STRENGTHENING AMERICA'S MILITARY FAMILIES

SEPTEMBER 2021

Matching Their Devotion:

Deepening Our Commitment to the Families, Caregivers, and Survivors of Service Members and Veterans

A REPORT OF THE
JOINING FORCES INTERAGENCY POLICY COMMITTEE

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

I have long believed that, as a nation, we have many obligations, but only one truly sacred obligation: to properly prepare and equip our troops when we send them into harm's way and to care for them and their families, both while they are serving and when they return home.

As Commander-in-Chief, I know that meeting the economic, social, and emotional needs of our military and veteran families, caregivers, and survivors is a national security imperative and critical to sustaining an all-volunteer force. The commitment and resilience of military families are essential to the recruitment, retention, and readiness of our fighting forces and the enduring strength of our nation.

Military families face many of the same challenges as other American working families, but they have the added strain of multiple deployments; frequent moves with little control over their geographic location; caring for wounded, ill, and injured service members or veterans; time apart for trainings and other demands of military life; and more. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these challenges and created new ones.

This report reflects the commitment of the Biden-Harris Administration to a government-wide effort that will advance the dignity, equity, opportunity, and prosperity of the families, caregivers, and survivors of our service members and veterans. Each executive department has given their commitment to supporting a whole-of-government approach to better know and serve this community.

Through nearly two decades of sustained warfare, military and veteran families, caregivers, and survivors have sacrificed much for our country. They have answered the call to duty over and again. We owe them nothing less than a coordinated and enduring effort to reduce unnecessarily burdensome barriers and increase access to support across the government, and I am pleased to approve the attached report signifying that commitment.

JOSEPH R. BIDEN JR.
President

We have an all-volunteer force and it continues only because generations of Americans see the honor, dignity, and patriotism of military service. If we hope to sustain this force, it is essential that we recognize and support those who also serve: the families of our service members and veterans, caregivers, and survivors. They may not wear a uniform, but they sacrifice for us all. They give their best to the United States, and we owe them nothing but our best in return.

Military families have shared their challenges and triumphs with me: landing a dream job, only to receive orders to a new location in a few months; registering a child for their third elementary school in as many years; or struggling to find affordable childcare at a new duty station. As a military mom and daughter of a veteran, I know the sleepless nights, the stressors on military children, and the many challenges, big and small, that come with service.

Through *Joining Forces*, the White House is committed to supporting the military and veteran communities through economic and entrepreneurship opportunities for military spouses, including access to affordable, quality child care; support for military-connected children in the classroom; and health and well-being resources. *Joining Forces* will continue to convene and collaborate with federal agency partners, non-profit organizations, corporate stakeholders, and service providers to develop comprehensive, meaningful, and long-term solutions that address the holistic well-being of military and veteran families, caregivers, and survivors.

As a government, we are committed to ensuring that military families have what they need to thrive. This report is just the beginning, and it is our hope that this work will become a permanent priority of every administration.

Jill Biden

DR. JILL T. BIDEN
First Lady

As a nation, we have many obligations, but we have only one truly sacred obligation: to care for our troops and their families while they are deployed and after they return home.

We recognize the service and sacrifices of the families, caregivers, and survivors of America's service members and veterans.

We affirm that supporting their economic, social, and emotional needs is a national security imperative critical to the maintenance of an all-volunteer force.

We commit to collaboration and the development of comprehensive and long-term solutions to better understand this community and strengthen their well-being.

The Biden-Harris Administration will honor the commitment of our nation's military and veteran families, caregivers, and survivors by coordinating resources, data, and expertise across the federal government to advance their dignity, equity, opportunity, and prosperity.

Department of State

Department of the Interior

Department of Health and Human Services

Department of Education

Department of Treasury

Department of Agriculture

Department of Housing and Urban Development

Department of Veteran Affairs

Department of Defense

Department of Commerce

Department of Transportation

Department of Homeland Security

Department of Justice

Department of Labor

Department of Energy

From day one, the Biden-Harris Administration has made clear that the families of our service members and veterans, their caregivers and survivors, are vital to our national security. In order to recruit and retain the best and most talented personnel to occupations within the military, the care and quality of life of their families must be considered, prioritized, and addressed by a coordinated effort across the federal government. After 20 years of sustained warfare, the families, caregivers, and survivors of those who serve and have served continue to face enduring challenges. They give their best to the United States, and we owe them our best in return.

> ***Make no mistake: military families are critical to our national defense. We have an all-volunteer force—and it continues only because generations of Americans see the honor, dignity, and patriotism of military service. How can we hope to keep our military strong if our service members are forced to choose between their love of country and their love of family?***
>
> ***First Lady Jill Biden***
> *Remarks to Service Members and Families at RAF Mildenhall*
> *June 9, 2021*

Military and veteran communities are becoming increasingly more diverse[1],[2],[3] and it is the policy of this administration to continue this growth by prioritizing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility as a national security imperative, in order to ensure critical perspectives and talents are represented in the national security workforce.[4] When service members and military families from different races, ethnicities, religions, sexual orientations, and other identities come together to support our common defense, the country benefits from a more talented, adaptive, and effective military force.[5]

Across the Department of Defense, in addition to those in uniform, there are almost 1.6 million active duty family members, including over 600,000 spouses and almost one million children, while the Department of Homeland Security supports approximately

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[1] "Demographics of the U.S. Military," Council on Foreign Relations (Council on Foreign Relations, July 13, 2020), https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/demographics-us-military.
[2] "2019 Demographics Profile of the Military Community." United States Department of Defense, 2019. https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2019-demographics-report.pdf.
[3] "Department of Defense Board on Diversity and Inclusion Report: Recommendations to Improve Racial and Ethnic Diversity and Inclusion in the U.S. Military." United States Department of Defense. Department of Defense Board on Diversity and Inclusion, December 18, 2020. https://media.defense.gov/2020/Dec/18/2002554852/-1/-1/0/DOD-DIVERSITY-AND-INCLUSION-FINAL-BOARD-REPORT.PDF.
[4] "Memorandum on Revitalizing America's Foreign Policy and National Security Workforce, Institutions, and Partnerships," White House, February 4, 2021, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/02/04/memorandum-revitalizing-americas-foreign-policy-and-national-security-workforce-institutions-and-partnerships.
[5] Id.

87,000 Coast Guard family members. The Department of Defense reports that approximately half of the active force is married, with almost seven percent in dual military marriages, and 37 percent have children. Additionally, there are over one million family members of Guard and Reserve personnel. 44 percent are married and 41 percent have children.[6] Information on the characteristics of veteran families is limited, but there are approximately 19 million veterans in the United States, the majority of whom are married.[7] It is estimated that there are 5.5 million adult military caregivers in the United States,[8] and advocates estimate that there are over 41,000 surviving families of military-connected deaths that occurred between January 1, 2001, and present day.

