

# WARRIOR MEDIC

## MONTHLY

An Army Reserve Medical Command Publication



### Families Can See Off, Greet Troops at Airport Gates



By Samantha L. Quigley  
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Dec. 11, 2009 - It's a scene that's played out in airports across the country numerous times in the past eight years: Families and servicemembers clinging to each other, either sad to leave or happy and vowing to never let go again.

The emotion always is appropriate, but the location of the scene just beyond the airline ticket counters and before the security checkpoint - robs the actors of precious minutes with loved ones. Those lost minutes are unnecessary, at least as far as the Transportation Security Administration is concerned, a TSA spokesman said.

"TSA permits the airlines to offer a gate pass to family members of arriving or departing U.S. servicemembers," Greg Soule said. "So, family members who want to accompany a ... servicemember being deployed to the boarding gate, or greet them [as they return] from deployment at the arrival gate may receive passes to enter the secure area of the airport."

Though TSA allows this practice, the final decision rests with the airlines, from which family members must request the passes. Each airline, and possibly even airport, has its own rules and procedures, Soule said.

Families interested in obtaining a gate pass need to check with the airline before arriving at the airport to determine the exact rules and procedures.

"It's an airline procedure," Soule said. "It is something that TSA has permitted the airlines to do, though we have security regulations that we provide to the airlines.

"Typically, only passengers who are flying and have a boarding pass are allowed to pass through security," he added.

TSA makes this allowance out of support for the armed forces, Soule said.

Though military family members with gate passes can pass

through security, they must adhere to all security regulations. This includes removing coats, jackets and shoes, and the liquids regulation. Anything of a liquid or gel consistency must be 3.4 ounces or less and be sealed in a quart-sized storage bag to pass through security, Soule said.

Each family member would have to present the gate pass as well as a valid government-issued identification card, Soule added.

TSA doesn't keep statistics on how frequently military families take advantage of this opportunity. Volunteers at Washington-Dulles International Airport's USO lounge said they are not frequently asked about the program or for assistance in obtaining the passes.

Separations and reunions are emotional enough in normal situations, but with the holidays in full swing, they're even more poignant. And thanks to the TSA and cooperating airlines, they can be more positive.

"We're happy to do this and make this small exemption," he added, noting that TSA officials recognize that military families, as well as servicemembers, make sacrifices for the country.

The TSA has no jurisdiction overseas, so U.S. military family members wishing to see off or meet their servicemember at a foreign airport are encouraged to check with the airline for local policy.

The policy on gate passes is available on the Transportation Security Administration's Web site under the heading "Accommodations for U.S. Military Personnel."

### Defense, Veterans Affairs Step Closer to Integrated Records



By Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael J. Carden American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Jan. 6, 2010 - The Defense Department soon will join a Veterans Affairs Department and Kaiser Permanente partnership designed to improve

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the way military veterans and the nation receive health care, the VA's top health affairs policy advisor said today.

For the past month, Kaiser Permanente and VA the nation's two largest electronic medical records systems have been working to integrate their standards for veterans through a pilot program in San Diego using the Nationwide Health Information Network.

The network was developed by the Health and Human Services Department in 2008, and allows government and several private sector health care providers like Kaiser to share health exchanges, such as integrated delivery networks, pharmacies, labs and patient information.

More than 400 San Diego veterans are participating in the pilot. The partnership has been successful so far, and is the culmination of decades of work in the medical community, Dr. Stephen L. Ondra, senior VA policy advisor for health affairs, said in a press conference from Kaiser Permanente's Otay Mesa Outpatient Medical Center in San Diego.

The Defense Department plans to join those efforts in San Diego within the first quarter of this year, he said.

"It's a very exciting moment for us," Ondra said. "This is the very first multi-party exchange to the nationwide health information network. [VA] feels committed and responsible to go forward to extend this to other providers and across the nation as we build on this effort."

VA is the largest integrated health system in the nation, serving more than 5.4 million veterans. More than half of those veterans seek some of their medical services outside the VA. Also, there are more than 1.5 million veterans who don't use VA health-care services at all, said Ondra, a former Army surgeon and Gulf War veteran.

