



ASSOCIATION OF
**DEFENSE
COMMUNITIES**

A PROGRAM OF



**BLUE STAR
FAMILIES**

COVID-19

MILITARY SUPPORT INITIATIVE

PRESENTED BY

Booz | Allen | Hamilton

SCORECARD

March–October 2020

PRESENTED BY

Booz | Allen | Hamilton

WITH MAJOR SUPPORT FROM



ADDITIONAL SPONSORS



PROUDLY SERVING MILITARY FAMILIES
OF PRIVATIZED HOUSING



JPMORGAN CHASE & CO.

CMSI BY THE NUMBERS



TOWN HALLS

- 28 Town Halls
- Over 10,000 Total Attendees
- Average Participant Interest was 93.8%



RESOURCES

DAILY NEWSLETTER

- 200 Articles
- 113,684 People Reached Per Newsletter
- 23% Average Open Rate

CMSI WEBSITE (ALL SINCE MARCH 20)

- Users: 17,695
- Sessions: 24, 643
- Page Views: 41,298

RESEARCH LIBRARY

- 769 page views (as of October 10, 2020)



WORKING GROUPS

- ~180 Participants
- 43 Actions for Consideration



RESEARCH

PAIN POINTS POLL (PPP)

- 10 Weeks (March 18–May 26, 2020)
- 7,421 Respondents
- 50 States
- 10 Topical Reports
- Cited in at least 59 articles with engagement of 40,300

RESILIENCE UNDER STRESS STUDY (RUSS)

- 5 Weeks (May 13–June 17, 2020)
- 3,024 respondents



POLICY COMMITTEE

- 44 recommendations
- 7 Coalition Letters



PARTNERS' CALLS

- 20 Partners Calls
- 60+ Partner Updates
- 40 Attendees (on average)



About

“

CMSI was a valuable crisis management tool.... You guys were so fast to get everyone around the table, and it was essential to have that kind of sector-wide response.

— Dr. Tina Atherall, CEO, PsychArmor Institute

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The COVID-19 Military Support Initiative

As the COVID-19 pandemic began to sweep across the country in earnest in early March, 2020, it became increasingly clear that currently-serving and veteran families, as well as their local communities, would be impacted. When the Department of Defense's (DoD) domestic "Stop Movement" order went into effect on March 16¹, it became obvious that military families in particular would be disproportionately impacted. Within one day of that order, on March 17, the Association of Defense Communities (ADC) and Blue Star Families joined forces to launch the COVID-19 Military Support Initiative (CMSI) to provide resources and expertise to support communities, states, and military and veteran families, including:

- ★ Comprehensive coverage of the COVID-19 crisis through a new daily publication, building on ADC's widely read On Base daily newsletter. The newsletter featured updates on substantial national stories and local coverage of how our military is responding
- ★ Virtual town halls on critical issues impacting our military, defense communities, and their families during this time

¹Department of Defense. (2020). *Statement by the Department of Defense on Domestic Travel Restrictions*. Department of Defense. <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2112213/statement-by-the-department-of-defense-on-domestic-travel-restrictions>

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You couldn't have established CMSI any faster. Your turnaround was amazing – in terms of grabbing people, getting them together, and figuring this out. It was such a privilege to be a part of the effort.

– Dr. Caitlin Thompson, Vice President, Community Partnerships, Cohen Veterans Network

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- ★ Military Community and Family Organizations and experts convening to identify and advance promising practices and policy solutions and pinpoint and track ongoing issues
- ★ An ever-evolving platform for sharing information and resources and a repository to capture and document promising practices and lessons learned
- ★ Live polling and feedback of military family pain points; this rolling data will inform our efforts to provide and organize immediate direct services and policy recommendations
- ★ Policy recommendations developed and shared at the local, state, and federal level

The Association of Defense Communities

ADC builds resilient communities that support America's military. We are the connection point for leaders from communities, states, the military and industry on community-military issues by enhancing knowledge, information sharing, and best practices. With nearly 300 communities, states, regions, and affiliated industry organizations, ADC represents every major defense community/state in the nation.

Blue Star Families

The families of our all-volunteer military make unprecedented sacrifices these days to serve our country. Blue Star Families was founded by military spouses in 2009 to empower these families to thrive as they serve. We're committed to strengthening military families by connecting them with their neighbors – individuals and organizations – to create vibrant communities of mutual support. We believe we're all stronger when we take care of one another.



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Acknowledgements

The Association of Defense Communities and Blue Star Families were honored to partner with the following organizations.

CMSI Partners:

American Red Cross	Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF), Syracuse University	Psych Hub
America's Warrior Partnership	Lumina Foundation	Robert R. McCormick Foundation
American Armed Forces Mutual Aid Association (AAFMAA)	Military Support Programs and Networks (MSPAN)	Sesame Workshop
Armed Services YMCA (ASYMCA)	Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC)*	Secure Families Initiative
American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)	Military Family Research Institute, Purdue University*	Team RWB
American Enterprise Institute (AEI)	The Mission Continues	THANKS USA
Armed Services YMCA	Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)*	Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)*
Association of the United States Army (AUSA)	Modern Military Association of America (MMAA)	The Retired Enlisted Association (TREA)*
Booz Allen Hamilton	National Math + Science Initiative	United Through Reading
Bunker Labs	National Military Family Association (NMFA)*	USO
Child Care Aware of America	Operation Family Caregiver	USAA
Cohen Veterans Network*	Operation Homefront	Easterseals
Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States (EANGUS)*	Our Military Kids*	Wounded Warrior Project (WWP)
Elizabeth Dole Foundation*	Partners in PROMISE*	
Hiring Our Heroes	PenFed Foundation	A special thanks to the Office of the Secretary of Defense, National Guard Bureau, Department of Veterans Affairs, Defense Health Agency, and military Services for their meaningful contributions to the COVID-19 Military Support Initiative.
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA)	PsychArmor Institute*	

*CMSI Policy Committee Member

Overview of CSMI



“

I attended every CMSI town hall meeting that came across my desk, took dutiful notes, and made sure that my team was aware of key outcomes and findings, as we work to address the needs of our military survivor population.