While the President has withdrawn U.S. troops from Afghanistan, ending America's longest war, the impacts of service on military and veteran families, caregivers, and survivors will continue for years to come. Military and veteran families face similar challenges as their fellow American working families, but with the additional stressors of deployments; frequent moves with little control over geographic location; caregiving for wounded, ill, and injured service members and veterans; separations caused by training or hardship duties; and more. The global pandemic has exacerbated many of these challenges, and created others. As housing costs continue to increase, military and veteran families, caregivers, and survivors are feeling the financial impact. Active duty military families find their housing situation exacerbated by a Congressionally-approved reduction in the Basic Allowance for Housing to cover less than 100 percent of the estimated average housing costs and eliminate the cost of renter's insurance from the housing allowance.[9] Approximately 70 percent of military families live outside of military installations;[10] meanwhile, 33 percent opt to live apart from their service member at some point, often in order to support a family member's employment or educational pursuits.[11] Thus, communities across America are key partners in supporting our national defense by ensuring military and veteran families, caregivers, and survivors are welcomed and supported.

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[6] "2019 Demographics Profile of the Military Community." United States Department of Defense, 2019. https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2019-demographics-report.pdf.

[7] "Veteran Population Projection Model." VetPop2018: A Brief Description. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d. https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/Demographics/New_Vetpop_Model/VP_18_A_Brief_Description.pdf.

[8] Rajeev Ramchand et al., Hidden Heroes: America's Military Caregivers (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2014), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR499.html.

[9] "Military Housing: Actions Needed to Improve the Process for Setting Allowances for Servicemembers and Calculating Payments for Privatized Housing Projects," Military Housing: Actions Needed to Improve the Process for Setting Allowances for Servicemembers and Calculating Payments for Privatized Housing Projects § (2021), https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-137.

[10] "Military Children Serve, Too," United States Department of Defense (United States Department of Defense, April 12, 2016), https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/719407/.

[11] "Military Spouse Career Journeys: Examining Entrepreneurship, Remote Work, and Upskilling as Drivers of Economic Success for Military Spouses" (United States Chamber of Commerce Hiring our Heroes & Burning Glass Technologies, September 2020), https://www.milspouseroadmap.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/drivers-of-economic-growth-0911.pdf.

In May 2021, the Office of the First Lady and the National Security Council launched a *Joining Forces* Interagency Policy Committee to establish a forum to highlight and advance cross-agency priorities related to the families of service members and veterans, caregivers, and survivors. The Interagency Policy Committee demonstrates the Biden-Harris Administration's "whole-of-government approach" to supporting these communities and serves as a mechanism to foster collaboration, data-sharing, and innovative solutions amongst agencies. Prepared by representatives from the White House and the federal agencies, this report should be viewed as an initial step in demonstrating the administration's commitment to the support of military and veteran families, caregivers, and survivors. Going forward, the Interagency Policy Committee will continue to advance these efforts through cross-agency working groups and will report results and updated plans annually.

Along with the historic investments already passed in the American Rescue Plan, the Biden-Harris Administration has proposed a number of additional measures to support American working families through the Build Back Better Agenda. These measures are well positioned to support all working families, and will also contribute to the well-being of the families of service members and veterans, caregivers, and survivors. The *Joining Forces* Interagency Policy Committee will work closely with agencies implementing these proposals, once passed, to ensure that military and veteran families are addressed as a key population for services provided. This includes policies such as free community college; high-quality universal preschool for all three- and four-year-olds; a historic investment in schools; additional resources for schools to hire counselors, social workers and school psychologists; and increased investments in mental health and substance use prevention, treatment, and recovery support services, which will further goals in supporting the well-being of military-connected communities. To the extent possible, relevant Build Back Better Agenda and budgetary proposals have been included within this document. While the priorities included below are not ordered by importance, they represent the breadth of experiences present in the military family lifecycle, from recruitment into the military through to the return to civilian communities.

Priority I: Develop a unified research approach so that policy and programming are informed by comprehensive, cross-agency data.

The demographic characteristics and experiences of the military and veteran populations have changed rapidly over the past two decades, and in order to best support their needs, a strategic, coordinated, and collaborative approach to data collection and sharing must be prioritized. While there are a number of government-executed data collections which seek to better define the needs and challenges faced by the families of veterans and service members, their caregivers, and survivors, a venue for sharing this information and using it to effectively shape the policy and programming designed to support them and improve service delivery is sorely needed. Lessons from the past 20 years also reveal that more intentional, strategic approaches to studying the characteristics and diverse experiences are necessary for evidence-

based policy making.[12] Previous research has indicated that there is need for more robust cross-agency collaboration to better understand and address complex emerging issues such as food insecurity.[13]

Our Goal: Create a forum through which agencies share data to better inform policy and programming for families of service members and veterans, caregivers, and survivors.

Our Commitments:

- **Through the *Joining Forces* Interagency Policy Committee, the White House will convene cross-agency working groups that will develop a strategy for sharing data across government agencies; and, when possible, with the public to better inform policy and program development.** These working groups will include deep-dives into existing data and planned research in the topics of:
    - Food Insecurity
    - Mental Health
    - Children in Caregiving Families
    - Military Child Education
- Each working group will produce a report outlining plans for future research and identifying areas of collaboration between agencies.

Our Goal: Better know our military and veteran families, caregivers, and survivors.

Our Commitments:

- **The U.S Census Bureau, in collaboration with the Department of Defense and other federal agencies, will undertake a multi-year process to create The Ask US Panel.** The panel will be a nationally-representative survey panel for tracking concerns and experiences across many domains. The panel will include military spouses and will allow for more expedient insights into emerging trends on issues like military spouse employment, health, and food insecurity. Online panels are more flexible, faster, and less burdensome than traditional surveys. This project will take advantage of the resources and expertise at the Census Bureau to produce nationally representative and reliable information about military families.

- **The Department of Defense Office of Military Family Readiness Policy, Family Advocacy Program will undertake research to enhance the agency's**

[12] Tanielian T, Trail TE, Corry N. Designing and Implementing Strategic Research Studies to Support Military Families. In A Battle Plan for Supporting Military Families: Lessons for the Leaders of Tomorrow. Edited by Hughes-Kirchubel, MacDermid Wadsworth, and Riggs. Springer; Lafayette, IN: 303-321.

[13] Fleischhacker, Sheila E, Catherine E Woteki, Paul M Coates, Van S Hubbard, Grace E Flaherty, Daniel R Glickman, Thomas R Harkin, et al. "Strengthening National Nutrition Research: Rationale and Options for a New Coordinated Federal Research Effort and Authority." The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition 112, no. 3 (2020): 721–69. https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcn/nqaa179.

efforts to respond to and prevent domestic violence. This project aligns with Defense priorities to address domestic violence and to further engage the Department's coordinated community response on domestic violence.

