



**National
Children's
Alliance®**

*The Force Behind
Children's Advocacy Centers*



Getting Started with CAC Partnerships:

A Guide for Military Partners

Introduction

Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) specialize in providing a coordinated, child-centered, multidisciplinary response to allegations of child abuse. There are over 950 CACs serving communities nationwide. At a CAC, a multidisciplinary team including medical providers, law enforcement, victim advocates, mental health providers, child forensic interviewers, and partners from other disciplines provide a coordinated response to hold offenders accountable and help children and families heal and thrive.

CACs can play a vital role in ensuring that military-connected children have access to the full scope of military and civilian services when they experience physical abuse, sexual abuse, witness violence, and if they exhibit or are impacted by problematic sexual behavior in children and youth (PSB-CY).

In 2024, National Children's Alliance (NCA), the accrediting body and membership organization for CACs, announced the establishment of memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with:

- U.S. Army Criminal Investigative Division (CID) – for Army
- Naval Criminal Investigative Services (NCIS) – for Navy and Marine Corps
- Department of the Air Force, Air Force Office of Special Investigations (AFOSI) – For Air Force and Space Force
- U.S. Army Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, G9–for Army FAP
- Headquarters Marine Corps, Manpower and Reserve Affairs, Marine and Family Programs Division – for Marine Corps FAP
- Commander, Navy Installations Command – for Navy FAP
- Department of the Air Force – for Air Force and Space Force FAP

These MOUs pave the path for investigation and service coordination, including information sharing, between CACs and military programs covered by the MOUs.

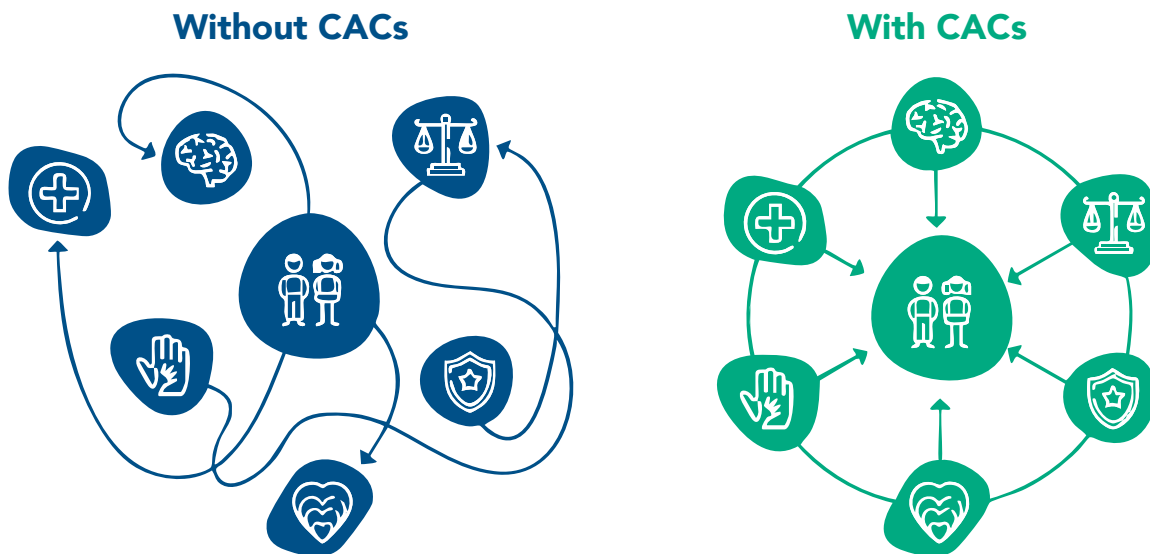
The purpose of this resource guide is to help military partners start building their partnerships with local CACs to improve collaboration and coordination of services for military families and support implementation of the national MOUs. By following the six steps outlined in this guide, military partners will be well-positioned to harness the power of CAC partnerships as part of a strong coordinated community response for military families.



Step 1: Learn about CACs

CACs are how communities provide a coordinated response to allegations of child abuse. To understand what a CAC is, you must understand what children face without one. Without a CAC, a child may have to describe their abuse experience repeatedly, to doctors, police, lawyers, therapists, investigators, prosecutors, and others. This is problematic both for the child's well-being and the investigation and prosecution efforts. Additionally, they may not get the help they need to heal once the investigation is over.

With a CAC, a child that is suspected of being abused, is brought to the CAC—a safe, child-focused environment—by a caregiver or other safe adult. At the CAC, the child shares their experience once with a trained forensic interviewer who conducts a developmentally appropriate and legally sound interview. Then, the multidisciplinary team that includes medical professionals, law enforcement, mental health providers, prosecution, child protective services, victim advocates, and other professionals, like those from Family Advocacy Program (FAP), make decisions together about how to best support the family. Finally, CACs offer a wide range of services like mental health treatment, medical exams, courtroom preparation, victim advocacy, case management, and more.



Check out the [Resources for Military Partners page](#) on NCA Engage to learn more about CACs and how they can support the families you work with.