— Dr. Chantel Dooley, Director of Impact Assessment and Research, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)

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Town Halls

As part of CMSI's outreach, Blue Star Families and the Association of Defense Communities co-sponsored 26 Virtual Town Hall Meetings, usually twice per week, ranging from topics such as “Addressing Caregiver and Wounded Warrior Needs During COVID-19” (May 19) to “Working as One Community — How Army Installations, States, and Local Governments are Working Together to Respond to COVID-19” (April 14).²

Perhaps more important than the topics themselves was the diverse array of panel discussants and participants. The partnership between Blue Star Families and the Association of Defense Communities opened the door to a tremendous number of Military and Veteran Service Organizations (MSOs/VSOs), defense industry partners, and government leaders to share views and experiences, often from the “grassroots” level of an Army post or Air Force base. The collegiality fostered during these town halls created a strong, enduring public-private partnership — a partnership that together strived to support defense communities and military families in all branches, all ranks, from retired to active to reserve to National Guard.

Key speakers included:

- ★ Mrs. Karen Pence, Second Lady of the United States
- ★ Senators Elizabeth and Bob Dole, The Elizabeth Dole Foundation
- ★ Congressman John Garamendi (D-CA), Chairman, House Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness
- ★ Congressman Derek Kilmer (D-WA), Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense
- ★ The Honorable Robert Wilkie, U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs
- ★ The Honorable W. Jordan Gillis, U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Sustainment
- ★ General John Hyten, USAF, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
- ★ Hollyanne Milley, Spouse of Gen Mark Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
- ★ Laura Hyten, Spouse of Gen John Hyten, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
- ★ Maria McConville, Spouse of General James McConville, Chief of Staff of the Army
- ★ Dawn Schultz, Spouse of Admiral Karl Schultz, Commandant of the Coast Guard
- ★ Kelly Hokanson, Spouse of Lt General Daniel Hokanson, Director, Army National Guard
- ★ Major General Dawne L. Deskins Director, Manpower & Personnel, National Guard Bureau Joint Staff
- ★ Jenny Korn, Special Assistant to the President and Deputy Director, WH Office of Public Liaison
- ★ Reporters and Anchors from CNN, Fox News, ABC, The Washington Post, Military Times, Politico

CMSI town halls occasionally garnered over 3,000 registrations, and consistently attracted a broad audience of military families, service members and veterans, nonprofits, government officials, and civilian community leaders.

²Past Events: recordings and resources from previous town halls,” COVID-19 Military Support Initiative, dates vary, accessed September 7, 2020, <https://covid19militarysupport.org/event>

“

CMSI's response to COVID-19 is absolutely impressive. I'm not one to shower praise, but you guys are leading the way and bringing really relevant content and information to your audiences.

— Military Spouse Town Hall Attendee

“

We are extremely interested in the data that CMSI is collecting, especially data on your PCS questions on installation communication activities. Your surveys have been a fantastic resource for us.

— Senior Department of Defense Official

“

I've used data from Pain Points Poll when speaking on panels and other engagements.... It was the first synergistic poll that reflected the needs and experiences of the entire military community. Having aggregated data was incredibly helpful.

— Melissa Bryant, (former) National Legislative Director, American Legion

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The Pain Points Poll reassured us that we were on the right track in serving our military survivor population. The findings helped to substantiate and reaffirm information gathered from our own surveys.

— Dr. Chantel Dooley, Director of Impact Assessment and Research, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)

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Research

PAIN POINTS POLL (PPP)

The need for continuous polling during the crisis was top of mind for CMSI leaders from day one, and on March 18, two days after the DoD's stop movement order went into effect, Blue Star Families fielded an email poll to quickly capture those experiences, inform phrasing of future questions, and prioritize responses to emerging pain points. The first week of polling garnered 1,321 respondents. By the following week, the poll became an official program of the CMSI initiative, transitioned into a more formal surveying platform, and data from it became a feature of every CMSI Town Hall and Partner Call thereon.

Over the course of its ten week fielding, the Pain Points Poll garnered 7,421 responses and addressed issues ranging from financial readiness and employment, to childcare and school closures, to military readiness, to health and wellness. While the poll was live, results were released in weekly “roll-ups,” which highlighted acute pain points that arose in that week's data. Once polling closed, the research team turned to publishing reference materials for posterity (including qualitative data reports) and a series of topical “Deep Dives,” which featured recommendations made on behalf of the CMSI policy committee.

As the pandemic continued, and the impacts of it on military families became more clear, data points drawn from the Pain Points Poll were featured in Dear Colleague letters from legislators, opinion pieces, and major news outlets as a means to substantiate the challenges military families faced.

Pain Points Poll data was used to inform at least 44 recommendations to the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Congress, state or local governments, Military and Veteran Serving Organizations (MSOs/ VSOs), and private-sector. As of this writing, all but 10 had resulted in some forward movement, even if the issue wasn't fully resolved.

“

The CMSI Policy Committee letters were great. The further away from D.C. you get, the less policy-aligned people are. I was able to do some intra-organization services around why these issues matter, how they affect military families, and how we ought to position ourselves in response.