- **The Department of Defense is adding a module focused on military-connected adolescents of participants in the longitudinal Millennium Cohort Study of service members and veterans.** This new study will survey 11 to 17-year-old youths and their parents on topics related to adolescent psychosocial adjustment and physical health, academic achievement, and educational/career aspirations. Data will provide key insights on modifiable risk and protective factors to inform military programs and services aimed at the needs of military-connected youth and their families.

- **The Department of Justice will collect data through veterans treatment courts regarding whether veterans participating in these programs are receiving family support services**. Veterans treatment courts do not provide family-focused services but rather services for participants to address their individual needs, including bolstering skills to support their role as a parent or caregiver. Collecting such data may assist in identifying and better serving the needs of veteran and military-connected families.

- **The Department of Justice will collect information on children in military and veteran families through its Juvenile Justice Research and Evaluation solicitation**. The Department will support research to better understand issues related to delinquency and victimization of children in military and veteran families. In FY 2022, the Department will release a new Juvenile Justice Research and Evaluation solicitation that will prioritize studies on delinquency and/or abuse of children in veteran and military families.

- **The Department of Justice will host listening sessions in Fall 2021 to determine how it can better support military and veteran families through the veterans treatment courts it funds**. This stakeholder engagement would include focus groups from the relevant population and engagement with the Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs to identify needs and gaps in assistance.

- **The Department of Veterans Affairs' Caregiver Support Program Partnered Evaluation Center surveyed caregivers prior to the expansion of the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers and will survey them again once they have enrolled.** This data will provide the Department with the first large scale research to demonstrate the impact of enrollment in the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers.

- **The Department of Veterans Affairs' Elizabeth Dole Center of Excellence for Veteran and Caregiver Research is currently collecting qualitative data on the lived experiences of parents and youth who live in veteran caregiving households.** This data will be used to inform the role of the new Family Coordinators as proposed by the Build Back Better Agenda.

Priority II: Increase economic opportunity and mobility for military families

The Department of Defense's 2019 Active Duty Spouse Survey reported the rate of military spouse unemployment as 22 percent, statistically unchanged since 2012.[14] In 2020, the global pandemic worsened the job outlook for many Americans, and military families were not spared. Between April 2020 and December 2020, 34 percent of military spouses reported that they lost their job and 25 percent reported that their hours were reduced.[15]

The mobile military lifestyle, with permanent change of station moves every two to three years on average, means that military spouses struggle to find options for work that are portable. Without remote or flexible work options, they must find a new professional network and start another job search with every move. In occupations that require licenses or credentials, many spouses still face barriers to transferability, despite years of effort at the state and federal levels to streamline and simplify those processes. Military families, like their civilian counterparts, increasingly rely upon dual incomes; however, the challenges working military spouses face make that a difficult goal to achieve and maintain, even absent the challenges of a global pandemic.

In a recent survey, 39 percent of military families reported discussing leaving active duty military service because of challenges with spouse employment, and of those who had already transitioned, 32 percent cited their own work or career as a major driver in that decision. Nearly 33 percent of respondents in the same survey indicated that they had lived apart from their service member for career opportunities.[16] Earlier information garnered through the 2002 Department of Defense Health-Related Behaviors Survey of Active Duty Personnel demonstrated that occupational stress, a key indicator for mental

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[14] "2019 Survey of Active Duty Spouses" (United States Department of Defense, December 2, 2020), https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Surveys/ADSS1901_MOS-Briefing-508-Revised.pdf.

[15] "Income Loss, Unemployment, and Loss of Childcare: The Military Family in Pandemic America," National Military Family Association, April 14, 2021, https://www.militaryfamily.org/income-loss-unemployment-and-loss-of-childcare-the-military-family-in-pandemic-america/.

[16] "Military Spouse Career Journeys: Examining Entrepreneurship, Remote Work, and Upskilling as Drivers of Economic Success for Military Spouses" (United States Chamber of Commerce Hiring our Heroes & Burning Glass Technologies, September 2020), https://www.milspouseroadmap.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/drivers-of-economic-growth-0911.pdf.

health issues and occupational performance measures, was highest amongst personnel living apart from their spouses.[17]

Given the challenges with traditional careers, a growing population of military spouses are seeking out opportunities to start and grow their own businesses. These entrepreneurial efforts have allowed many spouses to create portable job opportunities that move with them from base to base, providing their families economic security and flexibility. One study found that a quarter of military spouse respondents currently or previously owned their own business or performed contract work, and most selected this line of work to improve flexibility of schedule.[18]

With the considerable federal footprint around many military installations, military spouses are often interested in pursuing positions in civil service. As agencies consider post-pandemic telework policies in order to compete with other sectors, federal employment opportunities are even more compatible for military spouses. The Biden-Harris Administration has directed the federal government, as the nation's largest employer, to be a model for diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, and recognized that military spouses are an underserved community.[19] Noncompetitive appointment authority for military spouses was established in 2008 to enhance federal employment opportunities; however, the work continues to help human resources practitioners and hiring managers better understand the hiring authority and implement pathways to recruitment and retention of military spouses.[20] Whether pursuing entrepreneurship, federal positions, or other forms of employment, military spouses consistently report that a lack of access to quality, cost-effective, and geographically proximate child care exacerbates challenges in finding and maintaining a career. Military spouses with children experience even higher rates of unemployment, while nearly half of military spouses with children under 13 years old rely on child care to be able to work.[21]

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[17] Robert Bray et al., "2002 Department of Defense Survey of Health-Related Behaviors Among Military Personnel" (United States Department of Defense, 2003), https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA431566.pdf.

[18] "Military Spouse Career Journeys: Examining Entrepreneurship, Remote Work, and Upskilling as Drivers of Economic Success for Military Spouses" (United States Chamber of Commerce Hiring our Heroes & Burning Glass Technologies, September 2020), https://www.milspouseroadmap.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/drivers-of-economic-growth-0911.pdf.

[19] "Executive Order on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce" The White House, June 25, 2021, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/06/25/executive-order-on-diversity-equity-inclusion-and-accessibility-in-the-federal-workforce.

[20] "Recent Changes to the Noncompetitive Hiring Authority of Military Spouses" United States Office of Personnel Management, March 1, 2019, https://www.chcoc.gov/content/recent-changes-noncompetitive-hiring-authority-military-spouses.

[21] 2019 Survey of Active Duty Spouses"(United States Department of Defense, December 2, 2020), https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Surveys/ADSS1901_MOS-Briefing-508-Revised.pdf.

Our Goal: Ensure that the federal government is an employer of choice for military spouses.

Our Commitments:

- **The Office of Personnel Management will continue to promote military spouse hiring authorities for federal agencies** so that agencies are able to tap into the highly educated and motivated military spouse talent pool.

- **The Office of Personnel Management will work with the *Joining Forces* Interagency Policy Committee Federal Employment for Military Spouses Working Group to create a toolkit for federal hiring managers** to educate them about the use of the hiring authority featuring case studies of military spouses within federal careers.

