



National Children's Alliance[®]
The Force Behind Children's Advocacy Centers

Ready to serve

When CACs and military agencies team up, kids are better off



Every two years, National Children's Alliance (NCA) conducts a census of our Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) members. In the 2018 CAC Census, we asked for the first time about partnerships with local military installations. Thirty-four percent of CACs reported having a military installation in their service area. However, when we used geospatial analysis to compare CAC locations to Family Advocacy Program (FAP) offices on military installations, we found that 70% of CACs in 2018 were located within 50 miles of a FAP office. When we surveyed 165 FAP offices, most reported knowing of at least one CAC nearby. These findings laid a foundation of great possibility for our drive to expand access to CAC services for children in military families.

We spent the next two years developing resources to educate CACs and raise awareness of the benefits of partnering with the military, and in our 2020 CAC Census asked questions that we'll use as a benchmark to gauge the strength of such partnerships going forward. Here's what we found: Nearly all CACs would consider signing a national memorandum of understanding (MOU); few ask about or track possible military-affiliated status of new clients; and nearly a quarter have a practice of working with military partners on identified cases. There is much work to be done in expanding this new area of service for CACs but also tremendous promise for growth and success in meeting the needs of military families.

A Sample of Questions Asked on the 2020 CAC Census

	% of CACs
Would consider signing on to a national MOU: Yes or open to more information	98%
Asks about military-dependent child status at case intake	18%
Tracked number of military-dependent children served in 2019	10%
Has a practice of working with military partners on identified cases	23%
Reported no barriers to serving this population	42%

The work ahead of us

Because kids in military families deserve CAC services



As we write this report, NCA is working with our Department of Defense partners to develop national memorandums of understanding with each branch of service. An MOU establishes roles and responsibilities and ensures that there is no duplication and redundancy in activities and services by multidisciplinary team (MDT) members. Having national MOUs will help reduce the administrative burden on CAC leaders. And because formalized partnerships with MDT member agencies defined by MOUs is how CACs authorize and determine service delivery, these agreements will make it possible for CACs to accept referrals from military programs and ensure military families have access to CAC services.

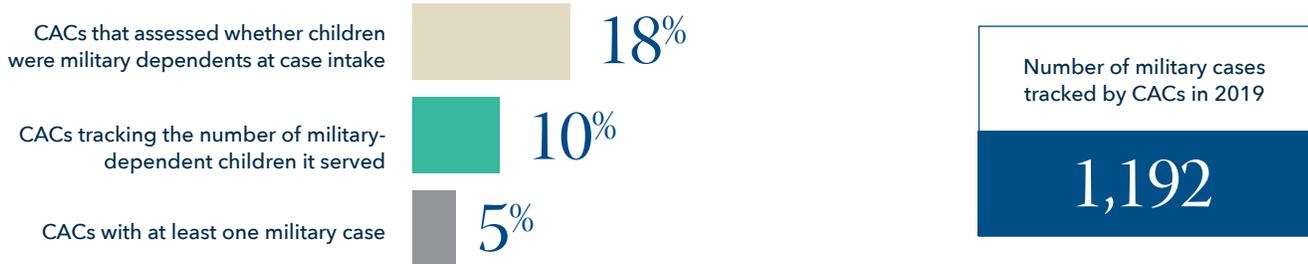
Virtually All CACs Would Be Open to a National MOU

Would CACs consider signing on to a national MOU committing to providing services for military-dependent children and including military partners in the CAC's MDT?



Back in 2018, only 7% of CACs reporting military in their service area also reported having at least one MOU with a military installation. In that light, having 56% say they'd consider signing a national MOU with a military service is a good sign. That 42% need more information just means it's on NCA to provide education and outreach once national military MOUs are available to sign.

CAC Services to Military Kids, by the Numbers



When CACs gather information on a new case, it's an opportunity to ask whether the child involved is in a family affiliated with the military—whether that means a parent or caregiver who is on active duty, a member of the National Guard or Reserves, or a veteran. Doing this ensures that children in military families can be connected to the full array of services available to them and have access to a coordinated investigation. Yet, in 2019 (the full-year data represented in our 2020 CAC Census), only 18% of CACs indicated that they asked about military affiliation at case intake. And, after that, only 10% actually tracked that information. (Some of those CACs may have had no military cases in 2019; what's important to NCA is that they tracked military affiliation.) Only 5% reported having at least one military-related case in 2019, for a total of 1,192 military cases served by NCA Member CACs that year.