— Dr. Tina Atherall, CEO, PsychArmor Institute

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One of the things that was nice for me about the Policy Committee calls was that I was able to be influential without being out front. As a researcher, I don't want to lobby. That said, if I can use my knowledge of history and research to inform the discussion, such that the policy recommendations that others make are better tuned to evidence and circumstance, then I feel like I've done something appropriate and useful.

— Dr. Shelley MacDermid Wadsworth, Director, Military Family Research Institute, Purdue University

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RESILIENCE UNDER STRESS STUDY (RUSS)

CMSI launched the Resilience Under Stress Study (RUSS) to uncover the factors that support military families' resilience during the COVID-19 crisis — focusing on health and wellness, financial stability, and institutional and community belonging. While research on resilience — particularly in military families — is growing, it has previously only examined military-specific stressors such as deployment. COVID-19 offered researchers an opportunity to explore military and veteran family resilience in action —while under the large-scale universal stressor of a global pandemic.

Policy Committee

From March through September, the CMSI Policy Committee used Pain Points Poll data to develop 44 recommendations to the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Congress, state or local governments, Military and Veteran Serving Organizations (MSOs/VSOs), and private-sector. As of this report, all but 10 had resulted in some forward movement, even if the issue wasn't fully resolved. CMSI partners will continue to advocate around these issues long after the dissolution of the COVID-19 Military Support Initiative.

ADC and Blue Star Families would like to thank the Cohen Veterans Network, EANGUS, the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, MCEC, MIC3, MOAA, NDIA, NMFA, Our Military Kids, PsychArmor Institute, MFRI, RAND, TAPS, and TREA, for their participation in the CMSI Policy Committee.



“

The CMSI partner calls on Monday night have been so helpful for me — it's a very tight network; getting to know some of the players and personalities has been invaluable.

— K. Conwell Smith, Director of Operation Family Caregiver, Rosalynn Carter Institute

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Kathy Roth-Douquet and her staff did a fantastic job facilitating discussion and putting together an informative agenda and building an environment that fostered networking and discussion.

— John Pray, Jr., Brig Gen (ret), USAF, CEO & President, Operation Homefront

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CASE STUDY ON MILITARY FAMILY FOOD INSECURITY

CMSI Pain Points Poll data from March 18 to April 7 found that the COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated the issue of military family food insecurity in the United States. In response to this data, CMSI sent a coalition letter (Blue Star Families, the National Military Family Association, and MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, and signed by 14 other organizations) to congressional leadership on April 9, calling on Congress to exclude the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) from being counted as income when calculating eligibility for SNAP and other federal nutrition assistance benefits.

Soon thereafter, members of the House of Representatives sent a “Dear Colleague” letter to Speaker Pelosi and House Minority Leader McCarthy on April 20, requesting that a provision excluding BAH as income in the next round of COVID-19 relief legislation. The language of this “Dear Colleague” letter mirrored that of the CMSI coalition letter, and cited the CMSI Pain Points Poll.

While Congress declined to exclude BAH from being counted as income when calculating SNAP eligibility in its COVID-19 relief legislation, another military hunger relief provision for which CMSI partners had also advocated — the military family basic allowance — was included in the House version of the FY21 NDAA.

Working Groups

In July 2020, approximately 180 people from Blue Star Families’ and the Association of Defense Communities’ diverse partners — leaders from DoD, MSOs and VSOs, academia, think tanks, and industry advocates — met remotely to address the major challenges facing service members and their families during the COVID-19 crisis. Decisions such as the March Stop Movement Order restricting military families’ movement, and challenging financial situations due to increased military spouse unemployment affected — and continue to affect — military families in myriad and often dramatic ways. To better delve into the issue, the CMSI leaders organized five working groups to observe top challenges and devise potential policy recommendations and solutions:

- I. Data Analysis
- II. K-12 Education
- III. Financial Impacts on the Military Family
- IV. Installation Management & Partnerships
- V. Installation-Community Crisis Response

The working groups included Subject Matter Experts and key leaders from non-profit, government, and corporate sectors. Additionally, a number of senior spouse leaders from the military services partook in the working groups, adding a valuable perspective and helping ensure that the challenges felt in active-duty military communities were accurately recorded and understood by those leading them. The opportunity to “dig into” the issues proved invaluable, and although the groups only met for a short amount of time, they were able to rapidly identify and address the most pressing concerns.

As a result of these cross-cutting discussions, CMSI has a cogent, tangible set of policy ideas and recommendations based on real-world and real-time problems. The working groups’ discussions, take-aways, and policy ideas and recommendations are documented in a white paper that was published in October 2020.

Partners’ Calls

From March through August, CMSI convened weekly partner calls to share information related to the Pain Points Poll, RUSS, town halls, and CMSI policy committee. At the start of each call, 3-5 would present on their organization’s activities during COVID-19. During these updates, partners share resources and information related to upcoming initiatives. At the end of each call, the National Guard Bureau provided an update on the status of National Guard deployments in the United States and OCONUS.

“

The CMSI website was beautiful and very well run and populated.

— Patricia Barron, Director of Family Readiness,
Association of the United States Army (AUSA)

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Resources

DAILY NEWSLETTER

CMSI sent out a daily update of military related COVID19 information relevant to defense communities, military families, veterans and MSO/VSO professionals, authored by ADC.

CMSI WEBSITE

CMSI created its own website (<https://covid19militarysupport.org>) to serve as a trusted repository for town hall recordings, information on nonprofit partners, and resources on a wide range of topics.

RESEARCH LIBRARY

CMSI also created a research library to house Pain Points Poll and RUSS reports, as well as CMSI partner data on a wide range of topics, including financial insecurity, caregiving, health & wellness, education, employment, etc.