Although, VA and the Defense Department are leaders in health information exchanges, Ondra said, it's important for their systems also to be integrated into the private sector.

"We've got to take care of those patients, and we really need to have the visibility ... to understand conditions and to understand what treatment they've had, what medications, what allergies they've had," he said. "Those are all things that this exchange will do. It improves quality, safety and efficiency."

Ondra explained that the network isn't so much a system as it is a set of standards and protocols, meaning that no organization is tied to any single system. Interoperability in sharing health record information and administrative data can occur in any system that follows the nationwide standard, he said.

"[The network] empowers the private sector with standards to develop more

choices that are always good for consumers," he said. "With a standard, it opens up space for new solutions and ultimately it aims to lower cost and better the health system for the public."

Ondra noted that such an integrated system will relieve the burden on patients and families who are often ill. With the network, and with patients' consent, they won't have to "scurry back and forth between providers with records," he said.

"This is about making patients' lives and health better ... doing something that is sustainable for our country," he continued. "We are committed to making their lives better."

As the partnership moves forward and grows, Ondra said the medical community is one step closer to President Barack Obama's vision of a lifetime electronic records system. He called the initiative the embodiment of Obama's commitment to servicemembers, veterans and improving overall health care for the nation.

Ondra also said their efforts are in keeping with VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki's commitment to transform VA into a 21st-century organization centered on patients.

"This healthcare record-sharing initiative is the most exciting development I've seen in my [25-year] medical career," Ondra said. "This has the greatest potential to improve and change how we deliver care than anything that's happened in my lifetime."

Along with the efforts in San Diego, a number of other private institutions have expressed interest in joining the VA and Defense Department partnership. Ondra expects several more pilot programs to be established this year, he said.

## DOD Trains Thousands to Help Millions to Register to Vote



The DoD's Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) kicked off its training program geared to help voting assistance officers at military bases worldwide at a 2010 Election Year

press conference Jan. 7.

Thousands of voting assistance officers will help an estimated 6 million uniformed and overseas citizens vote absentee. DoD and DoS directives require a voting assistance officer at the unit level and at every embassy and consulate to facilitate this effort.

"Our goal is to bring the military and overseas citizen absentee voting success rate to that of the general public," said Bob Carey, Federal Voting Assistance Program director. "We cannot do this if we do not address

each part of the process. Registration and ballot request, by using the federal post card application, is critical to our citizens."

During the kickoff press conference Carey focused on:

- Voting assistance officers (VOA) providing a federal post card application to all military personnel by Jan. 15.
- Using the FVAP Web site <http://www.fvap.gov> and the "Voting Assistance Guide" for help in completing the registration and ballot request process.
- Timely completion of registration and ballot request.
- VAOs, who are required to attend a workshop, should visit <http://www.FVAP.gov> for the workshop schedule by installation. Because the law has changed dramatically since last year, voters need to be aware that:
- Voters will no longer automatically receive ballots from absentee ballot applications submitted in previous years.
- Military voters should submit a new federal post card application at least each and every year, and every time they move, deploy, or redeploy overseas. Overseas civilian voters should submit an application before every federal election.
- Military and overseas voters should only use the Federal Post Card Application (available from voting assistance officers and at <http://www.FVAP.gov>) and not state registration and absentee ballot application forms; the FPCA provides specific federal rights and guarantees that the state forms do not.
- Voters should use the <http://www.FVAP.gov> Web site and check the "Voting Assistance Guide" to make sure they get it right.
- Voters should watch the FVAP Web site closely to learn about the launch of new online tools that will assist uniformed service members and overseas civilians vote absentee.

Carey also discussed the importance of meeting the FPCA deadlines and accounting for mail delays throughout the voting process.

For more information, contact Maj. April Cunningham at 703-697-6727 or e-mail [april.cunningham@osd.mil](mailto:april.cunningham@osd.mil).

## Laws Change for Military, Overseas Voters



By Carmen L. Gleason  
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Jan. 8, 2010  
- Servicemembers and overseas

voters shouldn't assume they automatically will receive ballots for the 2010 elections just because they have in the past.

Previously, voters would receive absentee ballots for up to two cycles following their request, Bob Carey, Federal Voting Assistance Program director, said yesterday during the 2010 election year kick-off. He said new laws require voters to submit federal postcard applications for absentee ballots on a yearly basis.