In short: Far too few CACs attempt to find out, and keep track of, whether the children they serve have any connection to the military. Why?



Why Don't CACs Track Military Status?

	Number of CACs, as of the 2020 Census
Don't believe that they have military families in their service area	205
Did not realize they should be tracking this information	108
Experience challenges with their case tracking software and/or processes	26
Other	8
No barriers exist, or past barriers have been resolved	62

Just because CACs believe they don't have a military presence in their service area doesn't mean it's true. A CAC can't know if it should be working with the military on a case if it doesn't screen for whether families entering the CAC have a military connection. For many civilians, the myths that service members must live on base or that insignia or uniforms will always be visible are persistent. In fact, most military families prefer not to live on base, sometimes living up to 100 miles away, and military families can't be identified on sight. While there's no requirement to screen for military affiliation, it's an easy measure to ensure kids are getting the best services available to them. A small percentage of CACs didn't have a way to track affiliation in their database or case management software, or believed that families would not disclose military affiliation due to privacy concerns. In 2020, NCA updated its NCAtrak case management software, which many CACs use, to make it easy for users to record military affiliation.

All CACs should track military affiliation, regardless of whether they know of a military base in the area. Case tracking provides essential demographic data, case information, and investigation/intervention results that enable CACs to evaluate their work, assess outcomes, and identify ways to improve. Case tracking is one of NCA's 10 [Standards for Accredited Members](#). Congress strongly supports CAC-military partnerships, but NCA needs solid data to make our case for the value of CAC services. We know CACs helped nearly 1,200 military-affiliated kids in 2019—but with only 10% of CACs tracking those cases, how many did we actually serve? We don't know. More CACs screening and tracking military affiliation will mean we have a more accurate estimate of the number of military families CACs serve, and this will help guide our efforts to expand access moving forward.

What you can do:

Explore the [Preparing for CAC-Military Collaboration: Identifying Military Families and Tracking Military Affiliation](#) webinar on NCA Engage. Hear from two CACs already doing this essential step in serving military families and from our team on how to use NCAtrak to track military affiliation and run reports. Don't miss the sample intake and information forms on the webinar handouts tab!



CACs play a critical role in the care of military families

While both the military and civilian authorities have systems in place to respond to child abuse, there remain jurisdictional uncertainty and gaps in coordinating victim services that sometimes lead to children and their families not receiving the full range of services and response needed.

Consider this: NCA's Standards for Accredited Members' Medical Evaluation Standard states that: *"Specialized medical evaluation and treatment services are available to all CAC clients and are coordinated as part of the Multidisciplinary Team response."*

Yet, across the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), there are only four child abuse pediatricians certified to conduct pediatric sexual assault forensic exams, and seven adult sexual assault forensic examiners who have been certified for pediatric exams—**a total of 11 providers to conduct all pediatric sexual assault forensic exams for military families in the U.S. and overseas.**¹ This is just one example of why CAC-military partnerships are essential for ensuring children in military families get the care they need. In addition to filling gaps in services, CAC-military partnerships may provide more useful services to military-affiliated families. A CAC, for example, likely knows much more about the community and what local resources are available than a DOD provider that has a huge service area.

The DOD has only 11 providers certified to conduct all pediatric sexual assault forensic exams for military families in the U.S. and overseas.

¹ GAO-20-110, *Child Welfare: Increased Guidance and Collaboration Needed to Improve DOD's Tracking and Response to Child Abuse* (February 12, 2020).



The unique challenges and strengths of military families

Military culture is unique and complex, and it can be both a source of strength and resilience and a barrier to seeking support. Understanding the risk and protective factors associated with military life is critical for CACs.

Risk Factors

- Military members tend to be less affluent and marry younger than the average American.
- Frequent relocations make developing community relationships challenging.
- Deployments are difficult for service members, caregivers at home, and children adapting to the transitions and stress.
- Transition to veteran life may involve loss of military support services for family members.

Protective Factors

- Military culture fosters a strong sense of duty, commitment, and service.
- Military families are resilient and well-practiced at managing transitions.
- Reliable employment and access to housing provides stability for the family.
- Military programs, like the Family Advocacy Program and the military health system, provide support and health services.

When CACs partner with their military counterparts, they can help families receive the child-friendly services CACs are known for. Civilian agencies and military partners can provide a coordinated, trauma-informed response to reports of abuse, minimize the number of forensic interviews a child must undergo, and help families access all available resources.

What you can do:

Learn more about military culture and the unique needs and strengths of military-connected families by accessing [products created with our partners](#) at the National Child Traumatic Stress Network.