Sample Media Coverage

- ★ "Military Families Caught In Coronavirus Travel Ban Struggle To Make Ends Meet," KPBS, 4/9/2020
- ★ "For Young Military Families, The Financial Effects Of The Pandemic Can Be Severe," Texas Public Radio, 4/13/2020
- ★ "National Guard Looks Out for Members' Benefits During Pandemic," Air Force Magazine, 4/17/2020
- ★ "Guard Members, Spouses: Sound Off on How You're Coping with COVID-19," Air Force Magazine, 4/20/2020
- ★ "Second lady, senior spouses to participate in virtual town hall for Military Spouse Appreciation Day," *Military Times*, 5/7/2020
- ★ "Financial remedies for military families in limbo," CNBC, 5/29/2020
- ★ "Supporting the mental health of military families," *Military Times*, 5/29/2020
- ★ "USAA Donates \$30 Million To Help Military Families Affected By COVID-19," *Stars & Stripes*, 8/21/2020



Impact of CSMI



Emerging Issues Identified & Information Shared

“

It was useful to hear the different perspectives that were presented at CMSI partner calls, and to learn what organizations were doing to support service members and their families during the pandemic. My team used information from the Pain Points poll to inform our community about the challenges that we were collectively facing.

— United States Navy Officer

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“We were grateful for the opportunity to share resources and hear how other organizations that serve the military community were responding to the crisis.”

— Josie Beets, Vice President of Advancement, United Through Reading

“I thought CMSI was fantastic — it was so timely, and the amount of information you were able to get out was amazing. We were able to take data from the Pain Points Poll back to our teams and clinicians and share what we were learning about the challenges military families were facing. Being able to participate in the conversations and to hear what our partners were doing was invaluable. I know that we would all be in a different place if it weren't for CMSI.”

— Dr. Caitlin Thompson, Vice President, Community Partnerships,
Cohen Veterans Network

“CMSI was a great collaborative effort to share information. The partners' calls allowed us to share our free, non-solicitous military financial wellness program with a wider audience. I expect we will have many new partners soon. Great opportunity to work together to do good for the community we all seek to serve — military families!”

— James Beamesderfer, Prudential

“I build assessments in support of the Army COVID Campaign Plan and I have found the data from your CMSI Pain Points Poll to be incredibly helpful. [...] [W]e remain interested in the general trends. I've also noted your assessment on the importance of communications on available resources, and will make sure to share that with my colleagues. I will continue to review your weekly reports, and if you ever have any additional recommendations for how the Army can improve its communications efforts based on your assessments, please don't hesitate to send them my way — I will make sure they're carefully considered.”

— United States Army Officer

“We used information gathered by CMSI to help inform our advocacy efforts and spouse programs. Specifically, I have frequently cited the unemployment data from the Pain Points Poll to advocate for a work opportunity to tax credit for military spouses, and to highlight military spouse unemployment disparities when communicating with members of Congress. Additionally, I used Pain Points Poll data on childcare to help secure essential childcare provisions in the House and Senate versions of the FY21 NDAA.”

— Eryn Wagon, Director, Military Family Policy and Spouse Programs,
Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)

“It was valuable to have various data points that reflect the experiences and concerns of our service members and their families. These data points illuminate areas of possible opportunity and concern... We shared Pain Points Poll information with key stakeholders, and used it to help inform where we should seek additional data to gain a clearer understanding.”

— United States Army Officer

“We were grateful for the opportunity to share resources and hear how other organizations that serve the military community were responding to the crisis.”

— Josie Beets, Vice President of Advancement, United Through Reading

“The Commonwealth was able to take advantage of the opportunities that the Blue Star Families/Association of Defense Communities’ COVID-19 Military Support Initiative (CMSI) Town Halls and presentations provided. The meetings and webinars presented an additional way to learn of the immediate impacts on military families and organizations and companies supporting the defense industrial base. The CMSI Pain Points Poll also addressed the issue of obtaining qualitative and quantitative assessments on how the Nation’s and Commonwealth’s response affected targeted populations of interest. Coupled with the shared understanding achieved with military installations, the Pain Points Poll information helped to paint a common operating picture that would have otherwise been difficult to develop.”

— Carlos L. Hopkins, Secretary of Veterans & Defense Affairs, Office of the Governor of Virginia

“CMSI was very useful in spotlighting the issues affecting military families the most. We used the information gleaned to refine our approach to how MFLC counselors operate, particularly in a pandemic environment.”

— Anthony Kurta, Vice President, Health & Human Performance, Leidos

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I used the information from CMSI to try to make sure that all of the staff at MFRI were up to date about the impacts of COVID-19 on our military communities. CMSI helped us to hone our thinking about what we could be doing in response to the pandemic; and of course, I was able to learn a lot about what other organizations were doing as well. I’m not aware of any other forum where I could have done that — particularly across the breadth of organizations that participated in CMSI.

— Dr. Shelley MacDermid Wadsworth, Director, Military Family Research Institute, Purdue University

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“The Pain Points Poll allowed us to reduce asking questions of our members — thereby recreating work that was already being done. If I ever needed clarifying information, I knew I could turn to CMSI... I believe that kind of coordination helped us to reduce survey fatigue.”

— Dr. Tina Atherall, Chief Executive Officer, PsychArmor Institute

“Our member benefits and survivor assistance staff used the information from the Pain Points Poll and working groups to become better informed regarding the challenges faced by military and veteran families as a result of the crisis... It was also useful to see what policy recommendations were being fielded in the space.”

— Michael Meese, President, American Armed Forces Mutual Aid Association (AAFMAA)

“The CMSI partnership helped us understand what others within our military community are dealing with during the COVID-19 pandemic. This allowed us to see things in a larger context. Additionally, the data shared by the Pain Points Poll informed a lot of our COVID-specific decision making and program creation.”

