

Dated January 17, 2001

H. James T. Sears, M.D.
Executive Director
TRICARE Management Activity
Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense
Health Affairs
Skyline Five, Suite 810
5111 Leesburg Pike
Falls Church, VA 22041-3206

Dear Dr. Sears:

I ask your assistance in furthering the cooperation and collaboration between the TRICARE Management Activity and the Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities (Part C) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Over the past several years, members of the Department of Defense (DoD) have served on the Federal Interagency Coordinating Council (FICC), which was established under the 1991 Amendments to the IDEA to address interagency service issues to young children with disabilities and their families.

Congress intended for the FICC to be a model for States with respect to coordination of policies, development of technical assistance initiatives, and performance of other functions necessary to achieve the objectives of Part C (birth through 2 year olds and their families) and section 619 (3 through 5 year olds) of the IDEA. Both of these programs provide financial support to States for the implementation of services for young children with disabilities.

The Federal Interagency Coordinating Council (FICC) is statutorily charged with the responsibility to advise and assist the Secretaries of Education, Defense, Health and Human Services, Agriculture, Interior and the Commissioner of Social Security in the performance of their responsibilities related to serving children from birth through age five with disabilities, who are eligible for services under Parts C and B of the IDEA.

The purposes of the FICC include:

- (1) minimizing duplication of programs and activities across Federal, State, and local agencies which provide services to infants, toddlers and preschoolers with disabilities and their families;
- (2) coordinating the provision of Federal technical assistance;
- (3) coordinating Federal early intervention and preschool programs and policies;
- (4) identification of gaps in program and services across Federal agencies; and
- (5) identifying barriers to Federal interagency cooperation.

In addition, the FICC is charged with the following tasks:

- (1) conducting policy analyses of Federal programs related to this age group in order to determine areas of conflict, overlap, duplication, or inappropriate omission;
- (2) identifying strategies to address these issues;
- (3) developing and recommending joint policy memoranda concerning interagency collaboration, including modifications to regulations, and elimination of barriers to interagency programs and activities;
- (4) coordinating technical assistance and disseminating information on best practices, effective coordination strategies, and recommendations for improved services to young children; and
- (5) facilitating activities in support of States' interagency coordination efforts.

In response to concerns by those involved with providing services to young children with disabilities, the FICC's Finance Committee/DoD task force developed a service guide titled, TRICARE and IDEA Part C: A Guide to Services, to address the interface between TRICARE and IDEA- Part C.

The service guide was developed by representatives from both the Departments of Education and Defense, particularly the TRICARE Management Activity (TMA). TMA's representatives Steve Lilly and Michael Kottyan, and Dr. Rebecca Posante of DoD served on the work group that designed, developed, and reviewed this guide. The FICC and I personally appreciate all the efforts that these individuals have put forth to make the guide a viable resource for DoD and Part C administrators, service providers, and families of young children.

Please note, Dr. Sears, that this guide includes: (1) a brief description of IDEA- Part C; (2) a chart indicating the eligibility for TRICARE coverage of medically necessary early intervention services; (3) frequently asked questions about TRICARE's programs; and (4) references. It also contains a disclaimer that directs individuals to address specific benefit coverage issues to the respective Departments.

In an effort to more broadly disseminate the service guide, we have scheduled a training session at our upcoming annual early childhood conference. The conference brings together state and local IDEA program administrators, researchers, parents of young children with disabilities, and federal partners. I am extending an invitation to you, your service personnel and Exceptional Family Member Program Coordinators to attend the session that will be held at the Omni Shoreham Hotel on February 27 (10:00 to 11:30 AM), titled TRICARE and IDEA – Part C: A Guide to Services. TMA's Colonel Karen Ferguson and Mr. Kottyan, along with Dr. Bobbi Stettner-Eaton, the Executive Director of the FICC, and Ms. Anne Lucas, the Part C Coordinator from Virginia, will present an overview of the guide.

Page 3 – H. James Sears, M. D.

I hope that you will endorse and support this initial interagency effort to get the word out about the value and importance of this service guide. I believe that this training opportunity will serve to foster additional communication between DoD and the early childhood community. If you have any questions about this or other FICC activities, please contact Bobbi Stettner-Eaton at (202) 205-8828.

Sincerely,

/signed Judith E. Heumann/

Judith E. Heumann