THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
1200 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1200

HEALTH AFFAIRS

The Honorable Carl Levin
Chairman, Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

APR 28 2009

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This report responds to Senate Report 110-335 accompanying the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009, that requests the Secretary of Defense report by February 1, 2009, on programs and plans to improve TRICARE information materials, in both print and electronic format, by redesigning them to be more user-friendly, especially for first-time users. This report addresses the TRICARE Web site, print and electronic products, and support phone numbers available to assist Service members and their families who do not have convenient access to a military treatment facility (MTF) benefits counselor to resolve problems. The report also discusses staffing a Reserve Component Beneficiary Counseling and Assistance Coordinator at each TRICARE Regional Office.

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Center (TSC) listings, which are timely updated. The TRICARE Contacts Web page also links to the Beneficiary Counseling and Assistance Coordinator (BCAC)/Debt Collection Assistance Officer (DCAO) directory.

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The level of benefit information for each product in the suite is tailored for readers depending on its intended purpose. For example, our TRICARE Reserve Select handbook provides detailed information on all available benefits and an entire chapter on getting help with specific issues. Flyers in the suite offer an overview of various program options by specialty, and clarify how benefits change based on activation and deactivation status. In every instance, users are directed to Web and telephone resources for additional information or assistance. All National Guard and Reserve products are updated as information about the benefit changes. The original TRICARE Reserve Select materials were completely revised in the fall of 2007. Four newly revised briefings designed specifically for National Guard and Reserve members and their families are also being developed.

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Toll Free Telephone Numbers: To help Service members and their families navigate through the list of toll-free phone numbers, TRICARE provides comprehensive lists in print products for the National Guard and Reserve members and their families and on the TRICARE Web site. For those who might not have access to the print products or Web site, TRICARE has purchased a 1-800-TRICARE telephone number. Beneficiaries may call the number toll-free for general information about the programs that TRICARE offers. The information service continues to be enhanced.

TRICARE will continue to utilize the TRICARE managed care support contractors who are responsible for provider relations and beneficiary customer service for their respective regions. They have established call centers, and their toll-free phone numbers are widely published. These competitively procured TRICARE contracts have financial incentives to improve the information available from their call centers. These contracts are currently under competition for the next generation of contracts, which promise to continue the trend of further improving and enhancing customer service.

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Additionally, TRICARE has an ongoing training program that offers both online and classroom training to other benefit advisors, family support staff, and unit representatives desiring to participate. In addition to the formal and graded training, TRICARE now offers an online training course that is open to the public and provides access to simplified information at the convenience of the user.

In summary, TRICARE Customer Service will continue to improve its information programs and materials.

Thank you for your continued support of the Military Health System.

Sincerely,

S. Ward Casscells, M.D.

cc:
The Honorable John McCain
Ranking Member

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The Honorable Ben Nelson
Chairman, Subcommittee on Personnel
Committee on Armed Services
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The Honorable Ike Skelton
Chairman, Committee on Armed Services
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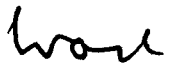

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