

Pursuant to Executive Order 14091 (February 16, 2023) on
"Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for
Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government"

2023 Equity Action Plan Summary

U.S. Department of Defense

Delivering equity through DoD

As the world's preeminent military and the largest U.S. federal workforce, it is the responsibility of the Department of Defense (DoD) to lead in advancing equity. Through its current equity efforts, the Department seeks to advance equity for military families and members of underserved communities and to rectify past harms for communities around military installations and bases. Advancing equity not only makes the Joint Force a stronger and more resilient fighting force, but it is also an essential component of deterring conflict for the American people and building a safer, more prosperous world.

New strategies to advance equity

DoD has identified five areas of focus for its 2023 Equity Action Plan through community engagement, including Tribal consultations, listening sessions with Service members and military spouses, advisory committees, and more. DoD will continue to engage community members on these action areas, its progress, and next steps.

1. Advance equity for military families with a focus on healthcare, education, and societal challenges and opportunities. *Demands of military life, such as frequent moves, long periods of separation, and executing the military mission, can pose unique stressors and health equity barriers for Service members and their families. Ensuring access to resources that support well-being is critical to their readiness and resilience. Spousal unemployment and underemployment can be barriers to both economic and food security for military families, which, in turn, can impact readiness, resilience, and retention. To address these barriers and others, DoD will:*

- Ensure consistent and equitable access for Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) students through increasing opportunities to advanced placement course options, advanced academic programs and services, DoDEA Virtual School course enrollment, and ongoing professional learning for all DoDEA educators to understand the dynamic needs of military-connected students during times of transition.
- Expand employer partnerships through the [Military Spouse Employment Partnership \(MSEP\)](#) program to provide more job opportunities for military spouses on the MSEP portal. Additionally, place military spouses in paid fellowships through the Military Spouse Career Accelerator Pilot (MSCAP) to enhance

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their experience and marketable skills.

- Explore approaches to educate health care providers on using an evidence-based screening tool (“the Hunger Vital Sign”) to evaluate household risk of food insecurity, offer providers key resources for those patients / households who screen as being at risk, and communicate the importance of food insecurity as a social determinant of health.
- Explore changes to Military Health System (MHS) GENESIS to address gaps in food insecurity screening, specifically to ensure screening of all children ages 0-17 years and to integrate early pregnancy screening.
- Add additional resources relevant to food insecurity on the TRICARE website (e.g., federal food assistance programs) and ensure information and resources are easily available for providers and beneficiaries. Once finalized and approved, include food insecurity resources into the Virtual Education Center, which is currently being tested to augment provider-patient communication in the electronic record.

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2. Advance economic equity and rectify past harms for communities around military installations and bases.

DoD operational and training activities during the World War II and Cold War eras resulted in adverse environmental, health, and economic impacts to communities, including American Indian and Alaska Native communities. Historically, DoD built temporary bases and bombing ranges on and near Indian lands, Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act-conveyed properties, ancestral lands, and reserved treaty rights areas. Legacy impacts from operations at these former bases and ranges may include hazardous materials, debris, underground fuel storage tanks, lead-based paint, asbestos, munitions / explosives residue, and abandoned or unsafe sites. These impacts create a barrier to Indigenous populations by potentially hindering land development for housing, economic opportunities (e.g., harvesting timber), or protecting the land for subsistence food gathering or cultural practices. To address these barriers and others, DoD will:

- Ensure the least exposure to communities when choosing among waste disposal options by paying particular attention to the additional oversight and controls provided at disposal and destruction facilities with environmental permits.
- Evaluate which communities may be experiencing negative environmental, health, or economic effects due to proximity to DoD testing sites, bases, or munitions sites, and invest in mitigating those effects and advancing equitable outcomes for those communities.
- Actively seek public engagement in the cleanup process and enhance public outreach and engagement (e.g., Restoration Advisory Boards) to ensure that the voices and lived experiences

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of communities with environmental justice concerns inform DoD's work.

3. Integrate environmental / economic justice tools into DoD planning tools for decision-making, where applicable. *Executive Orders (EOs) 12898, 14008, and 14096 have identified that communities that have been historically disadvantaged often suffer disproportionate environmental impacts, such as infrastructure decline, deteriorating housing, exposure to lead, and industrial pollution. This includes many DoD military and civilian personnel and their families living on and off base. To address these barriers and others, DoD will:*

- Develop an implementation strategy by September 2024 for EO 14096. This EO formally defined Environmental Justice and expanded the scope of the EO 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, assessing for disproportional impacts to low-income and minority populations.
- Incorporate Environmental Justice Screening and the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tools into the Defense Climate Assessment tool by May 2024.
- Train DoD Climate Assessment Tool users, a community of DoD installation planners and decision-makers, on environmental justice principles and how to include these principles and corresponding data into DoD planning processes by August 2024.