— Michelle Norman, Co-Founder & Executive Director, Partners in PROMISE

“CMSI was valuable to me for a couple of reasons — the most obvious, of course, was that it kept me and my organization connected to what was happening around COVID-19 and how it was impacting military families. Specifically, data from the Pain Points Poll around military dependent education helped to reinforce some of the actions that we were taking at MCEC.”

— Dr. Rebecca Porter, President and CEO, Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC)

“We shared some of the information [from the Pain Points Poll] with our board of directors and members. We asked that they participate in the surveys. We trust that the feedback from those surveys aided CMSI to better understand the issues and challenges of our constituency.”

— Frank Yoakum, Executive Director, Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States (EANGUS)

“I attended every CMSI town hall meeting that came across my desk, took dutiful notes, and made sure that my team was aware of key outcomes and findings, as we work to address the needs of our military survivor population.”

— Dr. Chantel Dooley, Director of Impact Assessment and Research, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)

“

I’m relatively new to the VSO/MSO space. I learned a great deal through CMSI about all the other great programs out there that I can recommend for members and connect with myself. We amplified findings from the Pain Points Poll on our social media because we wanted our members to see that they weren’t alone in their struggles.

— Sarah Streyder, Director, Secure Families Initiative

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“It was very helpful to hear overviews from participating VSOs/MSOs on their various programs that uplift our service members in different ways. Moreover, It was useful to hear the weekly updates on national guard deployed to assist in various efforts around the US — pandemic, protest control, hurricane assists, etc. — and interesting to hear how and in what regions the service members were impacted by COVID directly.”

— John Pray, Jr., Brig Gen (ret), USAF, CEO & President, Operation Homefront

“CMSI was very useful in obtaining information about the issues affecting military families and what various

organizations were doing to address those issues. The Pain Points Poll and other data helped to confirm the need for our military financial wellness program.”

— James Beamesderfer, Vice President, Veterans Initiatives, Prudential Financial

“The conversations were great. The information — on how to support military families — was insightful and helpful. A lot of it was information that you might not easily find elsewhere. I have used the information in our executive leadership meetings, to keep our team apprised on what organizations in the military support space are doing... I know that in my conversations with commissioners, Pain Points Poll information has come up and I’ve been able to refer them to other CMSI partner organizations. The more information I have to provide commissioners, to point them in the right direction, the better they are able to serve the families in their jurisdictions.”

— Cherise Imai, Executive Director, Military Interstate Children’s Compact Commission (MIC3)

“The weekly CMSI partner calls on Monday afternoon were extremely valuable. Clearly, the pandemic threw people for a loop, and we had to reorient ourselves on how to deliver information and services in real time to our members. Being able to hear from others in the military and veteran support space was very helpful, and we greatly appreciated the opportunity to share some of the lessons we learned during the partner updates. Moreover, the partners’ calls helped us to learn where some attention was being placed and where we could focus our efforts to make sure that the broader community was being served — particularly in the realm of caregiving... Every week, we offered information regarding CMSI town halls and partner programs to the folks that run our veteran and military initiatives in the states, so that they could share it with their communities. We believe that people ought to have more information, not less, on how best to cope with the pandemic as it progresses.”

— Pete Jefferies, National Engagements Director, AARP

“

I want to congratulate Blue Star Families and the Association of Defense Communities for having the foresight to do something very important — to elevate the voices of our military families to important people that needed to know what was going on. While the entire nation was, of course, being challenged by COVID-19, those challenges were particularly acute for military families — some of whom were caught in limbo due to the Stop Movement order, etc... I found the PPP to be very useful as a tool for understanding what our military families were experiencing at a given moment in time... The CMSI Policy Committee letters also allowed me to provide our government relations team and executive leadership with information regarding the challenges faced by military families and the recommendations that were being fielded in response.

— Patricia Barron, Director of Family Readiness, Association of the United States Army (AUSA)

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Relationships Established or Deepened

“Beyond the data, I think that the most useful aspect of CMSI has been the professional networking with organizations who share a common purpose. We all operate in our own specialized lanes, but when we are together, we build a highway of knowledge and support... Specifically,, we have been able to partner more with the National Guard Bureau Joint Staff.”

— Frank Yoakum, Executive Director, Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States (EANGUS)

“

I was able to connect with Sarah Streyder from the Secure Families Initiative by virtue of being on the CMSI partners' calls. We are going to do a podcast together later this month to talk about how important it is for military families to vote. I also redeveloped some relationships with folks who I had lost contact with and who had taken on new roles in the space.

— Patricia Barron, Director of Family Readiness, Association of the United States Army (AUSA)

“CMSI really got off to a good start in March and that really helped in building synergies across the community. It was useful to understand what partners were doing across the space — particularly during the early stages of the pandemic.”

— Melissa Bryant, (former) National Legislative Director, American Legion

“Various data points that may reflect the experiences and concerns of our Service members and our families are valuable. These data points illuminate areas of possible opportunity and concern. We certainly shared information with key stakeholders. Further, information helped inform where we should look further into additional data to gain a clearer understanding.”

— Senior Military Official at Defense Health Agency

“I think coming together through CMSI was really great. There was always a ‘golden nugget’ that you could glean from anything you attended.”

— Jim Lorraine, President & CEO, America's Warrior Partnership (AWP)

“I had been MCEC's CEO for only six months when CMSI started. The Monday night partners' calls enabled me to rapidly get to know the other leaders in our military and veteran support space in a way that I probably wouldn't have been able to accomplish otherwise.”

