

# How to Help Military & Veteran Families

FOR PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH FAMILY CAREGIVERS

Every day, military family caregivers are serving our nation right alongside the men and women in uniform. The spouses, parents, children, siblings, friends and others who provide care are vital to the health and well-being of service members and veterans. Along with providing support and assuming healthcare responsibilities, these caregivers often act as case managers who coordinate services, sometimes across multiple health systems. They serve as advocates for new treatments and better care, in addition to being financial and legal representatives for their loved one. Many of these caregivers are young spouses and parents with children who also require their attention and dedication.<sup>1</sup>

Caregivers face new challenges with recently separated service members suffering from combat operational stress disorder, traumatic brain injury (TBI), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and varying levels of physical — possibly debilitating — injuries. Their roles are constantly evolving, especially when there is a long-term injury, wound or illness. A caregiver's ability to fully engage in the service member's recovery often determines whether or not the service member is able to receive care and transition home or will need to reside at a permanent care facility.<sup>2</sup>

SECOND EDITION

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### Did you know?

- » There are an estimated 5.5 million military caregivers in the United States. Of these, 1.1 million (19.6 percent) are caring for post-9/11 veterans.<sup>3</sup>
- » The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act allows the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide unprecedented benefits to parents, spouses, children, stepfamily members, extended family members, or any other individuals who live with the service member or veteran, but are not a family member.<sup>4</sup>
- » Pre-9/11 military family caregivers are similar to civilian caregivers, as they are typically older adults caring for an aging parent or a spouse caring for an aging partner. In contrast, post-9/11 military family caregivers present a much different demographic. They are usually younger and are more likely to be the significant other, spouse or friend of the veteran.<sup>5</sup>
- » Family caregivers report greater increases in symptoms of depression, more caregiving-related stress, less "personal mastery" and less self-acceptance.<sup>6</sup>
- » Fewer than 18 percent of military family caregivers are utilizing the financial stipends available for the care and support of service members and veterans.<sup>3</sup>

## Practical Applications

- Caregivers must constantly focus on balancing their family, personal life and job, which can be both overwhelming and rewarding. While it can be difficult to manage conflicting responsibilities, it is important that the caregiver learn how to ask for help.
- Understand that many family caregivers have been forced to quit their jobs or reduce hours in order to care for their loved one. The Department of Defense (DOD) provides all eligible wounded, ill or injured service members and veterans with special compensation to help ease the economic burden for those who support members of our military.
- The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 provides additional services to post-9/11 veterans who have been seriously injured and their family caregivers. The Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers provides a number of benefits, including monthly stipends, travel expenses, access to health care insurance, mental health services and counseling, caregiver training (provided by Easter Seals), and respite care.
- DOD provides resources and information exclusively for military caregivers who assist wounded, ill and injured service members with activities of daily living. DOD's Military Caregiver Support includes the Military Caregiver PEER Forum Initiative (Personalized Experiences, Engagement, and Resources), the Caregiver Resource Directory, monthly Military Caregiver Virtual Forums, Military Caregiver Webinars, events, and specialized resources. The in-person



Military Caregiver PEER Forums convene monthly on or near military installations throughout the United States.<sup>7</sup>

- Continue to educate caregivers about their recovering service member's physical and behavioral health conditions. Knowledge is power, and the best advocate for service members and veterans is an educated caregiver. The more caregivers know about each specific condition, the more they are able to handle unexpected situations that might arise.

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## Additional Resources

Family caregivers provide a wide array of medical, social and personal support to veterans and military members, who may need long-term care when a chronic condition, trauma or illness limits their ability to carry out basic daily activities like help with household chores, meal preparation or managing money. Regardless of the type of long-term care a family caregiver provides, it involves the most intimate aspects of a person's life. Because of this intimacy, family caregivers greatly differ from other health care professionals. Below is a list of resources to help caregivers locate support and information.



### FOR MORE INFORMATION

- » *DOD Office of Warrior Care: Caregiver Resources*, [warriorcare.dodlive.mil/caregiver-resources](http://warriorcare.dodlive.mil/caregiver-resources)
- » *The Elizabeth Dole Foundation: Caring for Military Families*, [www.elizabethdolefoundation.org](http://www.elizabethdolefoundation.org)
- » *Easter Seals: Military and Veteran Caregivers*, [www.easterseals.com/our-programs/military-veterans/veterans-caregiver-training.html](http://www.easterseals.com/our-programs/military-veterans/veterans-caregiver-training.html)
- » *Measuring Communities: Mapping Progress for Military and Veteran Families*, [www.measuringcommunities.org](http://www.measuringcommunities.org)
- » *Military Families Learning Network: Military Caregiving*, [militaryfamilieslearningnetwork.org/military-caregiving](http://militaryfamilieslearningnetwork.org/military-caregiving)
- » *Military OneSource*, [www.militaryonesource.mil](http://www.militaryonesource.mil)
- » *National Alliance for Caregiving*, [www.caregiving.org/resources/military-families](http://www.caregiving.org/resources/military-families)
- » *National Resource Directory*, [www.nrd.gov](http://www.nrd.gov)
- » *Psychological Health Center of Excellence: Call Centers*, [www.pdhealth.mil/resources/call-centers](http://www.pdhealth.mil/resources/call-centers)
- » *The RAND Military Caregivers Study*, [www.rand.org/health/projects/military-caregivers.html](http://www.rand.org/health/projects/military-caregivers.html)
- » *Star Behavioral Health Providers*, [www.starproviders.org](http://www.starproviders.org)
- » *VA Caregiver Support*, [www.caregiver.va.gov](http://www.caregiver.va.gov)
- » *Veterans Crisis Line*, [www.veteranscrisisline.net](http://www.veteranscrisisline.net)

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## About MFRI

### Military Family Research Institute

The Military Family Research Institute (MFRI) at Purdue University conducts research on issues that affect military and veteran families and works to shape policies, programs and practices that improve their well-being. Founded in 2000, MFRI envisions a diverse support community that understands the most pressing needs of military and veteran families. To achieve this, MFRI collaborates to create meaningful solutions for them. This internationally-recognized organization is located at Purdue University's College of Health and Human Sciences, in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies.

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## About the *How to Help* Series

The *How to Help* series equips communities to better serve military and veteran families. The series offers effective, evidence-based guidance on how best to help military and veteran families given the unique challenges they face. Each *How to Help* addresses a different area of community involvement and identifies the increased need to understand the unique stresses, obstacles and opportunities that often accompany military service. We can strengthen communities by building their capacity to better support the military families within them.

Developed by THE MILITARY FAMILY RESEARCH INSTITUTE at Purdue University  
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United States Department of Agriculture  
National Institute of Food and Agriculture



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