In the coming months, Carey and his team will travel worldwide to train voting assistance officers at embassies, consulates and overseas military facilities to ensure voters understand the process and can exercise their right to vote.

"We are training thousands to train millions," Carey said. "[We want] to make sure that each and every military and overseas voter has the opportunity to successfully request an absentee ballot, receive their absentee ballot and cast it in time so it is counted."

The voting assistance program staff is striving to make it easy for voters to receive and cast their ballots for the upcoming election through the program's Web site, <http://www.FVAP.gov>.

Carey said his staff is converting to a Web-based process that's similar to many tax-filing programs, with an intuitive, easy-to-understand application. "You don't have to know how to go through the 250-page voter's assistance guide ? all will be online," he said.

Once voters answer a few questions, Carey explained, forms and ballots automatically will populate with relevant information, making it easier for users.

Although the program's staff is doing its best to make the process easy for military and overseas voters, people need to move quickly to ensure they get to vote. Voter applications may take a while to make it to hometown election offices, and it could take up to a month after that for ballots to be sent to voters.

Carey said voters who have applied for a ballot but don't receive their ballot at least a month before the election should instead use the federal write-in absentee ballot available on the voting assistance Web site.

"When [voters] get their regular ballot, they should still complete and return it," he said. "If it gets there in time, it will take its place."

In addition to starting the process in a timely manner, Carey said voters also should:

- Submit a new federal postcard application with every move so the most current address is on file;
- Fill out all forms in their entirety, because officials need an alternate way to reach an individual so their vote can be counted if the form is illegible; and

- Go to <http://www.FVAP.gov> to see their state's requirements.

Although applications were distributed to all deploying troops before their departure, Carey said, many didn't know their future mailing address and therefore left portions of the application blank. Once troops have the needed information, they can complete the forms online, even from a computer outside of the military domain.

## Military Housing Allowance Rates Set for 2010



By Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael J. Carden  
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Dec. 16, 2009 - Military members will see an average raise of 2.5 percent in housing allowance rates in 2010,

a BAH program analyst for the Defense Department said today.

The increase comes to average of around \$37 per month for the more than 900,000 servicemembers expected to draw the basic allowance for housing in 2010. Some areas will see a higher increase, while others will see less, Cheryl Anne Woehr said.

The 2010 raise is down from 2009's 6.5 percent average, and is the smallest percentage increase since the inception of the BAH program in 2000. This is due the past year's recession and declining housing market, she said.

"Rates are set based on actual housing data, so as the economy has declined, vacancy rates have increased [and] rental prices have declined, which results directly to lower BAH rates in various areas," Woehr said.

Those who do notice the BAH rates lower in their area than last year shouldn't worry, she said, because an individual rate protection law is in place. The policy protects those who already are under a rental agreement. So if BAH rates in their area are lower Jan. 1 than on Dec. 31, the previous, higher rate applies.

"Servicemembers are able to take advantage of the increase in rates, but are not affected by decreasing rates," she said. But servicemembers who change duty stations, change dependency status or get promoted on or after Jan. 1 will be affected by the new rates, she added.

Woehr stressed that it isn't necessarily bad news for the servicemember in areas that see a decrease in rates. "Servicemembers who are newly reporting to an area get to take advantage of the lower market when they arrive," she said.

The BAH program is designed to benefit the servicemember, but it's not designed

to pay 100 percent of housing expenses, Woehr said. The rate is intended to cover rent, renter's insurance and utilities based on pay grade and dependency status.

The local market economy determines annual BAH changes and sets the next year's BAH rates. Military housing offices from each installation begin collecting data on the local rental market as early as January each year. The offices research the current rates for two-bedroom houses, townhouses, single-family homes and the different standards and profiles for homes, Woehr explained.

Typically, rates are higher in larger, more heavily populated metropolitan areas, such as New York City, Chicago and Washington, D.C. Rates in rural areas usually are more stable, and although they may increase to some degree, the rise doesn't have the same impact as in larger cities, she said.

An estimated \$19 billion in BAH will be paid to nearly 1 million servicemembers in 2010, Woehr said.

