MISSION ALPHA
a d v o c a c y

BULLET BACKGROUND PAPER ON
TRICARE EXTENDED CARE HEALTH OPTION (ECHO)

PURPOSE

Provide background and overview of TRICARE ECHO. Outline how mandatory enrollment into the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) serves as a barrier to special needs families accessing medically necessary care provided by ECHO.

BACKGROUND

- ECHO is a supplemental program to the TRICARE basic program. It provides additional financial resources for an integrated set of services and supplies designed to assist in the reduction of disabling effects for the beneficiary.
- ECHO qualifying conditions include: mental retardation (old term, intellectual disability is the new DSM-5 diagnosis), serious physical disability, extraordinary physical or psychological condition, infant/toddler under the age of 3 years who are diagnosed with a neuromuscular developmental condition, multiple disabilities with a qualifying condition when the beneficiary has two or more disabilities involving separate body systems.
- The Autism Care Demonstration program is managed under ECHO.
- *ECHO enrollment requires sponsors to provide evidence of enrollment in EFMP at the time they register, unless waived.* Provisional eligibility status is granted for not more than 90 calendar days.

DISCUSSION

- EFMP primarily ensures the special needs of family members are considered during the assignment process. The program does not provide medical benefits.
- EFMP enrollment can sometimes take months to accomplish, especially if there is a lack of medical providers available to complete the required paperwork.
- EFMP enrollment for reserve and national guard service members on active orders may be delayed due to lack of EFMP coordinators and medical providers on non-active duty installations.
- Of note, EFMP enrollment is NOT required to access specialty medical services that are covered under the TRICARE basic program.
- Delays in EFMP enrollment and unfamiliarity with the waiver process can result in significant delays to receiving ECHO benefits.

RECOMMENDATION

Remove the requirement to enroll in EFMP to receive ECHO benefits (32 CFR Section 199.5.(h).(2))

Current as of: 3/2/2024

199.5 TRICARE Extended Care Health Option (ECHO).

(a) General.

(1) The TRICARE ECHO is essentially a supplemental program to the TRICARE Basic Program. It does not provide acute care nor benefits available through the TRICARE Basic Program.

(2) The purpose of the ECHO is to provide an additional financial resource for an integrated set of services and supplies designed to assist in the reduction of the disabling effects of the ECHO-eligible dependent's qualifying condition. Services include those necessary to maintain, minimize or prevent deterioration of function of an ECHO-eligible dependent.

(3) The Government's cost-share for ECHO or ECHO home health benefits during any program year is limited as stated in this section. In order to transition the program year from a fiscal year to a calendar year basis, the Government's annual cost-share limitation specified in paragraph (f) of this section shall be prorated for the last quarter of calendar year 2018 as authorized by 10 U.S.C. 1079(f)(2)(A).

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(h) Other Requirements —

(1) ***Applicable part.*** All provisions of this part, except the provisions of § 199.4 unless otherwise provided by this section or as directed by the Director, TRICARE Management Activity or designee, apply to the ECHO.

(2) ***Registration.*** Active duty sponsors must register potential ECHO-eligible beneficiaries through the Director, TRICARE Management Activity, or designee prior to receiving ECHO benefits. The Director, TRICARE Management Activity, or designee will determine ECHO eligibility and update the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System accordingly. Unless waived by the Director, TRICARE Management Activity or designee, sponsors must provide evidence of enrollment in the Exceptional Family Member Program provided by their branch of Service at the time they register their family member(s) for the ECHO.