

JOINING FORCES FACT SHEET

What is *Joining Forces*?

- *Joining Forces* is a White House initiative to support military families, which includes: families of service members and veterans, caregivers and survivors.

The Mission:

- The mission of *Joining Forces* is to support those who also serve: military and veteran families, caregivers and survivors.

The Objectives:

- Convene and coordinate federal agency partners, advocacy organizations, corporate stakeholders and service providers to develop comprehensive and long-term solutions to address the holistic well-being of military and veteran families, caregivers and survivors.
- Improve access to the resources created to support the economic, social and emotional needs of military and veteran families, caregivers and survivors.
- Call on all Americans to support and harness the special skills, strengths and experiences of military and veteran families, caregivers and survivors.
- Honor the sacrifices and resilience of those who also serve: family members, caregivers and survivors.

Joining Forces' Focus Areas:

- Guided by the life experiences and the perspectives voiced during in-person and virtual listening sessions with military families and stakeholders, the work and priorities of *Joining Forces* will center on the needs of military families: Employment and Entrepreneurship; Military Child Education; and Health and Well-Being.
- **Employment and Entrepreneurship**: The Department of Defense's 2019 Active Duty Spouses Survey indicates, even pre-pandemic, a military spouse unemployment rate of approximately 22%. Frequent moves and transfers, state licensing requirements, child care (costs, long waitlists for on-base providers, and lack of access to off-base providers), caregiving, and deployments, all contribute to the unique challenges military spouses face to building sustainable and long-term careers. *Joining Forces* will work with government at all levels and the non-profit and private sectors to mitigate these challenges and drive economic opportunities. We will work with employers to create more flexible, transferable, and remote job opportunities for military spouses, as well as increasing resources for those interested in entrepreneurial endeavors. We will also ensure that military families are included in the administration's overall policies aimed at improving economic security for all families.
- **Military Child Education**: There are more than 2 million children in classrooms in the United States whose parents are active-duty military service members, National Guard or reservists, or military veterans. Military life can be unpredictable: these children often experience multiple moves, extended separation from family members, and increased fear for their parents' safety during deployments. We must understand and account for the lifelong impact of service on military-connected children and ensure that children in veteran families, caregiving families, and surviving families will also be included in the initiative's work. We also recognize that military children with disabilities, including those enrolled in DOD's Exceptional Family Member Program, face additional challenges with changes of duty station. *Joining Forces* will advance programming to support military-connected children in their classrooms, and help ease the burdens created by the highly mobile military lifestyle.
- **Health and Well-Being**: Supporting the overall physical, social, and emotional health of military families is a national security imperative. While our country lauds the strength and resilience of military families, it is critical to acknowledge that they too shoulder the weight of the past 20 years of sustained warfare. Members of military families and caregivers may experience mental health challenges like depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. Caregiving for a wounded, ill, or injured family member can have an outsized impact on a caregiver's health, financial stability, and economic security. Additionally, some military families report a lack of consistent access to enough food to live an active, healthy lifestyle. The global pandemic over the past year has intensified

these stressors. We will also work closely with service providers in the civilian community to ensure they have the knowledge and tools to effectively support military and veteran families, caregivers, and survivors.

The History:

- The Biden family is a military family. The First Lady is the daughter of a Navy Signalman who served in the Pacific during World War II; the mother of Major Beau Biden, a soldier in the Delaware Army National Guard who deployed to both Kosovo and Iraq; and the grandmother to military children.
- In April of 2011, Dr. Biden and former First Lady Michelle Obama launched *Joining Forces* as an effort to motivate and harness support across the public and private sectors to support service members, veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.
- Over the course of five years, working together with partners in government, the business community, and non-profit organizations, the initiative highlighted the challenges faced by the military and veteran communities and drove progress in hiring veterans and military spouses, making classrooms more welcoming for military connected children, and raising awareness of the mental health needs of the military and veteran community. The effort was widely supported by military and veteran service organizations, as well as private philanthropy, employers, educators, and health care providers.
- After the Obama-Biden Administration ended, Dr. Biden continued her work to support the military family community at the Biden Foundation, specifically focusing on military child education, military spouse employment, and mental health.

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