## Officials Encourage Guard, Reserve to Honor Employers



By Air Force Master Sgt. Mike R. Smith  
Special to American Forces Press Service

ARLINGTON, Va., Dec. 30, 2009 - Providing pay and benefits during deployments, sending care packages to deployed employees, allowing time off, and celebrating military service with send-off and homecoming ceremonies are just a few commitments that the Guard and Reserve's top employers are honored for each year.

Officials here are asking Guard and Reserve servicemembers to speak out and honor their patriotic employers.

With ongoing global operations, support from employers for Guard and Reserve service is more critical now than ever, said Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve officials.

The ESGR's mission is to gain and maintain employer support for Guard and Reserve service by recognizing outstanding support. It also increases awareness of the laws governing Guard and Reserve service and resolves potential employer-servicemember conflicts through mediation.

Guard and Reserve leaders continually stress how critical the support of families, communities and employers are to the defense of the nation.

"If you added up all of your family members and all the employers you touch, we have over a million people that di-

rectly know what we do with the National Guard of the United States,” Air Force Gen. Craig R. McKinley, chief of the National Guard Bureau, told Guard leaders at a conference last month.

Guard and Reserve servicemembers can nominate their employers for the Patriot and the Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom awards online.

The Patriot Award recognizes all employers with a certificate and an accompanying lapel pin. Nominees are considered for other awards and recognition based on their level of support.

The Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award is the highest in a series of employer recognition awards given by the Defense Department. The deadline for nominations is Jan. 18.

Officials said the award was created to publicly recognize employers that provide exceptional support to their National Guard and Reserve employees.

More than 3,200 nominations for awards were submitted to ESGR this year.

## Military Study Expands to Include Families



By Elaine Wilson  
American Forces Press Service

BETHESDA, Dec. 14, 2009 - A Defense Department study that explores the long-term health effects of military service, including deployments, will expand its scope to military families starting in June.

With nearly 150,000 servicemember participants, the Millennium Cohort Study is the largest prospective health project in military history, according to the study's Web site. The study launched in 2001 and will span 21 years by the time it concludes in 2022.

“Researchers have done a good job of studying the impact of deployment on servicemembers beginning with Vietnam, but family members have been pretty much overlooked,” William E. Schlenger, principal investigator for the study's family impact component, said last week at the Trauma Spectrum Disorders conference here.

Researchers will remedy that in June, when the study will enroll a new panel of about 62,500 servicemembers. About half will be married, and researchers anticipate that about 65 percent will give permission to contact their spouses, Schlenger said. In the end, researchers hope to have a sample of about 5,000 spouses whose servicemember has deployed one or more times, and about 5,000 spouses whose member has not deployed, he said.

Having their feedback will go a long way toward filling important gaps in information, Schlenger said.

“The objectives of the family component are to answer important health-related questions about military servicemembers and their families in the context of deployment and other occupational exposures,” he explained, “and to assess the importance of family support and other factors on the health outcomes.”

Experts will ask spouses about their physical and mental health and also about the status of their servicemember, Schlenger said. Both will be asked about the quality of their relationship with each other and, if applicable, about how deployments are affecting their children.

“We'll also ask the spouse about the specific kinds of stressors that have happened in the family that are attributable to deployment,” Schlenger added.

Schlenger noted two “active ingredients” of deployments that affect families and their functioning. “No. 1, the servicemember is leaving the family,” he said. “Mommy or daddy is leaving, or my spouse whom I've chosen to live my life with is going away -- and it's not for a nontrivial period of time.”

And the spouse not only is going away, “but going to a place that's very dangerous,” he continued. “That is the part that makes service in the military different from other kinds of occupations.”

Experts hope to learn more about the way children of different ages and stages understand and respond to someone leaving. “These are the kinds of active ingredients that need to be examined in some detail, and we're hoping to do so,” he said.

Researchers project they'll have some findings by 2012, he added.

The study's expansion marks an important step in military family research, Schlenger said, with other studies soon to follow.

“A number of funded studies will be started soon, so there will be much more information about the effect of deployment on families in the near future,” he said.

While the family component is a step in the right direction, Schlenger said, he hopes studies like this will be expanded even more in the future.

