from the ones on this report. Reasons for differences may include data pull dates.

<sup>3</sup>MilLife Learning provides self-directed online courses for select audiences, while managing and keeping track of their progress and performance. <https://millifelearning.militaryonesource.mil/>

<sup>4</sup>The MFLN engages Service member family providers and Cooperative Extension educators in the exchange of experiences and research to enhance professional impact and encourage professional growth. <https://militaryfamilieslearningnetwork.org/>

Enhancements to the EFMP Data Repository include additional data elements and more granular installation-level data collections. These enhancements increase the specificity of the current data and add new data collected in the repository, further centralizing the management of the EFMP data to improve OSN's reporting and oversight capabilities.

### ***Monitoring***

OSN continues to assess the effectiveness of the Services' EFMP Family Support programs and has developed standardized criteria designed to measure effectiveness of the programs. These criteria are referenced in DoDI 1342.22, "Military Family Readiness", Section 8: DoD Family Program Certification Standards, currently in formal coordination. Currently, installation EFMP Family Support programs are monitored and evaluated along with the other Family Support programs through the Service-level certification process. When published, all Services will utilize the EFMP standards listed in DoDI 1342.22 in their certification process. In December 2019, OSN staff conducted a formal EFMP Family Support on-site monitoring visit at Naval Air Station Patuxent River. During the installation-level visit, standards were reviewed to ensure program compliance and effectiveness. Results of on-site monitoring visits assist in the development of initiatives and provide insight for continued standardization of Family Support services.

The Department relies on senior executive-level leadership to provide additional oversight of policies, programs, and support that impacts Service member with special needs through the DoD Coordinating Committee for Military Families with Special Needs (the Coordinating Committee). The Coordinating Committee is actively engaged in advising the OSN. They reviewed and provided recommendations in several key areas, including the Staffing Pilot, the FMFS forms and processes, and the use of the EFMP Data Repository.

In addition to oversight from senior DoD leadership, OSN relies on input from the Subcommittee for Inter-Component Coordination (SICC). Membership of the SICC is comprised of military medical department Educational and Developmental Intervention Services program managers, representatives from the Department of Defense Education Activity, and OSN. During the reporting period, discussions focused on availability of educationally related services, and revision of the current compliance monitoring standards for early intervention services.

### ***Family Feedback***

The Department has increased efforts to solicit feedback on specific usage of, and satisfaction with, the EFMP. The EFMP Family Support Feedback Tool is designed to provide a way for families to directly report their feedback about their recent interaction with installation EFMP Family Support providers to OSN. The tool will increase OSN's awareness of the types of assistance requested through EFMP Family Support services, provide key program insights to help monitor the services provided and, in turn, improve services. Military OneSource will host the feedback tool once it is released. Continued development of the tool in preparation for the launch includes a comprehensive communications plan for Service member families and

installation EFMP Family Support Providers. Data collected through the EFMP Family Support Feedback Tool will also be stored in the EFMP Data Repository to further increase the centralization of all EFMP data.

The DoD Family Advisory Panel on Community Support for Military Families continued to meet quarterly in 2019. Each of the panel's seven members, representative of all the Services, is appointed by his or her respective Service and has a family member enrolled in EFMP. Topics of interest prioritized and discussed by panel members in 2019 included a review of a Preparing for Your Move fact sheet, inclusion and diversity in EFMP and community programs, an overview of the mental health services available through TRICARE, and a demonstration of the available resources on Military OneSource for Service members and their families.

### **Strategic Communication**

OSN utilizes Military OneSource as a primary mechanism for outreach to Service member families with special needs. OSN tracks monthly and quarterly usage activity and patterns through the reports from MilLife Learning and Military OneSource. For example, The Exceptional Advocate e-newsletter, a quarterly publication, which provides information about EFMP and related initiatives gained over 8,000 new subscriptions in 2019. Total subscriptions for the year amounted to approximately 18,600.

During 2019, OSN continued to meet monthly with the Military Community Support Programs (MCSP) liaison, a member of the Military Community and Family Policy team, and the EFMP Resources, Options, and Consultations (ROC) Call Center team. The MCSP liaison provides contract oversight for Military OneSource and ensures the quality and accuracy of the resources and referrals provided to the participants utilizing the EFMP ROC services. The MCSP liaison initiatives focus on improving communication and service delivery for EFMP and Military OneSource, such as the implementation of Military OneSource metrics into the monthly meetings. The EFMP ROC available through Military OneSource, offers additional expertise, specialized support, and additional ways to connect families with resources, all of which augment the services already provided by the EFMP staff at military installations around the world. The discussions addressed various topics to include data collection and quality assurance of consultation calls, trends in EFMP, policy, and program updates for OSN and the military health care system. EFMP ROC completed over 1,000 consultations during 2019. With the introduction of the TRICARE liaison role, OSN provided a key resource to the EFMP ROC consultants and Service member families to help assist with complex military health care system benefit issues and TRICARE claims worldwide. The TRICARE liaison interfaces and coordinates between OSN, the Defense Health Agency, the Military Services, EFMP ROC, and Service member families.

EFMP eLearning courses, developed specifically as a resource for Service member families with special needs, are delivered via Military OneSource/MilLife Learning. EFMP eLearning courses and video tutorials address topics such as special education (Early Intervention Services and EFMP Childhood Development Milestones and Identifying Delays), permanent change of station travel considerations, adults with special needs, Special Care

Organization Record, and personal stories from Service member families with special needs. Efforts to improve on-line resources available on Military OneSource resulted in eliminating materials and out of-date content. An updated key word functionality also improved the search experience.

Under development, EFMP & Me is a web-based application designed to address a family's needs during various stages in their military lifecycle. EFMP & Me will provide direct access for Service member families with special needs to EFMP resources by providing easy-to-use checklists tailored to each family's needs. The application is anticipated to launch in 2020.

The Education Directory for Children with Special Needs helps families who are transitioning to a new location make informed decisions about the provision of special education and early intervention services available on or near installations within the 50 States and the District of Columbia. The directory is formatted to separately address children from birth through age 3 and school-age children from ages 3 through 21 years old.

## **Conclusion**

OSN continues to be a support infrastructure that promotes the well-being of families with special needs and thereby foster family and mission readiness. Our force is increasingly joint, so it is imperative that we minimize the challenges in the context of intra-Service and cross-Service coordination and support. The activities and accomplishments outlined in this report demonstrate a commitment to assess and improve service and support programs for Service member families with special needs. We look forward to continuing the growth and success of the program across the Department.