— Dr. Rebecca Porter, President and CEO, Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC)

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“The issue-specific briefs from the CMSI Policy Committee were very informative regarding the challenges military families face with respect to their finances (pay and compensation, spousal unemployment, food insecurity, etc.), housing, PCS, deployment, separation, education, etc.”

— Ken Greenberg, Director of Veterans & Military Policy, TREA: The Enlisted Association

“CMSI enabled me to network and partner with subject matter experts from other VSOs/MSOs to learn more, ask questions, and obtain a better understanding of the issues. All of the individuals I met, either on the CMSI Policy Committee calls or the Monday night partner calls were very open and willing to assist TREA in learning more about active duty families.”

— Ken Greenberg, Director of Veterans & Military Policy, TREA: The Enlisted Association

“The CMSI partners’ calls gave us greater awareness of the players in the military and veteran support space, and put us in contact with individuals who were on the front lines of trying to help military and veteran families during the pandemic. That awareness will be helpful even after the pandemic is over.” — Pete Jefferies, National Engagements Director, AARP

“I’ve definitely appreciated being a part of CMSI — which has been a valuable opportunity to connect with other organizations in the MSO/VSO space. The regular interaction and correspondence with CMSI partners expanded IAVA’s connections to organizations that we hadn’t worked or collaborated with as much in the past.”

— Jeremy Butler, Chief Executive Officer, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA)

“I don’t typically have a lot of opportunity for face-time with other military support organizations, so CMSI was very useful in familiarizing me with the space.”

— Cherise Imai, Executive Director, Military Interstate Children’s Compact Commission (MIC3)

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CMSI was very useful for me personally and for AAFMAA generally to understand what the broader issues were and to see the wealth of organizations that were addressing those issues. In fact, we were introduced to some organizations (such as ADC and others) that I personally did not know existed, and we became acquainted with the work they were doing... CMSI specifically helped us improve our relationships with the military relief societies — Coast Guard Mutual Assistance, Army Emergency Relief, Air Force Aid Society, and Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society. We were able to bring them into the CMSI fold, which later proved beneficial since it enabled them to become a conduit for the financial assistance that USAA provided for service members and their families.

— Michael Meese, President, American Armed Forces Mutual Aid Association (AAFMAA)

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“I was grateful for the opportunity to present at a town hall regarding the impact of COVID-19 on military families’ mental health. I feel as though that town hall helped PsychArmor to deepen our relationship with the communities that we serve. There were individuals that contacted me after the webinar (caregivers and family members) to say ‘I’m so glad I saw your face, and that you’re still in this work.’ That personal connection and the ability to remind people that their community is working to support them was amazing.”

— Dr. Tina Atherall, CEO, PsychArmor Institute

“I was able to renew a relationship with a former colleague from the Bob Woodruff Foundation thanks to CMSI.”

— Anthony Kurta, Vice President, Health & Human Performance, Leidos

“The CMSI partner calls allowed me to reconnect with individuals whom I had lost touch with over the years, and who were now in different positions... We were able to acquire some new partners for our Families Tackling Tough Times Together program who we probably wouldn't have connected with without CMSI.”

— Dr. Shelley MacDermid Wadsworth, Director, Military Family Research Institute,
Purdue University

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I was able to deepen the American Legion's relationships with some of the other CMSI partners. For example, we worked with the National Guard Bureau during the early days of the pandemic when we were thinking about how we could better support Guard families.

— Melissa Bryant, (former) National Legislative Director, American Legion

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“As a funder, the most useful thing for me about CMSI was being able to hear organizations give updates. I appreciated the opportunity to listen in, and learn about the issues impacting military and veteran families, as well as how organizations were responding and the research being done.”

— Mike Monroe, Director, Veterans Programs, A. James & Alice B. Clark
Foundation

“We were able to cultivate a deeper relationship with Armed Services YMCA via a CMSI working group — that interaction catalyzed a deeper partnership.”

— Elizabeth O'Brien, Chief Executive Officer, Freedom Learning Group

“The genesis of the Respite Relief for Military and Veterans Caregivers program came out of a CMSI town hall meeting on May 19 in which we were able to present the challenges that caregivers were facing as a result of COVID-19. We were blessed and fortunate that our parent company, Generali, had provided us with a \$1 million grant to help caregivers during the crisis, which we announced at that event. We quickly teamed up with our CMSI partner and co-panelist, the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, to distribute that funding to military and veteran caregivers in California, Florida, and Texas. CMSI helped us to operationalize the donation to make a meaningful impact.”

— Sherwin Sheik, Chief Executive Officer, CareLinx

“Everything was extremely beneficial — there was nothing that was not additive. It was a good opportunity to connect with colleagues that I hadn't seen in a long time, listen to what they were doing, and find ways to collaborate. For example, Christopher Plamp had moved from Hire Heroes USA to the USO, and we hadn't talked for several months. It was through CMSI that he and I reconnected and began working with each other on some of our complementary programs.”

— Jim Lorraine, President & CEO, America's Warrior Partnership (AWP)

“Following one of the Monday night partners' calls, we were able to connect with the VA communications team to send out information about our mobile reading app to veteran families. United Through Reading saw a slew of downloads of our app in the immediate aftermath of that outreach — enabling us to reach a community we would have otherwise had a hard time getting in front of.”

— Josie Beets, Vice President of Advancement, United Through Reading

Organizational Response

“On the programmatic side, CMSI’s data on lack of technology for virtual education and financial hardship helped to inform efforts at the MOAA Foundation to develop a COVID-19 relief grant program (up to \$500 of financial relief for military families) and to expand our remote telework program (removing PCS requirements) to ensure military households had a sufficient number of workstations to accommodate telework and virtual learning requirements.”