A close-up photograph of a man in a military uniform, wearing a grey cap, smiling warmly while holding a young child. The child is wearing a pink sweater and looking towards the camera. The background is a clear blue sky. The image is partially framed by a green circular graphic with dashed lines.

Filling the gaps:

Barriers and opportunities

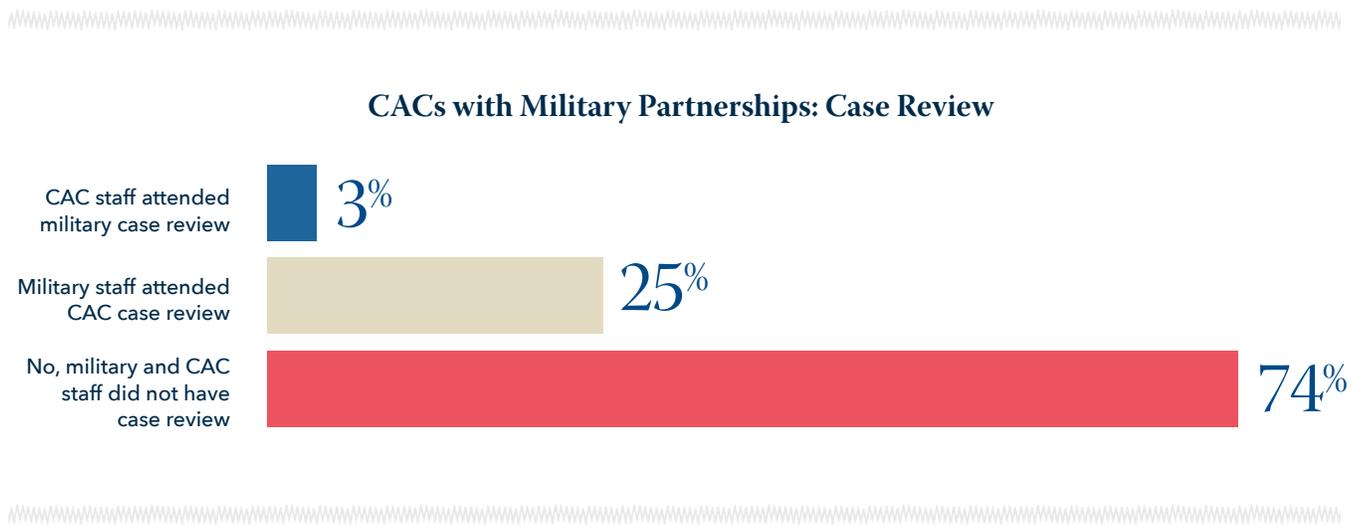
In our 2020 Census, 23% of CACs reported that they had a practice of working with military partners when a case is identified to have a military connection. This is despite the fact that many of these CACs reported earlier in the survey that they do not ask about military-dependent child status at case intake and/or do not track these cases separately in their case management system. This means that even some CACs that don't have formal systems in place for identifying military families have a practice of partnering with military programs to do what's best for kids when they become aware of the need. We asked these 23% of centers a series of follow-up questions about the quality of these relationships as measured through specific practice indicators. The results highlight additional opportunities for growth, even among CACs that have already established relationships with military partners.



For example, some 38% of CACs with military partnerships have no specific policy of notifying their military partners when a military connection is identified. This data point makes sense because, as mentioned above, a sizable proportion of these CACs that claim to have military partnerships may not have systems in place to assess for this element in their cases.

The forensic interview is a core part of the MDT process, one of the foundations that the investigation, intervention, and journey to healing depends on in a child abuse or sexual abuse case. Yet, in CACs that have military partnerships, only 40% of the time did military personnel observe, conduct, or even receive a copy of the forensic interview in cases involving military-dependent children.

There is also opportunity for more collaboration on case review:



Case review is the formal process that enables the MDT to monitor and assess its effectiveness. It not only encourages mutual accountability, it is an opportunity for partners to support each other's work. In nearly three-quarters of CAC-military partnerships that existed in 2019, however, the two sides did not meet to review current cases. Note: CAC and military partners most often meet on CAC premises, so it's not concerning that only 3% of partnered CACs attended case review on a military base. But only 25% of partnerships having military staff attending case review at a CAC is an area for growth.