- **The Department of Defense Military Community Support Programs will strengthen the Military Spouse Employment Partnership.** These changes will focus on expanding opportunities for remote work, small business, primary/secondary education, and software/coding companies by:
    - Launching free access to a subscription remote job search website in Summer 2021 in support of military spouse flexible and/or remote employment opportunities.
    - Increasing engagement with military-impacted education systems to include public and private primary and secondary schools as well as higher education to identify employment opportunities for military spouses.
    - Engaging with military-impacted communities to create networks focused on promoting and increasing employment opportunities for military spouses at the local level (often small business).
    - Providing access in Summer 2021 to a new educational platform providing certification in certain information technology careers (aligned to software-coding companies).

- **The Department of Defense Military Spouse Employment Partnership will partner more closely with federal agencies to connect hiring managers with military spouse talent.** A new concierge service will launch in Summer 2021 to provide federal agencies with white glove service in identifying avenues for accessing potential military spouse candidates specific to a vacancy announcement or series of announcements.

- **Federal agencies will collaborate with the Department of Defense through committing to the Military Spouse Employment Partnership.** The commitments below mark a milestone reflecting participation of all executive departments across the President's Cabinet.

- **The Department of Justice will join as a partner employer**. Once registered, the Department will announce its partnership with the Military Spouse Employment Partnership and encourage its use among hiring officers, including through announcements to Executive and Human Resources Officers reminding them of the merits of the non-competitive military spouse hiring authority.
- **The Internal Revenue Service will join as a partner employer**. Representing approximately 90 percent of the Department of Treasury workforce, the Internal Revenue Service will connect with qualified military spouses through the Military Spouse Employment Partnership commitment.
- **The Department of Transportation will join as a partner employer.** By partnering, the Department will encourage opportunities for military spouses to join the transportation workforce and ensure America has the safest, most efficient and modern transportation system in the world.
- **The Department of Health and Human Services will join as a partner employer.** Through this partnership, the Department will offer military spouses rewarding job opportunities to work with the latest in health research, care, and technologies to improve the quality of life for millions.
- **The Department of Commerce will join as a partner employer.** Commerce will use the Military Spouse Employment Partnership platform to connect with qualified military spouses and share careers promoting economic growth and job creation.
- **The Department of Energy will join as a partner employer.** Through this partnership, the Department will connect with military spouses to share job opportunities that span the nation and encompass a wide range of job types from scientific and technical disciplines to a full range of administrative and supporting talents.
- **The General Services Administration will join as a partner employer**. GSA will share remote and geographically diverse job opportunities with qualified military spouses through the Military Spouse Employment Partnership program.

- **The Department of State will share the Domestic Employees Teleworking Overseas policy and procedures with other federal agencies** to encourage efforts to retain skilled workers and keep military and veteran families together, even when overseas military assignments occur.

- **The Interagency Work Group on Veterans and Military Spouses in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, led by the Office of Science and Technology Policy, will develop a strategic plan in order to improve the representation of veterans and military spouses in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics careers.** The Department of Defense, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Education, the National

Science Foundation, the Department of Energy, and the Small Business Administration are just a few of the federal agencies currently serving on the Interagency Work Group to advance veteran and military spouse equity in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields.

Our Goal: Increase opportunities and resources for military spouse entrepreneurship.

Our Commitments:

- **The Department of Defense Spouse Education and Career Opportunities office will continue to develop and provide resources to give military spouses individualized support and robust tools to plan and finance their education, define and pursue a job or career, and grow their professional and personal networks to suit their needs**. The office's Entrepreneurship Coaching Package provides a series of coaching sessions focused on assessment, goal planning, business planning, finance options, and ongoing services to provide military spouses with entrepreneurial support and resources. Spouses also have access to the Entrepreneur EDGE assessment to help a spouse discern if entrepreneurship or a more traditional career may be the best fit for them. As an accountability partner, Spouse Education and Career Opportunities career coaches work together with spouses on specific goals in a 90-day action plan for their business.

- **The Internal Revenue Service will create a publicly available resource with tax preparation tips for military spouse business owners.**

- **The Small Business Administration Office of Veterans Business Development will create a military spouse entrepreneur toolkit** with vetted resources for military spouses seeking to build and grow their businesses.

- **The American Rescue Plan:**
    - **Provides emergency grants, lending, and investment to hard-hit small businesses** so they can rehire and retain workers and purchase the health and sanitation equipment they need to keep workers safe.
    - **Includes a State Small Business Credit Initiative** to provide growth capital to main street small businesses in economically disadvantaged areas, including minority-owned businesses.

- **If enacted, the Build Back Better Agenda and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act will:**
    - **Expand small businesses in underserved communities** by creating a national network of federally-funded small business incubators and innovation hubs to ensure that all Americans, regardless of race or wealth, have a fair shot at starting and growing their own business.

- **Increase engagement in the innovation economy by investing** in federal programs that empower small firms to participate in federal research and development that has the potential for commercialization.
- **Make investments to build high-speed broadband infrastructure to reach 100 percent coverage** and prioritizes building "future proof" broadband infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas. It also prioritizes support for broadband networks owned, operated by, or affiliated with local governments, non-profits, and co-operatives—providers with less pressure to turn profits and with a commitment to serving entire communities.

<u>Our Goal: Increase availability of child care through innovative solutions.</u>

Our Commitments:

- **The Department of Defense will administer the In-Home Child Care Provider Fee Assistance Program Pilot.** The Department is furthering its commitment to support service members and families with securing child care that fits their family's needs. It is also implementing a new pilot program to offer fee assistance to in-home child care providers, such as a nanny. The pilot supports military families who have determined that full-time, in-home child care, is the best solution to meet their needs. For the first year of the pilot, the program will be offered in five locations where demand is greatest and the longest wait lists exist for child care: Hawaii; San Diego; Norfolk; San Antonio; and the National Capital Region. The pilot will run for five years.

- **The Department of Defense will expand its Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood Pilot (MCCYN-PLUS)**. With the success of the pilots in Virginia and Maryland, the Department will expand to additional states and are currently determining which locations are in the best position to join in these efforts.

- **The American Rescue Plan made the single largest investment in child care in our nation's history**:
  - $24 billion in Child Care Stabilization Grants that provide financial relief to child care providers to help with business costs associated with the pandemic, and to help stabilize their operations so that they may continue to provide care.
  - $15 billion in supplemental Child Care and Development Fund to prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus.

- **If enacted, the Build Back Better Agenda will provide access to universal, free, high-quality preschool for all three- and four-year-old children, and ensure low and middle-income families pay no more than 7 percent of their**

income on high-quality child care for children under 5 years-old, saving the average family $14,800 per year on child care expenses when fully implemented.

- **The President's FY 2022 budget proposes to nearly double the investment in Child Care Access Means Parents in School** to ensure that student parents, including veterans and military spouses, enroll in, persist in, and complete postsecondary education by helping to meet their needs for affordable and convenient child care.