— Eryn Wagnon, Director, Military Family Policy and Spouse Programs, Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)

“PsychArmor built out webinars and resources in response to Pain Points Poll findings around mental health. We created resilience and cohesion workshops, and convened smaller learning communities to support the needs of our military family members revealed in the Pain Points Poll... Moreover, I serve on the board of the San Diego Veterans Coalition and continually sent them information from the Pain Points Poll and CMSI town halls, which they used to inform the work of the Military Family Life Action Group — a task force that seeks to address quality of life challenges for military families in San Diego.”

— Dr. Tina Atherall, Chief Executive Officer, PsychArmor Institute

“We worked closely with Mr. Tony Wickham, J1 at the National Guard Bureau, and were able to determine the need for additional support not only for those deployed guardsmen and reservists overseas but also for those activated for the COVID-19 response or the Southwest Border Mission. For service members deployed overseas for 120 days or more, their children are now eligible for two \$300 activity grants and for those activated stateside for an aggregated 120 day, their children may receive a

\$300 activity grant for the first time ever. We’ve had grant recipients in 47 states and two territories for a total of 844 grants since we launched the campaign. The CMSI forum was really critical in determining the need and having the data to support that decision.”

— Kara Dallman, Executive Director, Our Military Kids

“The most useful and specific data collected [via the Pain Points Poll] was on issues/effects relating to child care access and employment. While access to on-base military child care was a significant concern for military families prior to the pandemic, the data collected by the pain points poll provides supplemental analysis into how it is impacting military families specifically post-pandemic. This information and analysis will help us continue engaging our federal and state partners on how to enable greater access to child care (both on-base and community-based). Similarly, with regard to employment and underemployment, these issues were of significant concern to military families (spouses, chiefly) prior to the pandemic’s onset. The data provides a clearer picture of the fragility of opportunity for employment of military spouses, after the pandemic’s onset. This will reinforce Virginia’s efforts to identify and advocate for policies and partnerships that address both unemployment and underemployment of military spouses.”

— Carlos L. Hopkins, Secretary of Veterans & Defense Affairs, Office of the Governor of Virginia

“The Pain Points Poll provided us valuable information as we made business decisions to better serve our military spouses. For example, data regarding the lack of accessible child care helped to inform how we structured our work hours.”

— Elizabeth O’Brien, Chief Executive Officer, Freedom Learning Group

“After learning from the Pain Points Poll what issues our community was facing, we looked to address those problem areas through programming. Because families felt disconnected from each other, especially our special education families, Partners in PROMISE focused on creating informational content that also served to connect our families. An example of this is our EFMP Stories program. Our COO interviewed EFMP parents to highlight not only their personal stories, but also their key takeaways from those experiences.”

— Michelle Norman, Co-Founder & Executive Director, Partners in PROMISE

“We used data points from the Pain Points Poll to bolster the argument of a sign-on letter that we drafted.”

— Sarah Streyder, Director, Secure Families Initiative

“One of the things that came out of our association with CMSI was that we immediately launched a COVID-19 page on the AUSA website... We linked to all of the CMSI town halls on that page so that families who missed them were able to view the recordings.”

— Patricia Barron, Director of Family Readiness, Association of the United States Army (AUSA)

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“Data from the Pain Points Poll helped us to understand what our military families were going through and helped us to shift accordingly. For example, the Pain Points Poll revealed that some families were having a hard time connecting and were feeling socially isolated. We responded by refocusing our outreach strategies — reminding beneficiaries that our services exist to provide that connection.”

— Josie Beets, Vice President of Advancement, United Through Reading

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We shared the weekly Pain Points Poll through our national and state networks to let our communities know what active duty and veteran families were going through. From an operational standpoint, we tried to respond to some of the needs that were cropping up in the data. For example, we saw that respondents were feeling increasingly isolated — not just military-connected individuals but civilians as well. AARP used that data and our own inputs to develop a Community Connections program to help folks connect virtually and improve their access to vital resources. The Pain Points Poll also reinforced our understanding that military and veteran family members were increasingly assuming long-term caregiving responsibilities. Within two weeks of the pandemic, we partnered with another CMSI member, the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, and created a fact sheet entitled ‘Supporting Military, Veteran, and Family Caregivers in a Pandemic,’ to offer practical steps that caregivers can take amid the coronavirus outbreak to better protect themselves and their loved ones.

— Pete Jefferies, National Engagements Director, AARP

“We are starting a self-paced course with Blue Star Families on the basis of findings from the Pain Points Poll. The information that CMSI provided helped us to realize that we need to have a military family focus.”

— Dr. Caitlin Thompson, Vice President, Community Partnerships, Cohen Veterans Network

“The timely and relevant insights that we gleaned from the CMSI Pain Points Poll, partners’ calls, and town halls regarding the financial impacts of COVID-19 on our military families helped to shape the development of USAA’s Military Family Relief Initiative — which will provide \$30 million in funding to assist military families during these challenging times.” — Greg Frey, Corporate Responsibility Director, USAA

