

Army reforms improve EFMP - Exceptional Family Member Program

By Douglas Hall, Army Public Health Center 15 June 2022



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ABERDEEN PROVING GROUND, Md. — Army life has many rewards, but navigating the unique demands of that accompany it can sometimes be challenging. Frequent moves, family separations, school changes and work-life balance are part of every Army Family's life. For the roughly 9 percent of active-duty Soldiers who have family members with special needs — these demands can be uniquely challenging.

There are approximately 46,000 active-duty Soldiers and nearly 55,000 family members enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program, or EFMP, which helps families with special medical/educational needs. EFMP is a mandatory enrollment program that works with other military and civilian agencies to provide comprehensive and coordinated community support, housing, educational and medical services to families with special needs. Additionally, these special needs are considered when the Army assigns them a new post.

The inaugural [Health of the Army Family report](#) released in December

2021 by the Army Public Health Center and Army research conducted by G-9 identified some of the pressing issues for Army families with special needs such as ease of program enrollment, legal support, assignments, and access to care after a permanent change of station move.

“The takeaways from the issues identified in the Health of the Army Family report are that families with multiple EFMs, junior enlisted families and families in the continental U.S. may experience increased challenges during PCS moves,” said Laura Mitvalsky, APHC director for Health Promotion and Wellness and a member of the Army’s Quality of Life Task Force. “We are hoping Army leadership considers our recommendations to provide more targeted support to these groups. We understand this is a complex program with lots of moving parts. Our goal with this report and future reports is to work with our partners at G-9 and other Army stakeholders to create a positive impact for Army Families.”

Senior Army leadership is taking action to address these concerns. This includes piloting a new Enterprise Exceptional Family Member Program, or E-EFMP, online enrollment process to improve the assignment research and selection process for EFMP participants.

“The Army has listened to these concerns and recognizes the challenges families with special needs face, especially during a move,” said Lt. Gen. Jason Evans, deputy Army Chief of Staff for Installations, G-9, and Army Quality of Life Task Force lead. “We are aggressively reforming the program to improve transparency, coordination, access to resources and services, and build trust in the program.”

The new digital platform is expected to streamline enrollment, make assignment coordination and family support access easier, and synchronize all aspects of care for families with special needs. The system is being rolled out in two phases. Phase one, released April 2022, established the online enrollment process. Phase two integrates assignment coordination and family support access.

“So far, the feedback has been positive and we continue to fine tune the site based on Soldier, family member, and stakeholder feedback,” said Cleo Green, E-EFMP project lead, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, G-9.

Key features of the new E-EFMP system include:

- Automated DD Form 2792 (Family Member Medical Summary) enrollment and overseas family screening process.
- A case management component that allows Soldiers and families to initiate and monitor career long EFMP enrollment — including paperwork storage so no more carrying documents.

- A forum feature which allows EFMP families to connect, share information, and create an online community.
- Mobile capability with 24/7 access to the E-EFMP, compatible with both the iPhone and Android
- Centralized content management
- DS Login, multi-factor authentication and/or Common Access Card accessible

The Army established an EFMP Board of Directors, which meets every six months with two- and three-star leaders to evaluate the EFMP performance and address critical issues with the program.

Legal assistance is another focus area for EFMP. Since 2020, the Office of the Judge Advocate General has sent 47 practitioners to the College of William and Mary School of Law to be trained in special education law. This training prepares Army practitioners to assist EFMP families with complex legal issues.

“All Army Legal Assistance Offices are available to provide EFMP Families legal counseling to assist with their personal legal issues,” said Melissa Halsey, chief of the Legal Assistance Policy Division in the Office of the Judge Advocate General. “Legal counseling may be provided on legal topics ranging from estate planning, family law, consumer law, to tenants’ rights, and now special education law.”

For more complex cases, Army military legal assistance services partner with the American Bar Association to provide pro bono legal assistance to eligible EFMP families.

“In terms of assignments, the Army Human Resources Command will not knowingly assign a Soldier, with their family, to a location that cannot support the family’s medical needs,” said Michael Slaven, chief, Special Actions Branch, HRC. “The best way to maximize assignment options is to ensure the Soldier’s EFMP enrollment is up to date and accurate.”

Additionally, Soldiers should ask themselves, does anyone in my family:

1. Have a potentially life-threatening condition(s) and/or chronic medical/physical condition, a current and/or chronic mental health condition, a diagnosis of asthma or other respiratory-related diagnosis, a diagnosis of attention deficit disorder and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder?
2. Require adaptive equipment, assistive technology devices, and/or environmental and/or architectural considerations?
3. Have special education needs?

“If the answer is ‘yes’ to any of the questions, you should make an appointment at your local Medical Treatment Facility EFMP office for family medical screening and enrollment,” said Col. Scott Gregg, EFMP director

for the Army Office of the Surgeon General.

“Soldiers and families who need additional assistance or want to learn more about EFMP should contact their local Army Community Service EFMP family support systems navigator,” said Sharon Swisher, EFMP manager, at Army Installation Management Command. “Family support is available to assist families before, during and after relocation with information and resources.”

Soldiers and/or families can also submit their question(s) to:

usarmy.pentagon.hqda-dcs-g-9.mbx.efmp@mail.mil.

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