Our Goal: Increase support for military and veteran family economic and education opportunities.

Our Commitments:

- **The Department of Defense Military Community Support Programs will execute the expansion of the My Career Advancement Account Scholarship to include national testing and continuing education,** easing the burden for military spouses who require continuing education credits to pursue or maintain licensure during frequent moves. The Department is also expanding the My Career Advancement Account to cover national testing for military spouses, mirroring coverage that exists for service members.

- **The Department of Labor's Transition Employment Assistance for Military Spouses (TEAMS)** course curriculum is designed to specifically meet the needs of military spouses who are transitioning with their service member out of the service or to another installation. Currently, there are four modules being delivered virtually during instructor-led workshops and five more modules were piloted in May and are being revised for full delivery over the remainder 2021.

- **The Department of Labor launched the Employment Navigator and Partnership Pilot in close collaboration with Department of Defense in April 2021**. This pilot provides transitioning service members and their spouses with the needed tools and support to facilitate a successful transition into the civilian workplace. Transitioning service members and their spouses can work with Employment Navigators one-on-one outside the formal Transition Assistance Program instruction to complete individualized self-assessments and skills testing, explore career options, and identify high-demand occupations and necessary credentials. The Employment Navigators can also assist pilot program participants in reviewing detailed labor market information and help connect transitioning service members and their spouses with government and non-government partners to identify other services that may be needed.

- **The Department of Labor Veterans Employment Training Service (VETS) will execute Off-base Transition Training Pilot**: VETS will take a three-pronged approach to implement the pilot:
    - To be responsive to the needs of veterans and their spouses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, VETS' initial action will be to extend virtual delivery of the Department's Transition Assistance Program workshops to veterans and their spouses.
    - Secondly, VETS will leverage the existing State Workforce Agencies and American Job Center networks and provide additional grant flexibilities to states most impacted by COVID-19 to hire additional Jobs for Veterans State Grants staff.
    - Finally, VETS will staff employment coordinators in select pilot states in various National Guard and other Reserve facilities to improve how pilot states serve the employment needs of Reserve Component members and their spouses. VETS intends to leverage this pilot to determine its efficacy in improving employment outcomes for this important population that has repeatedly answered the call during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **The Department of the Interior is expanding its reach through public-private partnerships to participate in the proposed Climate Conservation Corps. This will create more opportunities to recruit youth from military-connected families into the outdoors and environmental workforce.** The Department of the Interior works with many partners to offer educational experiences, increase job readiness, and provide job opportunities for teens, young adults, and veterans through programs like the Service Corps programs, the Youth Conservation Corps Programs, and the Pathways Program.

- **The American Rescue Plan allocated nearly $40 billion to institutions of higher education and their students to ensure learning continues during the COVID-19 pandemic**. Of this funding, $18 billion is specifically designated as emergency aid for students.

- **The Build Back Better Agenda will make college affordable and invests in promising and evidence-based practices that help students complete their education**. Specifically, the Build Back Better Agenda includes the following proposals:
    - Two years of free community college to Americans and will ensure that first-time students and workers, including military and veteran families, wanting to reskill can enroll in a community college to earn a degree or credential for free. Students can use the benefit over three years and, if circumstances warrant, up to four years, recognizing that many students' lives and other responsibilities can make full-time enrollment difficult.

- Additional assistance to low-income students by increasing the maximum Pell Grant award.
- Subsidized tuition for low- and middle-income students attending a Historically Black College and University, Tribal College and University, and minority-serving institution.
- A grant program to invest in completion and retention activities at colleges and universities that serve high numbers of low-income students, particularly community colleges.

Priority III: Support the educational needs of military-connected children.

There are more than two million children in classrooms in the United States whose parents are active-duty military service members, National Guard or Reserve personnel, or military veterans.[22] These children often experience multiple moves, extended separations from family members, increased fear for their parent's safety during deployment, and other stressors related to the unpredictability of military life. The impact of service on military-connected children does not end when their parent hangs up their uniform, so ensuring that communities, educators, and parents are able to support the unique needs of children in veteran families, caregiving families, and surviving families is also essential.

Military children with disabilities, known within military vernacular as "exceptional family members," face undue burdens in their education, especially around permanent change of station transitions. Individualized education programs are provided to children with disabilities receiving services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and identify specialized instructional and related support needs. Many military families who move regularly find it can be challenging to transfer an individualized education program from school to school. 42 percent of parents of military-connected children with a disability reported in a recent study that their child's individualized education program was either changed or not implemented upon arrival at a new duty station.[23]

<u>Our Goal: Provide support to military-connected students to ease barriers they face in education.</u>

Our Commitments:

- **The Department of Education will convene listening sessions on specialized topics to further identify the needs of targeted populations** (*e.g.*, students with disabilities and surviving spouses and children)

[22] "Military Kids Now Survey 2020" (Military Child Education Coalition, 2020), https://www.militarychild.org/upload/files/MCEC_2020EdSurvey_digital.pdf.
[23] "2021 Survey Findings," 2021 Military Special Education Survey (Partners in Promise, March 10, 2021), https://thepromiseact.org/2021-survey/.

- **The Department of Education will convene coordination meetings with the Department of Defense, including the Department of Defense Education Activity, to improve resource coordination, communication, and support for military-connected students and their families**.

- **The Department of Education will reaffirm its support for the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission (MIC3) by issuing a letter of support from the Secretary of Education.** The Department of Education will send a Dear Colleague letter to district superintendents and chief state school officers in support of the Interstate Compact on Education Opportunities for Military Children and provide relevant resources to support the implementation of the Compact at the State Education Agency and Local Education Agency level. The Dear Colleague letter will minimally request State Education Agencies and Local Education Agencies to:
    - Review the Compact and consider ways of making district and state policies and procedures consistent with the guidelines and rules set forth under the Compact;
    - Involve district and school leaders, teachers, guidance counselors, social workers, instructors, coaches, school nurses, administrators, and students at all levels in district efforts to better address the needs of military-connected school children;
    - Honor and respect the previous academic standing and accomplishments of military-connected children new to districts and support their enrollment and success in advanced programs and extracurricular opportunities, including flexibility in its policies related to earned course/credit transfers to their new school; and, provide professional development and training to educators and staff on how to recognize and respond to the needs of military-connected students. In addition to the letter of support, the Department will work with state education agencies and local education agencies to conduct trainings and information sessions around the importance of the Compact and consistency around the transition into new schools by military-connected children. The Department will provide support to State and Local Education Agencies to improve service delivery and compliance for other matters related to military-connected students and families, such as through webinars or other guidance.

- **The Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Civil Rights, and Office of Elementary and Secondary Education will issue a joint letter** encouraging districts to enable implementation of individualized education programs as soon as possible and ensure that a free appropriate public education is provided for military-connected children with disabilities and 504 plans. The Department of Education will also continue to collaborate with the Department of Defense on outreach focused on promoting the Exceptional Family Member Program, individualized education plans, and other resources available to military-connected families.

