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Military Families Struggled to Access Mental Health Care Even Before the Pandemic

MFAN Survey Finds that Military Families are Interested in Receiving Care Through Telehealth

WASHINGTON — In newly released data, only half of the military and veteran family members who responded to MFAN’s 2019 Military Family Support Programming Survey, presented by Cerner Government Services, said they could easily access mental health care and their biggest obstacle was not having enough appointments available.

With the COVID-19 virus impacting how behavioral health care providers can see patients and deliver services, anecdotes about military and veteran family members having even less access to providers and appointments are surfacing, especially overseas. Fortunately, more than one-third of active duty family survey respondents said they would be likely or very likely to use telehealth options if such options were available.

“This is my first time to be stationed abroad, and getting referrals to access mental health care was difficult enough and took many months and excessive red tape, even as someone in the Exceptional Family Member Program,” said Emily Gerson, a military spouse currently living in England. “But during the pandemic, I was no longer able to see my regular civilian mental health providers since they were only offering appointments via telemedicine and were told Tricare wouldn’t reimburse them. People on base didn’t have any answers other than they were aware of the issue for overseas dependents and were working on it. I had to spend weeks advocating for myself and looking for answers and solutions, which was incredibly disheartening and stressful during a global crisis — a time when people need access to mental health care more than ever.”

Changes due to the pandemic, including the delay in military moves, forced isolation, and unemployment rates skyrocketing, are sources of added stress for military families. Telehealth offers a viable, and necessary, option for mental health treatment during this global pandemic and beyond, and MFAN’s survey responses show that military families are open to receiving care through unconventional methods.

“In light of the global pandemic and Mental Health Month, MFAN opted to expedite the release of these findings,” said MFAN’s Executive Director Shannon Razsadin. “Our survey, which was fielded before COVID-19, found that military families experienced difficulty scheduling mental health care appointments. That’s something we never want to hear, and we are concerned about the additional barriers caused by COVID-19. We look forward to an expanded dialogue on how we can reduce red tape for military families globally so that everyone has access to the mental health support they want and need.”

More information about the survey methods and demographics can be found here:

<https://militaryfamilyadvisorynetwork.org/military-family-support-programmingsurvey>

The entire survey will be released at an event on July 17, 2020, featuring expert panel discussions and video narratives from military family members around the country who are personally impacted by each issue.

Cerner Government Services, Inc., a wholly-owned subsidiary of Cerner Corporation, sponsored the 2019 survey data which provides the most rigorous, comprehensive understanding of the needs of military and veteran families in areas that are further impacted by the pandemic, such as financial readiness, mental health, food insecurity, moving and housing, utilization of telehealth options, and intimate partner violence.

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About MFAN: The Military Family Advisory Network is the authentic voice of the modern military family and the bridge that connects military families to the resources, people, and information they depend on to successfully navigate all phases of military life. To learn more about MFAN, visit www.militaryfamilyadvisorynetwork.org.