“Virtually all of the studies that have been funded, or are soon to be funded, focused largely on married people and on the spouse and the children,” he said. About half of the military is married, he added, but the other half is “out completely.”

“But those people have families too -- mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, a whole lot of other family members who can be impacted,” he said. “We need in the next round to be able to focus on the broader impact on families.”

## California Boosts Support to Combat Vets



By Donna Miles  
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Jan. 6, 2010 - California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger today announced a new state initiative to better help returning combat veterans to land jobs and get whatever help they need in securing housing, health care and other veterans' services.

Schwarzenegger unveiled the Operation Welcome Home outreach campaign during his State of the State address in Sacramento, citing “a fundamental obligation to anyone who has shed or risked blood for this country.”

The new program charges state agencies with providing better support for veterans.

“California has more returning veterans than any other state. So our state, as well as the federal government, has a special responsibility,” he said. “We have a fundamental obligation to anyone who has shed or risked blood for this country.”

The state plans to hire 325 combat veterans to make contact with recently discharged troops in need of job assistance. Other plans call for recruiting 1,000 volunteers to help veterans cut through red tape so they can better tap into services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs and state and municipal programs, as well as non-government organizations.

Sparked by his pre-Thanksgiving visit to Camp Victory in Baghdad, Schwarzenegger said he felt compelled despite the state's financial crisis -- to find better ways to help troops returning from the combat theater transition to civilian life.

“They have seen and experienced some hard things. Many have served tour after tour after tour. As a result, some have lost homes, spouses, limbs and lives,” he said. “Too often our soldiers bring back the enemy with them in their heads,” noting cases of post-traumatic stress and suicides.

Schwarzenegger acknowledged troops in uniform who recently returned from Iraq and Afghanistan and attended today's address, and thanked them for their service.

“To each of you, I say, ‘Welcome home,’” he said.

## Officials Seek Feedback on Family Programs



By Elaine Wilson  
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Dec. 15, 2009 - Defense officials have launched

virtual “listening sessions” in hopes of gaining more insight into the effectiveness of military family programs, a Pentagon official said today.

The anonymous, online survey solicits feedback from servicemembers and their families on the military’s educational programs, support networks and other services.

“We hope to hear from a tremendous number of people and have the opportunity to hear from people with wide-ranging issues,” said Cathann Kress, program lead for partnerships within the Pentagon’s office of military community and family policy. “Whether you’re a brand-new military family with no children or a military family with many years in with several children, we want to hear from you.”

**Servicemembers and their families are invited to participate in the survey at <https://survey.vt.edu/survey/entry.jsp?id=1253631402808>.**

The online component is an addition to the face-to-face listening sessions already being conducted on military installations throughout the world. The Defense Department and U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture began conducting these discussion groups in October to help in determining the best way forward for military family programs, Kress said.

“We needed to hear from the people invested in the programs,” she said. Past sessions have included leadership directly responsible for family programs and policies and frontline professionals who provide support at the local level, she added. Future sessions will focus only on servicemembers and their families.

Virginia Tech University faculty members have been conducting the face-to-face sessions. “It helps to have a neutral, third party so people can have a relaxed conversation,” Kress noted.

Both the online and face-to-face listening sessions will wrap up in April. Officials will analyze the feedback and create a report that outlines trends and program gaps and offer future recommendations.

The report also will highlight the good-news stories, Kress said. “We’d like to know what programs families have used and are using, what have been helpful and how have they been helpful,” she said. Finding out what’s working can be just as beneficial as finding out what isn’t, she added.

“This information will help us know what direction we need to go in,” she said.

Officials will share the report with each service and their partners, Kress said. “We’ll use it to help determine our priorities for the future, such as where to put resources.”

The feedback also will be invaluable for officials who hear of issues through word of mouth, but don’t have a concrete way of pinpointing the “big picture” problems, she

said.

“We’re hearing that there are a lot of programs out there, but those programs aren’t communicated to the people who need them,” Kress said. “Or, people are overwhelmed by information on programs and aren’t sure which program to use when there’s a need.

“We’ve heard this anecdotally, but don’t actually know,” she continued. “We hope we can gain a better understanding of what the issues really are. That understanding will enable us to better serve families.”