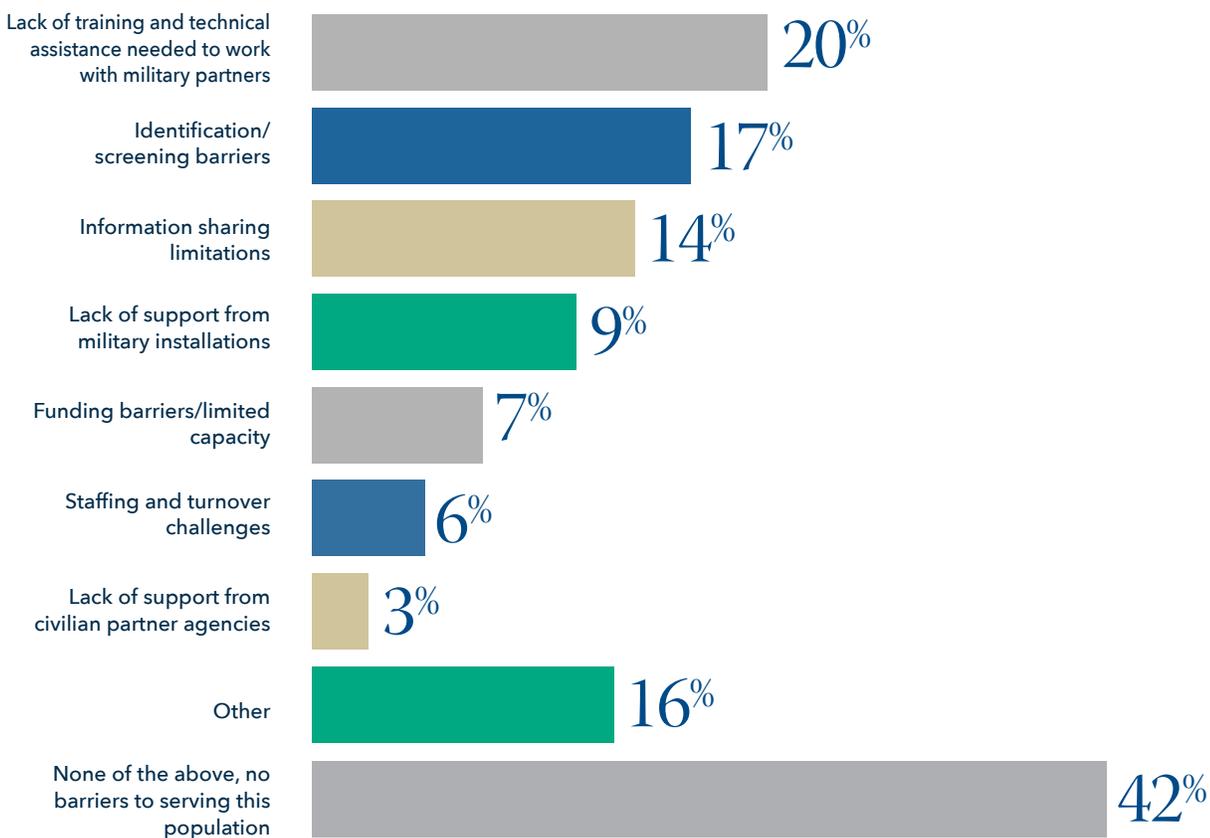
What you can do:

Check out the [Children's Advocacy Center-Military Case Review](#) webinar on NCA Engage. CACs with military partnership experience share the benefits of including military partners in case review, ideas for how to structure meetings so military partners can attend, and other tips.

“No barriers” may be more complicated than it seems

Regardless of whether CACs have established partnerships, all Census participants were asked about barriers to serving this population. At first glance, the fact that 42% of CACs reported no barriers sounds like good news. However, experience shows that CACs often report few barriers to new service needs simply because they do not believe these needs exist in their communities, so they see no need for resources or other supports. We may actually see the proportion of CACs reporting barriers temporarily increase in the future as CACs become more aware of local needs, and then gradually decline as NCA and our partners provide resources based on this data and CACs make use of those resources.

Barriers Experienced by CACs in Working with Military Installations in 2019



The great news is that we can overcome all of these barriers as a movement. As soon as the results came in for our 2018 CAC Census, where we first explored this service area, NCA began building up our library of training and technical assistance materials to help CAC staff and military personnel learn more about each other and learn who is responsible for what during an abuse investigation. And, we have plans for additional, more in-depth training in the year to come, guided by the 2020 Census results discussed in this report.





The role of State Chapters

Every year, NCA publishes interactive “gap maps” that show where CACs and military installations are located across the country. Historically, these maps have focused on services to counties and federally recognized tribal communities. Beginning in 2021, active duty military installations were added to the scope of coverage areas tracked in the gap maps. State Chapters excel at building collaborative relationships within and across CACs and their partners, and they can play the same role between CACs and military installations in their state.