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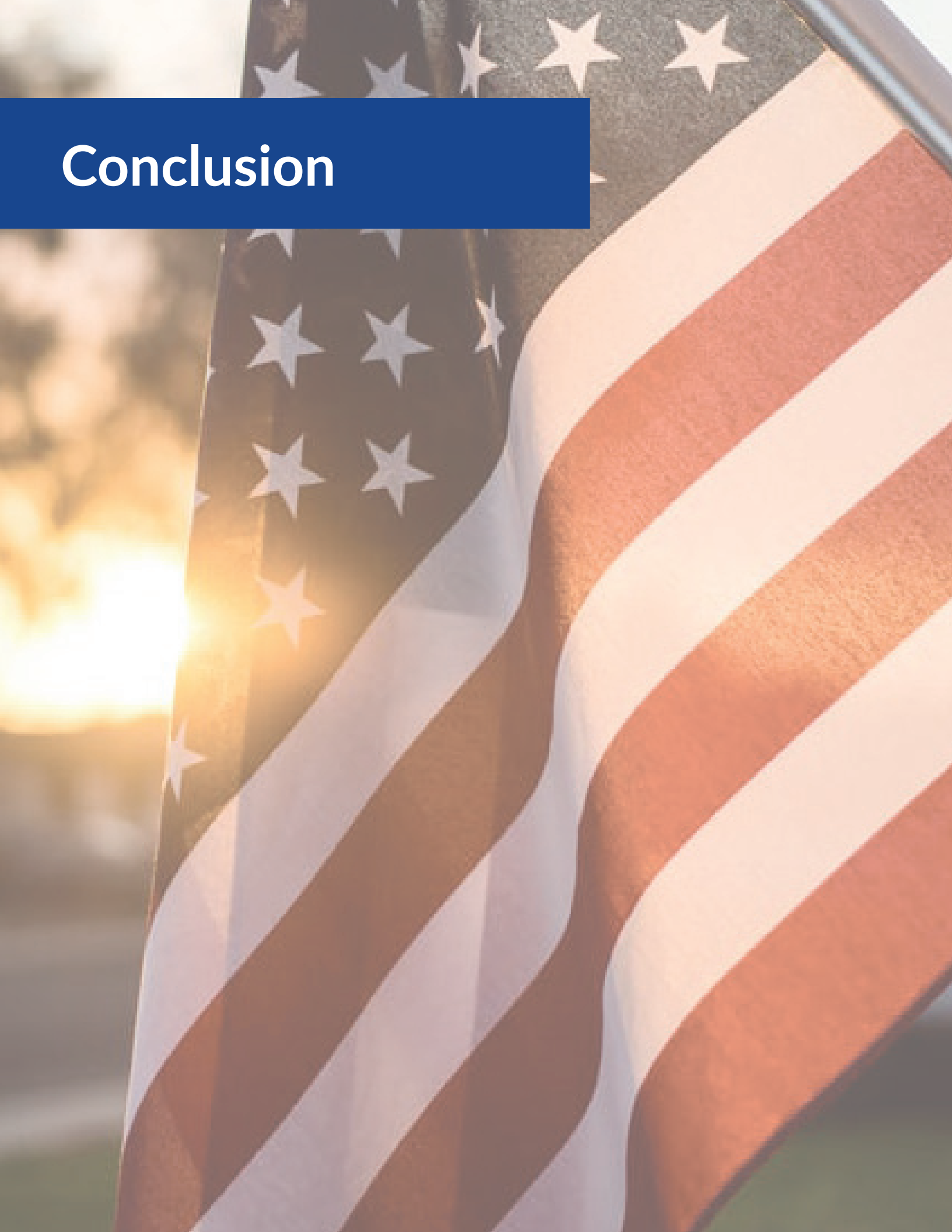
We used the Pain Points Poll in a couple of ways. AWP had done a poll out to our veteran support communities to ask how they were doing in their ability to provide services to veterans during the pandemic. (We do not typically work with veterans directly — instead, we work with the communities that work with veterans.) The Pain Points Poll revealed what veteran families were saying they needed; we then compared those findings to our own poll of what communities were saying they could or couldn't provide. There was overlap in a couple of areas. For example, an issue that came up in the Pain Points Poll was that veteran families were having difficulty accessing food; our communities were reporting that they were having trouble providing food assistance. Moreover, many families didn't have the financial means to afford the food that was available. To address this issue, AWP worked with a couple of foundations to provide emergency financial assistance to families in need.

— Jim Lorraine, President & CEO, America's Warrior Partnership (AWP)

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Conclusion



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Thank you to Blue Star Families and ADC for picking up the flag at the beginning of the pandemic and bringing us all together. It's always a nightmare scenario to have to build a plane as you fly it, but you guys did it very effectively.

— Josie Beets, Vice President of Advancement,
United Through Reading

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The success of the cross-sector collaborative nature of the COVID-19 Military Support Initiative demonstrated that **working together works**. The coalition highlighted the importance of building strong organizational relationships and networks in order to successfully manage emergencies when they arise. Moreover, CMSI underscored the utility of gathering data in real-time, in order to identify emerging issues, target resources, and craft solutions.

In the aftermath of CMSI, a continued MSO/VSO collaborative infrastructure will be needed to rapidly respond to potential future crises. As one partner articulated: “We will want to maintain the capability to ‘ramp up’ if something else happens, so that the military and veteran support community can coordinate a collective response quickly.” As such, we plan to continue the CMSI partners’ calls and policy committee meetings moving forward under the auspices of the White Oak Collaborative moving forward.

We would again like to thank all of the organizations that participated in the COVID-19 Military Support Initiative. Your tireless efforts on behalf of our military and veteran communities made a world of difference during this difficult time.

“I appreciate the leadership that BSF and ADC exhibited in the face of what was happening with COVID. I know that there was so much work that went into the behind the scenes organization and logistics of that and I really appreciate the fact that you all took that on.”

— Dr. Rebecca Porter, President and CEO, Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC)

“I think CMSI has been great. Across the board, it's been very useful.”

— Mike Monroe, Director, Veterans Programs, A. James & Alice B. Clark Foundation

“The very very best part of CMSI was your team — you guys are exceptional. A pure pleasure to work with.” — Dr. Tina Atherall, CEO, PsychArmor Institute