Whether feedback is gained online or in person, “The goal is to hear from whoever wants to share,” Kress said. “This is a wonderful opportunity to hear from our servicemembers and their families.”

## Program Helps Servicemembers Transition to Civilian Life



By Christen N. McCluney  
Special to American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Dec. 31, 2009 - The Department of Defense’s Transition Assistance Program is working to prepare servicemembers and their families for a successful transition to civilian life.

“We are trying to ensure that [servicemembers] transition from active duty back to the civilian community is a smooth and seamless one,” Ron Horne, deputy director for the Transition Assistance Program at the Office of Wounded Warrior Care and Transition Policy told listeners during a “Dot Mil Docs” interview today.

The idea of the program is to make them aware of the support systems that are available to them, he said. The DoD has a partnership with the Departments of Labor and Veterans Affairs to help servicemembers with their transition. The program also works with the Department of Homeland Security for Coast Guard Members as well.

Horne said that the program has five major components to it: pre-separation counseling, Department of Labor employment workshops, VA benefits briefings, the Disabled Transition Assistance Program and one-on-one counseling, all of which take place at local military installations and bases.

The pre-separation counseling component consists of an overview of 16 topics that counseling and coaching addresses with service members, Horne said. It gives a review of transition services, benefits, and resources available for the transition process.

The employment workshop is “a baseline to start looking and preparing for employment,” said Horne. In the workshop,

servicemembers go over skills including resume writing, creating cover letters, dressing for success and job search techniques.

The VA benefits briefing serves as a session to inform servicemembers of benefits they may be entitled to include the Montgomery GI Bill, healthcare, VA counseling and the home loan program.

Servicemembers who have a service related disability also must attend the DTAP-briefing. “In this session they learn about the benefits they may be entitled based on their ratings from VA,” Horne said.

Once servicemembers have completed those four core components of TAP, they are eligible for one-on-one counseling at their installations transition office,

Horne said. Transition counselors assist the servicemembers in a variety of ways including completing their resume, information on medical benefits and technology access.

For Army installations, services are provided by Army Career and Alumni Program Centers. On Navy installations, the transition assistance office is usually located at the Fleet and Family Support Center, at Marine Corps Bases the services are provided through the Marine Corps Community Services and Air

Force services are provided through the Airmen and Family Readiness Flight centers. Members of the Coast Guard can receive services through Work-Life offices.

Horne also said that many separating servicemembers are not looking for employment but are returning to school. “We encourage them to use their education benefits because they’ve earned it and that is one way to ensure that they are prepared to compete with their contemporaries that were getting an education while they were on active duty,” he said.

He encourages servicemembers to start their transition process 12 months before voluntarily leaving the service and 24 months before retiring. “Anyone that reaches the 18th year mark should start the transition process,” he said. “It is overwhelming when you wait until the last minute.”

TAP also has a Web site, [www.turbotap.org](http://www.turbotap.org), which offers a timeline on the transitioning process and other resources that help with the entire process. “We are trying to get [servicemembers] started early enough so that they can plan to do things step by step.”

He also said the TAP office is “rethinking and reshaping the program,” so that transitioning isn’t an event but a process from when a servicemember joins the military to their departure or retirement or as long as they need assistance once they become a veteran. The program hopes to guide servicemembers in setting career goals and starting financial planning early. They are also finding ways to leverage technology

to reach their younger audiences through Facebook, Twitter, and texting.

“We feel that TAP needs to be designed and developed in a way that when a member needs it, it will be there for them. Whether it’s a facility at a base or online for someone that is at a remote location,” Horne said. “We think the future of Tap is bright and we have a way to go, but we have done some wonderful things.”

## Stop-Loss Payments Continue, But Some No Longer Eligible



By Donna Miles  
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Jan. 5, 2010 - The fiscal 2010 defense budget extends payments to servicemembers involuntarily extended on active duty under the so-called “Stop Loss” program, but those who received a bonus for voluntarily re-enlisting or extending their service no longer qualify for retroactive Stop Loss pay.

The Defense Department put the new policy into effect today, modifying eligibility for retroactive special pay to comply with Section 8108 of the 2010 Defense Department Appropriations Act, which took effect Dec. 19.