Chapters can use NCA’s military gap map to see where military bases are located in their state. They may discover there are no CACs located near a particular base, which may indicate a need for establishing a new standalone CAC or satellite location to expand services to this area. Alternatively, Chapters may observe installations that overlap with multiple CACs’ service areas. Chapters are well-suited to help CACs and military partners sort out who should respond to suspected child abuse cases at the base. And, as they do for other areas of concern in our field, Chapters can help identify training and technical assistance needs, or encourage mentorships between CACs in their state that already have developed military partnerships and those who want to start one.

What you can do:

Access NCA’s 2021 [interactive CAC coverage map](#) to learn about CAC coverage of active duty military installations. Using this map, you can view CAC locations and coverage areas at a national level and zoom to see more details about the CACs and installations in your local area.



Case study:

Answering the call in South Carolina

Durant Children's Center in Florence, S.C., is located about an hour from Shaw Air Force Base. With 7,140 active duty service members and 14,000 family members assigned to the base—and with 90% of military families in off-base housing—the CAC team knew military families had to be coming through their doors. But the CAC only knew if a family was military-connected if it happened to come up during an inquiry about employment, and even then, they had no way to track the information. That changed in 2019 when the center was awarded a CAC Services for Military Installations subgrant award through NCA.

Director of Training and Systems Development Michelle M. Harkey, MS, CCTP, who serves as the military partnership project coordinator, is an Air Force veteran who grew up in a military family. She says, "With South Carolina being one of the major military hubs in the country and having the third-highest number of military enlistees, it is not if a military family would present at a South Carolina CAC, but *when*."

The CAC used the grant to implement a system to assess every family for military affiliation at intake. Once a military connection is identified, that case is assigned to Harkey so she can work with partners like the Family Advocacy Program and Air Force Office of Special Investigations (OSI) to ensure the investigation is well coordinated and the family has access to all the services available to them. The affiliation is entered in the CAC's case-tracking system so the center can monitor, over time, the number of such children they serve. They even worked with their state network of CACs to get military affiliation included in their statewide case tracking system.

Before the project, Durant Children's Center didn't know how much help it offered Shaw Air Force Base families. Now they know: In 2020, 22 children from military families received services at the CAC and were connected to military programs that could offer additional support. As of July 2021, the center had already served 17 military-affiliated children, and they are confident that these families are receiving the best possible coordinated care. "With the increased amount of referrals from both FAP and OSI," Harkey says, "the positive impact is reflected by the increased visibility and accessibility to military families. This is a reflection of the steady increase of service delivery to our military community."

Conclusions

Overall, our field is still in the relatively early stages of building partnerships between CACs and military installations. The 2020 CAC Census data included here are from 2019, when NCA was just beginning to build its library of training and technical resources for CAC-military partnerships. So it's understandable that the Census shows we still have a lot of work to do. And the pandemic of 2020-2021 will have affected efforts to build and improve partnerships. But every CAC can take action to ensure military families have access to the services they deserve. By screening for military affiliation, CACs can be proactive in identifying military families, the essential first step in meeting their unique needs and recognizing the necessity of military partner collaboration. Tracking the number of military-affiliated children a CAC serves helps us understand the scope of services provided to military families nationwide. And, once the national MOUs are complete, CACs will be even more equipped to provide coordinated services for military-connected families.

CACs that work collaboratively with their military partners are doing tremendous work that is expanding access to CAC services for military-connected kids. At NCA, we are excited to see development in this area of service for CACs and look forward to supporting this efforts of partnerships across the country. Our willingness to collaborate and our wish that all children grow up healthy and happy have always been the hallmarks of our movement. We're all here for the same reason: Keeping kids safe.

Resources for NCA Members

- [CAC-Military Partnerships page](#) on NCA Engage including links to the *CAC-Military Partnership Webinar Series*; four fact sheets that cover the key roles in the U.S. Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, and Navy that support children and families in abuse cases; and the [Status of CAC-Military Partnerships 2019](#) report we prepared for Congress.
- NCA's [interactive map](#) (scroll down for the military map) shows the locations of CACs and military installations.
- Join the [Military Partnerships Community](#) on NCA Engage to share information and resources with your peers.
- For help starting or strengthening a CAC-military partnership, contact Heather Provencher, Coordinator for Services to Military Families, at hprovencher@nca-online.org.

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