- **The Department of Education will work to ensure parents of military-connected three- and four- year-olds are aware of pre-school programs.** The Department of Education will partner with the Department of Defense's Family Programs Offices and other applicable agencies to ensure awareness, training, and best practices are available to assist military families in locating and choosing high-quality programs.

- **As part of an overall strategy to increase access to postsecondary education and prepare our students for success in today's economy, the Department of Education will continue work on simplifying the Free Application for Federal Student Aid to reduce the administrative burden on military-connected students and families.** The Department of Education will also work with community college leaders on developing best practices to ensure military families have access to community college education and resources for post high school education plans. These efforts will include sharing information on the Department of Education's College Scorecard, which has the most reliable data on college costs, graduation, and post-college earnings, and the GI Bill Comparison Tool, which provides comparisons for colleges approved for GI Bill benefits to ensure students have the most reliable data when enrolling in college.

- **The Department of Education will work to implement statutory and regulatory provisions to protect hard-earned postsecondary educational benefits for veterans and military families.** Starting in October 2021, the Department of Education will begin regulating on the recent change to the Higher Education Act that prevents for-profit institutions who earn greater than 90 percent of their revenue through federal sources from continued participation in the student aid programs.

- **The Department of Education will work collaboratively with the Department of Defense to establish best practices for schools around "block leave" and support programs that are effective for military-connected students.** The agency will support both Department of Defense and private organization work which encourages school districts to participate in best practices.

- **The Department of Justice plans to expand legal counsel to the Department of Defense Education Activity to include matters affecting the rights of LGBTQI+ students,** furthering the administration's priorities outlined in recent Executive Orders related to discrimination, including Executive Order 13988 regarding protections against sex discrimination for gay and transgender students.

- **As a part of its ten key issues, the Department of Defense's Defense-State Liaison Office will include increasing access to school district open-enrollment for military-connected students.** Military families are at a disadvantage when it comes to the enrollment options available to their children

due to military-directed reassignments. States can provide military families with increased flexibility through access to district open-enrollment policies.

- **Working collaboratively, the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Education, and Health and Human Services and stakeholders will develop a toolkit for educators** at all levels to help them better understand and support children who live in veteran households, and specifically, veteran caregiving households.

- **The Build Back Better Agenda calls for investment in America's future to provide access to free, high-quality, accessible, and inclusive preschool** for all three-and four-year-olds, benefitting five million children, when fully implemented. Children in military families will also benefit from the plan's investment in high-quality, affordable child care for children from birth through age five.

- **The Build Back Better Agenda will also strengthen our K-12 education system** by investing in school infrastructure, so schools are safe and healthy places of learning with the technology and labs students need to prepare for jobs of the future; addressing teacher shortages, supporting current teachers, and strengthening and diversifying the teacher pipeline; investing in career pathways through high quality career and technical education that prepares students for jobs in STEM and other in-demand fields, and allows them to earn a credential or college credit before they graduate; and supporting our children, through investments in counselors, social workers, school psychologists, nurses and community schools that provide wraparound supports for students and their families, like afterschool programs, and adult education.

<u>Our Goal: Support the needs of military- and veteran-connected students with disabilities</u>.

Our Commitments:

- **The Department of Defense will facilitate the development of new policy and updates to current policy as part of the Exceptional Family Member Program standardization efforts.** Standardization includes a focus on the following: identification and enrollment, disenrollment, assignment coordination, Exceptional Family Member Program respite child care, and performance metrics. These continued standardization efforts will guide policy development and ensure a seamless continuity of support for military family members with a disability.

- **The Department of Defense seeks the use of innovation and technology to advance oversight and data reporting of the Exceptional Family Member Program.** The Office of Special Needs will implement a digital system to enhance the Exceptional Family Member Program. The use of technology will aid

in the strategic analysis of data and enhance the seamless continuity of services to military families with disabilities.

- **The American Rescue Plan provided direct support to students with disabilities and infants and toddlers with disabilities** through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act**:**
    - Invested $2.58 billion to elementary and secondary education students with disabilities, $200 million for preschool students with disabilities, and $250 million for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.

- **The President's FY 2022 Budget request includes historic increases in funding for students with disabilities.** This includes a $2.6 billion increase for stage grants to support students with disabilities, a significant first step towards fully funding the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The President's Budget also includes large increases in funding for preschool students, and infants and toddlers with disabilities. The Build Back Better Agenda would also increase funding for expanding the pipeline of special education teachers.

Priority IV: Increase support to caregivers—adults and children— of wounded, ill, or injured service members and veterans

Research has shown that caregivers of wounded, ill or injured service members and veterans experience negative impacts on their health, financial, and legal stability outcomes.[24] Respite care, economic stability, and appropriate mental health support are consistently cited as challenges by those caring for wounded, ill, or injured service members or veterans. While data on the population of children who also provide care is extremely limited, there is increasing evidence that children in caregiving families are providing care and experiencing similar challenges with emotional health as their adult counterparts.[25]

<u>Our Goal: Better coordinate the transition from active duty to veteran status for caregivers.</u>

Our Commitments:

- **Upon passage of the Build Back Better Agenda, the Department of Veterans Affairs will implement a Family Coordinator Program, with social workers linking veterans with support for their spouses and/or children.** The Family Coordinator will be knowledgeable about resources in the local

[24] Rajeev Ramchand et al., Hidden Heroes: America's Military Caregivers (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2014), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR499.html.
[25] "Children of Military Caregivers: Impact Forum Report" (Elizabeth Dole Foundation, 2019), https://www.elizabethdolefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/EDF_Military-Childrens-Caregiver-Forum-Report-April-2019.pdf.

community as well as the federal government to support veterans and their families**.**

- **The Department of Veterans Affairs will name Family Caregivers participating in the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers in the Veteran's Electronic Health Record, specifically within the Computerized Patient Record System by the end of FY 2021.** By the end of FY 2022, the Department will expand this capability to include naming newly enrolled caregivers participating in VA's Program of General Caregiver Support Services. Identification of caregivers participating in these programs within the veteran's medical record will allow for increased coordination of the veteran's care as well as increased support to caregivers.

<u>Our Goal: Increase economic opportunities for caregivers.</u>

Our Commitments:

- **Department of Labor Veterans Employment Training Service (VETS) will develop a transition assistance curriculum designed specifically to address the employment needs of wounded, ill, and injured service members, and their caregivers**. The curriculum will be an extension of the self-paced Employment Fundamentals of Career Transition, and will cover additional topics such as job accommodations, employment rights, and self-advocacy so that wounded warriors and their caregivers are able to more fully realize their potential in the civilian workplace. VETS intends to pilot modules of this curriculum in fall of 2021.