Servicemembers affected by the new policy who already received Stop Loss payments will not be required to repay them, defense officials said. However, all outstanding applications from affected servicemembers will be returned, along with an explanation of the change in law that makes them no longer eligible to receive the payments, officials said.

Department officials announced in March their intention to eliminate the Stop Loss policy, which kept servicemembers on active duty beyond their contracted end-of-service date.

While the services work to phase out the policy, officials authorized a special pay of \$500 a month for anyone retained on active duty due to Stop Loss. Retroactive payments applied for anyone who served on active duty between Sept. 11, 2001, and Sept. 30, 2009, and the fiscal 2010 defense budget extended that authority through September 2010.

Servicemembers were able to begin submitting their claims for retroactive Stop Loss special pay on Oct. 21.

## Study Explores Deployment Impact on Older Children



By Elaine Wilson  
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Dec. 10, 2009 - Children in military families experience emotional and behavioral difficulties above national averages, a study has revealed.

The Rand Corp. study, commissioned by the National Military Family Association, explored how older children from military families deal with the deployment of a parent. The results were published in the journal *Pediatrics* on Dec. 7.

The study surveyed 1,500 military children, ages 11 to 17, from across the nation and their nondeployed parent or caregiver.

“This is one of the first studies that I’m aware of where the children were the ones providing the information,” said Barbara Thompson, director of the Pentagon’s office of family policy and children and youth. “It’s groundbreaking.”

About one-third of the children in the study reported symptoms of anxiety, somewhat higher than the percentages reported on other studies of children, the results indicated. Also, the number of child difficulties was linked to the total months deployed in the past three years.

“The study serves as an important reminder that when a servicemember deploys, the entire family deploys,” Thompson said. “The findings contributed to our understanding of how longer and repeated deployments weigh on families.” Findings also suggested that children whose caregivers had better self-reported mental health were better able to cope with deployments.

“We are definitely aware that the resiliency and coping mechanisms of the stay-behind parent will make a deployment that much easier for the child,” Thompson said. She cited Defense Department programs such as Military OneSource, which provides around-the-clock access to military family life consultants.

“The key is to talk about challenges and work together to find solutions,” she said, “so you can be a strong parent for your children.”

The study also served to highlight populations that may be more vulnerable to deployment-related stress. The study indicated that “families living off-base, girls during the reintegration period, and middle and late adolescents were especially vulnerable,” Thompson noted.

“We know that two-thirds of our military families live off the installation,” she said. “We know how tough it is to access brick and mortar with a deployed family

member, as you’re juggling work schedules [and] children’s activities.”

Thompson said she hopes the department’s virtual programs can help fill the gap. “Virtual technology offers a great support for families off installation and for those families who are geographically separated, such as our Guard and Reserve [servicemembers], who often don’t have easy access to the programs and services designed to support them,” she said.

The study is useful in that it provides scientific data that can help to identify vulnerable populations and to steer the department’s future decisions on military family programs, Thompson said.

“We now have some very important data that will drive decisions and that we can use to create a dialogue,” she added. “We know military families also serve, and the National Military Family Association knows that as well. We greatly appreciate their efforts with this study.”

While the study was beneficial, Thompson noted, it included few lower-ranking enlisted families and only dealt with a limited age group. However, the department will launch a comprehensive survey of military families this spring called the “DoD Military Family Project,” she said. This survey of active-duty members and their spouses will include a representative sample of the active duty force, spanning all ranks and ages of children.

“This is going to be a landmark study,” Thompson said. “It will track families over time, after going through a deployment cycle, so we can see the changes and challenges. That information will be very critical as we look at how we provide support and information to people.”

In the meantime, Thompson said, she welcomes studies on military families such as the Rand study.

“The more we know about the impact of multiple, long-term deployments on families, the better we will be able to serve them,” she said. “This is an unprecedented time, not only for our military children, but for other nations’. This type of knowledge is contributing to the universe of knowledge about the impact of separation on children.

“Those of us who work with families know separation affects children, and affects them differently in different stages,” she continued. “Our focus is, how do we keep a child in the mind of a deployed parent and the parent in the mind of a child at home? How do we keep connections vibrant and ongoing? That is our mission.”