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4. Advance gender diversity, equity, and inclusion by removing barriers to the recruitment, development, retention, and advancement of women in DoD. *Efforts to ensure the needs of female Service members have frequently been isolated, with limited accountability for lasting change, causing a barrier to gender equity. To address these barriers and others, DoD will:*

- Execute a child care fee assistance pilot program, increasing access to child care for eligible Service members by implementing changes or requirements from the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) FY 2024 and determining the feasibility of recommendations from the DoD Child Care Summit (continuation from FY 2022 plan). Broaden the pool of eligible providers to receive fee assistance through strategic partnerships with states and counties (continuation from FY 2022 plan).
- Provide recommendations from the Women in Service Working Group, a subgroup of the Medical and Personnel Executive Steering Committee, for policy and programmatic changes that will advance the needs of female Service members in response to the 2019 Defense Health Board report.
- Pilot a reproductive behavioral health consultation program with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs that will offer military health care providers access to reproductive behavioral health subject matter experts to address issues and care for reproductive health-related behavioral health.

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5. Advance women’s participation in democracy, representation, and decision-making in peace and security processes. *Despite the critical role women can play in their defense institutions, women’s recruitment, career progressions, and involvement in security sector decision-making still lags behind globally due to gender-based barriers, instances of unsupportive leadership, discouraging culture and norms, and lack of adequate infrastructure and equipment. Defense institutions struggle integrating a gender perspective into military operations to better plan for and accommodate the disproportionate impact of conflict on women, girls, and other underserved communities. To address these barriers and others, DoD will:*

- Elevate and standardize the Gender Advisor workforce to further the consideration and application of gender analysis to the Department’s plans, operations, activities, and investments. Codify roles and responsibilities for Gender Advisor workforce in DoD policy guidance (e.g., DoDI). Ensure DoD organizations maintain a gender advisory workforce, including Gender Advisors, Gender Focal Points, and Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Program Managers, and implement DoD WPS policy guidance.
- Train the Gender Advisor workforce and DoD personnel on steps for conducting gender analyses, as appropriate, and conduct gender analysis to inform security cooperation, Theater Campaign Plans, training for U.S personnel, military exercises, and DoD support to the development of Integrated Country Strategies.
- Work with partner nations to advance gender equity and equality within national security decision-making, engagement, and cooperation with allies and partners globally. Update DoD security cooperation guidance and design templates to reflect gender analysis information and WPS security cooperation programs.

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- Provide opportunities for women in national security forces of foreign partners to participate in security cooperation and assistance programs, resources, training, and education opportunities, including U.S. professional military education institutions.

What DoD accomplished

Below is a sampling of DoD's progress delivering on equity and racial justice since its first Equity Action Plan in 2022.

- ***Launched a self-guided financial well-being assessment tool.***
The tool will help Service members and their families assess their financial well-being and be referred to appropriate resources.
- ***Established the first Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)-led University Affiliated Research Center at Howard University in tactical autonomy in January 2023.***
- ***Awarded 82 grants to HBCUs / Minority Serving Institution (MSI) researchers totaling \$61.7 million.***
- ***Released an updated "Responsible AI Guidelines" by the Defense Innovation Unit in June 2023.***
The [document](#) is a practical framework for including the DoD's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Ethics Principles, including equity, in AI product planning, development, testing, and evaluation. It is a living document, to be updated based on evolving best practices and practical experience.
- ***Launched the Military Spouse Employment Program Small Business training program.***
The program brought in over 30 new small business employer partners.

What DoD accomplished

- ***Completed over half of the Preliminary Assessments / Site Inspections at 707 installations where DoD may have used and potentially released Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) materials.***

DoD obligated \$2.0 billion through FY 2022 to conduct PFAS-related drinking water mitigation, investigations, and cleanup on its installations, as well as in nearby communities.

- ***Awarded three non-construction planning and organization assistance grants to Guam in FY 2022 totaling \$2.3 million to address cumulative DoD socioeconomic and environmental impacts in Guam.***