<u>Our Goal: Increase auxiliary support for family caregivers.</u>

Our Commitments:

- **The American Rescue Plan provided additional funding to states to expand access to and strengthen their Medicaid home and community-based programs**, allowing them to provide additional supports to family caregivers, such as respite care and Medicaid reimbursement for their caregiving.

- **The Build Back Better Agenda will build upon the American Rescue Plan by investing in home and community-based care** for individuals who need better care but are unable to access it; and, will make substantial investments in the infrastructure of our care economy, starting by creating new and better jobs for caregiving workers.

- **The Build Back Better Agenda will also create a national comprehensive paid family and medical leave program**. The program will ensure workers receive partial wage replacement to take time to bond with a new child; care for a

seriously ill loved one; deal with a loved one's military deployment; find safety from sexual assault, stalking, or domestic violence; heal from their own serious illness; or take time to deal with the death of a loved one. It will guarantee twelve weeks of paid parental, family, and personal illness/safe leave by year 10 of the program, and also ensure workers get three days of bereavement leave per year starting in year one.

Priority V: Decrease food insecurity amongst military-connected families.

Low spousal employment rates, an increasing number of military families living off base in higher cost of living communities, and the inclusion of the Basic Allowance for Housing as income when determining eligibility for benefits such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and, in some states, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), may result in military families experiencing food insecurity without qualifying for assistance. Combined with the economic challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic, military family food insecurity has been brought to the fore.

In 2016, a Government Accountability Office report found that, while the Department of Defense collected some information on the use of food assistance programs, the challenges faced by services and their families is not fully known.[26] Even prior to COVID-19, some reports estimated that one in seven military families were experiencing food insecurity[27] and 24 percent of military children enrolled in Department of Defense Education Activity schools in the United States were eligible for free lunch, while 21 percent were eligible for reduced-price lunch.[28] Cross agency collaboration and data sharing are critical to fully understanding and addressing food security in military and veteran families.

<u>Our Goal: Increase coordination between federal agencies in order to fully understand the scope of food insecurity and access to nutrition benefits amongst the military and veteran family population.</u>

Our Commitments:

- **The Departments of Defense, Agriculture, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Veterans Affairs, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will work collaboratively through an interagency working group**

[26] "DOD Needs More Complete Data on Active-Duty Servicemembers' Use of Food Assistance Programs," U.S. Government Accountability Office § (2016), https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-16-561.pdf.
[27] Sarah Grenier Wax and Susan M Stankorb, "Prevalence of Food Insecurity among Military Households with Children 5 Years of Age and Younger," Public Health Nutrition 19, no. 13 (2016): pp. 2458-2466, https://doi.org/10.1017/s1368980016000422.
[28] "DOD Needs More Complete Data on Active-Duty Servicemembers' Use of Food Assistance Programs," U.S. Government Accountability Office § (2016), https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-16-561.pdf.

on food insecurity in order to foster collaboration and coordination, while addressing the needs of military and veteran families, caregivers, and survivors.

- **In order to better understand and address food security in active duty military families, the Department of Defense will include the Department of Agriculture Six-Item Short Form Food Security Module within the Active Duty Spouse Survey.** The Active Duty Spouse Survey is conducted every two years and provides the department with critical information on the experiences and attitudes of military spouses.

- **The Department of Defense's Building Healthy Military Communities program will expand to an additional three states in fall 2021.** The program, a multi-year and multi-state pilot initiative to understand and mitigate the unique challenges faced by geographically dispersed service members, recruits, and their families, mobilizes significant experience from national, state, and local public health entities in partnership with the military and other non-traditional partners to promote community change and improve opportunities for healthy living.

<u>Our Goal: Increase awareness of food and nutrition resources and benefits available to military and veteran families.</u>

Our Commitments:

- **The Department of Defense will develop a Commander Food Security Tool Kit** to provide leaders with key resources to identify and address issues of food insecurity among service members and families. The tool kit will include educational and assessment components that help commanders and other leaders understand and identify food insecurity in the military population, along with data on the state of food insecurity in the military population by rank, service, and family status. A searchable web-tool to locate food insecurity resources in the surrounding area will also be included in the tool kit.

- **The Department of Veterans Affairs is releasing a "Quick Start Guide," developed in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture, about food/nutrition and SNAP** which will be part of the "VA Welcome Toolkit" each service member receives when separating or retiring from the service.

- **The Department of Defense, in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, will consider the creation of a "Quick Start Guide" about food/nutrition and SNAP for distribution to service members and their families**, modeled after the Quick Start Guide created for veterans.

- **The American Rescue Plan provides an extension to the 15 percent increase in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits for all participants through September 30, 2021**, or about $27 per month per person, with $1.15 billion allocated for the cost of state administrative expenses.

- **The American Rescue Plan includes investments in technological improvements to expand access for families to use their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits** to purchase groceries safely online.

- **The American Rescue Plan provided $880 million to deliver expanded access to more fruits and vegetables for moms and babies** and investments in innovation to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children.

- **The American Rescue Plan provides access to the Pandemic EBT program for the duration of the health emergency**, including through the summer, to allow families with children receiving school meals to purchase healthy food more easily during the pandemic.

- **The Build Back Better Agenda will expand summer EBT to all eligible children nationwide to help low-income families with children** eligible for free and reduced-price meals during the school year purchase food during the summer. Research shows that this program decreases food insecurity among children and has led to positive changes in nutritional outcomes. The Build Back Better Agenda builds on the American Rescue Plan's support for Summer Pandemic-EBT by investing more to make the successful program permanent and available to all 29 million children receiving free and reduced-price meals.

- **The Build Back Better Agenda will also expand healthy school meals.** The Community Eligibility Provision allows high-poverty schools to provide meals free of charge to all of their students. In addition, other families in high-poverty schools may still be facing food insecurity but make just enough to not qualify for free school meals. The President's plan, if enacted, will expand free meals for children in the highest poverty districts. Additionally, the plan will lower the threshold for Community Eligibility Provision eligibility for elementary schools to 25 percent of students participating in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. This proposal will provide free meals to an additional 9.3 million children, with about 70 percent in elementary schools.

Priority VI: Promote and increase the behavioral, social, and emotional well-being of military and veteran families, caregivers, and survivors.

Frequent moves, family trauma, multiple deployments, the impact of visible and invisible wounds, and family separations have led to behavioral health challenges like depression, anxiety, and substance abuse amongst military and veteran family members.[29] Despite these risks, previous research indicates that nearly 1 million military dependents were at risk for being considered geographically remote from behavioral healthcare.[30]

Access to high quality, culturally competent health care is critical to addressing the on-going physical and mental health needs of military families; however, as the military health system evolves, the government will need to address gaps in the system which may impact the broader health system's ability to provide timely and culturally competent care. Research has examined non-military healthcare systems and has found that very few providers are prepared to serve the military-connected community.[31] As more military and veteran families seek care in civilian healthcare systems, it will be essential that community providers have the tools they need to provide culturally competent, evidenced-based care.

