



ASSOCIATION OF
**DEFENSE
COMMUNITIES**

A PROGRAM OF



**BLUE STAR
FAMILIES**

COVID-19

MILITARY SUPPORT

INITIATIVE

PRESENTED BY

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IN SUMMARY: WHAT WE CAN DO TO
CONTINUE SUPPORTING MILITARY COMMUNITIES

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PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

- AMERICAN ARMED FORCES MUTUAL AID ASSOCIATION
- AARP
- AMERICAN RED CROSS
- ASSOCIATION OF DEFENSE COMMUNITIES
- BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER
- BLUE STAR FAMILIES
- BOB WOODRUFF FOUNDATION
- BOOZ ALLEN HAMILTON
- BRISTOL MYERS SQUIBB FOUNDATION
- BUNKER LABS
- COHEN VETERANS NETWORK
- DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS – LIAISON
- DIXON CENTER FOR MILITARY AND VETERANS SERVICES
- EASTER SEALS
- ELIZABETH DOLE FOUNDATION
- ENLISTED ASSOCIATION OF THE NATIONAL GUARD OF THE UNITED STATES
- FREEDOM LEARNING GROUP
- GRANT THORNTON
- HIRING OUR HEROES, U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOUNDATION
- INSTITUTE FOR VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES
- IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN VETERANS OF AMERICA
- MILITARY CHILD EDUCATION COALITION
- MILITARY FAMILY RESEARCH INSTITUTE, PURDUE UNIVERSITY
- MILITARY OFFICERS OF AMERICA ASSOCIATION
- NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF VETERAN-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS
- NATIONAL CHILD TRAUMATIC STRESS NETWORK'S MILITARY AND VETERAN FAMILIES PROGRAM
- NATIONAL MATH AND SCIENCE INITIATIVE
- OPERATION HOMEFRONT
- OUR MILITARY KIDS
- PARTNERS IN PROMISE
- PENFED FOUNDATION
- PRUDENTIAL FINANCIAL
- PSYCHARMOR INSTITUTE
- RALLYPOINT
- SESAME STREET WORKSHOP
- THE RETIRED ENLISTED ASSOCIATION
- TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS (TAPS)
- TRAVIS MANION FOUNDATION
- TUTOR.COM
- UNITED SERVICES AUTOMOBILE ASSOCIATION (USAA)
- UNITED THROUGH READING

As the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in the U.S. intensified in early 2020, two organizations — the Association of Defense Communities and Blue Star Families — quickly realized that military and veteran communities were uniquely impacted and formed the COVID-19 Military Support Initiative (CMSI). CMSI immediately leveraged the expertise and capabilities of the White Oak Collaborative, a cross-sector, voluntary gathering of major nonprofits and other stakeholders. The collaborative grew rapidly as CMSI quickly became the go-to resource for members of the military community as they grappled with the impacts of the pandemic. After months of polling and town hall-style expert-driven meetings, the effort culminated in a series of working groups designed to capture and document lessons learned and recommendations for future action related to the pandemic. With 180 leaders and subject matter experts participating, these working groups addressed five topics — K-12 education, financial readiness, installation response, defense community response, and the need to understand what the data was saying about each of these topics. Their takeaways are summarized here, and the associated white paper offers a detailed breakdown of working group discussions. CMSI's effort is intended to be a call to action for those who want to understand how this national emergency impacted military and veteran families and their communities. In addition, the report offers recommendations to prepare for the pandemic's continuation and for the next crisis. Critically, it also contains insights about strengthening our military and their families in general. Collectively, the working groups found:

- The power and reach of public-nonprofit-private partnerships is key for the success and welfare of military families and their associated communities. These partnerships require an investment before crisis strikes.

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- COVID-19 has significant implications for military personnel and readiness policies. Issues in military communities, such as dwindling spouse employment opportunities, increasing problems finding adequate day care, the difficulties of permanent change of station (PCS) moves, and the disparate challenges faced by female service members who are mothers, already existed before the pandemic. COVID-19 not only highlighted these problems, but also magnified their impact.
- The effects of COVID-19 on military families showed how crisis response mechanisms work — or do not — within the military community. Issues such as access to child care, financial resilience, effectiveness of installation communications, and local community support need to be addressed before the next crisis so that some of the stressors on military families are better mitigated in advance.

TOP TAKEAWAYS & ACTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

DATA ANALYSIS

- The military must adapt to a 21st century workforce, culturally and structurally, to preserve operational and family readiness during a national emergency.
- The capacity of local communities to address families' needs is indelibly tied to the ability to address the needs of military and veteran families.
- Reducing uncertainty alleviates stress for military and veteran families; installations should ensure consistent communication and guidance at the local installation level to avoid contributing to uncertainty among some service members and families.

Military and civilian leaders should identify and help set the conditions for safe and effective use of flexible, non-traditional work and child care arrangements until the threat of the virus dissipates; these adaptations should be tailored to local public health conditions. Service members (especially women) should not be penalized in their career progression because the pandemic created increased demands around child care.

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K-12 EDUCATION

- Consistent communication is key to supporting students' and families' social and emotional well-being.
- Schools, communities, installations, and military families should proactively mitigate issues for students by increasing flexibility when possible, addressing virtual learning disparities, identifying and addressing learning gaps, and encouraging families to create portfolios for students to ease school transitions. Students with special education needs are most likely to be at risk of falling behind.

Schools should provide clear and consistent communication to parents and staff, and should take action to prevent burnout among staff (e.g., setting clear expectations and providing flexibility as able) in the 2020-2021 school year.

FINANCIAL IMPACTS ON THE MILITARY FAMILY

- The COVID-19 pandemic intensified existing barriers to financial security for military families, exacerbating concerns with spouse employment and lack of child care.
- Response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the "Stop Movement" order and the payroll tax deferral, have had and may continue to have unintended negative financial consequences for military families, and may increase military families' financial needs.
- Editor's note: [CMSI research](#) completed after the working group met demonstrated that Black/African American military families experienced greater financial distress, and Black and Hispanic families were not receiving effective communications about support and resources.

Employers should comprehensively survey the workforce, understanding which employees are also full-time caregivers and/or full-time or hybrid home-school teachers. Military spouse employees need flexibility in work schedules and training, as well as agency and input in scheduling. Military commanders should recognize the likely greater toll on female service members who have children.

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MAINTAINING INSTALLATION OPERATIONS

- Maintaining installation operations requires collaborations with local communities and planning for future pandemic response.
- Classified work is almost impossible to complete in a remote work setting. Installation managers need to plan how classified work can continue seamlessly and safely in pandemic conditions.

Military leaders should develop alliances with counties, local governments, and utilities “outside the fence line,” to include identification of joint-use space, establishment of intergovernmental service agreements, and bolstering installation resilience through investment in telecommunications, utilities, and infrastructure.

INSTALLATION-COMMUNITY CRISIS RESPONSE

- Installation and community collaboration were essential for providing necessary supplies and resources for both military and civilian communities.
- Leveraging existing relationships between installations and community organizations and businesses allowed for rapid, innovative responses to community needs.
- Military families and organizations strengthened ties and investment in their local communities during COVID-19.

The Department of Defense should work to strengthen partnerships with local and state governments and other community organizations, and to document and share “best practices” from partnerships built during the pandemic.

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