Our Goal: Increase access to quality behavioral, social, and emotional health resources for military and veteran families.

Our Commitments:

- **The Department of Defense's Military Community Support Programs, in collaboration with the Office of Health Affairs, will expand the HealthySteps pilot program within pediatric clinics**. The HealthySteps model of pediatric care embeds a child development professional within the pediatric care team to provide non-medical, supportive resources to meet the comprehensive needs of families.
- **The Departments of Education and Health and Human Services will release a Joint Policy Statement on Early Childhood Social-Emotional and Behavioral Health** including a call for supporting needs and resources available for military families.

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[29] Fianna Sogomonyan and Janice Cooper, "Trauma Faced by Children of Military Families: What Every Policymaker Should Know" (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2010), http://www.nccp.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/text_938.pdf.

[30] Brown, Ryan Andrew, et al. "Access to Behavioral Health Care for Geographically Remote Service Members and Dependents in the U.S." Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR578.html.

[31] Tanielian, Terri, et al. "Ready to Serve: Community-Based Provider Capacity to Deliver Culturally Competent, Quality Mental Health Care to Veterans and Their Families. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2014. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR806.html. Also available in print form.

- **The Department of Defense developed a new training that focuses on spouse-specific barriers to seeking help, the importance of self-care, provides insight into their service member's barriers to care, and teaches bystander intervention skills. The training will launch in Summer 2021.** Resources Exist, Asking Can Help for Spouses (REACH-S) is based on a successful training pilot that significantly lowered service members' barriers to seeking care and significantly increased their comfort with seeking help in the future as well as knowledge of resources available.

- **The Department of Health and Human Services created a Special Enrollment Period open to the public for much of 2021, allowing veterans families, caregivers, and survivors to enroll in affordable, quality health care coverage through HealthCare.gov.** As a result of the American Rescue Plan, additional savings are available for consumers through HealthCare.gov as of April 1, 2021. These savings decreased premiums for consumers returning to HealthCare.gov, on average, by 40 percent, and 34 percent of new and returning consumers spend $10 or less per month for HealthCare.gov coverage following implementation of the American Rescue Plan's tax credits. The Build Back Better Agenda will make the American Rescue Plan's premium reductions permanent, lowering health care costs for millions of consumers.

- **To encourage military and veteran families to find recreational opportunities and increase comprehensive physical, social, mental, and spiritual fitness, the Department of the Interior created a dynamic map available on its website to show where national park access exists in proximity to military installations.** This map expands on an existing resource showing where park access exists in proximity to Department of Veterans Affairs facilities.

- **The Department of the Interior is expanding its partnerships with external organizations to provide recreational experiences for military families.** A growing number of sites partner with the Department of Defense to promote access to parks and activities to advance health and wellbeing, readiness, and resilience of the military community. Additionally, a variety of free National Park entrance passes are available to the military and veteran communities, including the annual Military Pass for current servicemembers, veterans, and Gold Star families, as well as the lifetime Access Pass for citizens and permanent residents with permanent disabilities.

- **The Department of Justice is revising future Family Drug Court program solicitations to encourage better ways to serve veterans and families**, including:

- Veteran and Military Family Identification in Family Drug Courts: Identifying veterans and veteran family members during the child welfare intake process or through Family Drug Courts referrals, to help trigger screening and assessment methods to better determine their need for supportive services.
- Memorandums of Understanding with Veteran- and Military-Serving Organizations: Family Drug Courts may enter into Memoranda of Understanding with local veteran- and military- serving organizations and agencies to provide veteran families entering the Family Drug Court program with access to supplemental services that reflect military competence.

- **The Department of Justice's Servicemember and Veterans Initiative will strengthen its outreach and training for military families and the people who serve them**. The Servicemember and Veterans Initiative provides information to veteran organizations, military family organizations, military training schools, military legal assistance offices, Department of Defense's Yellow Ribbon events, and law school clinics about federal rights affecting the military community, including employment, financial, voting, and disability rights. New outreach efforts will focus on military families, family support units on base, and groups supporting military families with disabilities.

- **The Interagency Task Force on Military and Veterans Mental Health, a collaborative effort across the Departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs, and Health and Human Services,** is developing a new Transition Assistance Program module on mental health care options for family members of separating service members to launch in July 2021. The course will help transitioning service members and their families recognize the importance of adequate health care coverage and how it can impact mental health care needs, as well as explore coverage options and resources for connecting to care such as the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's treatment locator.

- **The American Rescue Plan increased investments in mental health and substance use prevention, treatment, and recovery support services**, including historic investments in the mental health and substance use block grant programs which fund services to support adults and children with serious mental illness as well as support for crisis intervention services, outpatient treatment, and emergency services. The American Rescue Plan also included funding to expand the number of certified community-based behavioral health clinics, which can be an essential source of care for all families, including veteran families and caregivers.

- **The American Rescue Plan also expanded funding for youth suicide prevention programs, Project AWARE, and the National Child Traumatic Stress Network**.

- **The American Rescue Plan's $122 billion in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds for safely reopening schools and addressing the needs of students are helping states and school districts to hire school counselors, social workers, nurses and other health professionals who will provide needed support to students**. The President's FY 2022 Budget included an additional $1 billion to help schools hire even more of these critical staff, working towards the goal of doubling the number social workers, counselors, school psychologists and nurses in public schools. The Budget also included a ten-fold increase in funding for Full-Service Community Schools that provide wraparound supports to students and their families, from afterschool programs, and adult education to health services.

<u>Our Goal: Increase social support for children in caregiving and survivor families.</u>

Our Commitment:

- **The Department of Justice will make changes to its national mentoring and multi-state mentoring grant solicitations to prioritize mentoring for youth who lost a parent or caregiver serving in the military**.

<u>Our Goal: Increase financial wellbeing for military and veteran families</u>

Our Commitments:

- **The Build Back Better Agenda makes investments to build, preserve, and retrofit more than two million homes and commercial buildings to address the affordable housing crisis**. It pairs this investment with an innovative new approach to eliminate state and local exclusionary zoning laws, which drive up the cost of construction and keep families from moving to neighborhoods with more opportunities for them and their kids.

- **The Build Back Better Agenda provides funding to modernize our nation's schools and child care facilities and upgrade veterans' hospitals and federal buildings.** The Build Back Better Agenda will create good jobs building, rehabilitating, and retrofitting affordable, accessible, energy efficient, and resilient housing, commercial buildings, schools, and child care facilities all over the country, while also vastly improving our nation's federal facilities, especially those that serve veterans and their families and caregivers.

- **The Build Back Better Agenda will extend key tax cuts in the American Rescue Plan that benefit lower- and middle-income workers and families,**

including the Child Tax Credit, the Earned Income Tax Credit, and the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit. In addition to making it easier for families to make ends meet, tax credits for working families have been shown to boost child academic and economic performance over time.

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