Step 2: Find Your Local CAC and Make Introductions

NCA has developed a directory for military partners to identify Accredited CACs that have opted-in to participate in the national MOUs. CACs listed in this directory have reviewed the MOUs and are committed to working with military partners. This directory is maintained in the form of a map and includes contact details for points of contact and other information needed for collaboration. Military partners can access this map using the link provided to Military Criminal Investigative Organization (MCIO) and FAP leadership, or they can reach out to NCA to request the link.

The NCA website includes a public CAC directory with a search feature. Here, military partners can search by zip code, city, or state to find a list of all CACs near a given area. All CACs are listed in this directory, including CACs that are Accredited with NCA and those that are Associate/Developing, Affiliate, or Satellite members. CACs in this directory may or may not be signed on to participate in the military MOUs, but they are still available as resources to military families. Accredited CACs on this list, that aren't reflected on the MOU participation map, may still be open to case coordination and have yet to sign on the MOUs. Military partners are encouraged to reach out to their nearest CAC and discuss the potential for partnership.

Requesting a tour of the CAC closest to you and inviting your local CAC to your military installation is an effective starting point for partnership development. Giving the CAC a tour of the installation and a brief on your mission can help the CAC understand the unique needs and challenges your military families face. In addition to program orientation-related activities, CACs are available to partner with FAP and other military programs on community awareness and education efforts. Collaborating on education and awareness events provides relationship-building opportunities while helping increase the visibility of CAC services for military families.

When making contact with a CAC when there is not already a relationship established, military partners can ask if they have a military liaison or ask to speak with the MDT coordinator or family advocate.



Step 3: Identify and Maintain Points of Contact

Once military partners have identified their local CACs and made introductions, the next step is to identify who at the CAC should be the primary point of contact. Depending on the structure of the program, the CAC point of contact could be the executive director, an advocate, the MDT coordinator, or someone in another role at the center. Some CACs have specific roles dedicated to coordinating services for military families such as military victim advocates or military family liaisons. When meeting with your CAC initially, be sure to ask who the best point of contact would be for various partnership opportunities such as making referrals, coordinating services to families, and prevention or community education efforts.

Once contacts are established, it is a helpful practice for military partners to maintain contact lists for the CAC and multidisciplinary team members that can be shared widely on your teams and regularly updated.



Step 4: Learn each program's services and processes

Understanding how each system responds to reports of child abuse is the foundation to establishing a collaborative approach. CACs and military partner programs must understand how each other's processes work independently before developing a plan for coordination. Military partners may find it helpful to facilitate a process mapping exercise with CACs in which each program provides a detailed overview of their case activities from start to finish.

When learning about the CAC's processes, be sure to inquire about the services available at the CAC and the process and case criteria for referrals. All CACs set their own case acceptance criteria, so which cases can be referred to the CAC may differ slightly from center to center. In addition, while all CACs provide core services like forensic interviewing, medical evaluation and treatment, mental health treatment, family advocacy, and MDT coordination, how those services are administered vary depending on the needs of the community.

Sample Responsibilities of a CAC	Sample Responsibilities of Military Partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Screen families for military affiliation at intake	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sign onto CAC MDT protocols
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make appropriate military notifications and cross-reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participate in CAC MDTs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide forensic interviews, mental health, advocacy, and medical exams	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Invite CAC to participate in any military MDTs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide MDT coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share relevant case information
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Invite and encourage military partners to participate in MDT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Refer children to CAC for services
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participate in military MDTs as requested	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observe forensic interviews to eliminate need for duplicative interviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share relevant case information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accept referrals from CAC
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allow appropriate military partners to observe forensic interviews or provide post interview information to eliminate need for duplicative interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Include CAC personnel in clinical case staffing when applicable
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide treatment services or referrals for services not available at the CAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Notify CACs when changes in points of contact are expected



Step 5: Establish Protocols for CAC-Military Collaboration

Once CACs and military partners understand how their systems work independently, it's time to establish procedures for working together to provide a coordinated response for military families. Since every CAC has its own MDT protocols and operating procedures, protocols for CAC-military collaboration will look different from community to community, based on the needs of families and partner programs. Military partners can participate in established CAC MDT protocols which may include guidance such as:

- Who can refer a case to the CAC
- Services offered by the CAC
- Information sharing and mandated reporting guidelines
- Process for determining law enforcement jurisdiction
- Case staffing protocol
- Who observes or receives a copy of the forensic interview
- Who provides family advocacy services and referrals
- Participation and expectations for CAC case review
- Ongoing case tracking and updates on active-duty family transfers
- Record maintenance and destruction
- Maintaining contacts and planning for personnel transitions





Step 6: Establish Practices and Systems to Account for Turnover

Just like in military programs, staff turnover occurs with some frequency at CACs, too. Military partners should be proactive about planning for turnover and put systems into place to ensure continuity of partnership, even when contacts move on.

A facilitated introduction from the initial point of contact to the next is best practice for ensuring that CAC-military coordination continues even when our contacts transition. Including this expectation in protocols is essential. Military partners can request that CACs notify the military partner of changes and make the introduction when possible. In addition, it's essential that military programs keep CACs up to date when a PCS is expected or occurs.

Challenges often arise when military partners and CACs only have contact when a case is referred. If considerable time passes between referrals, military partners may lose connection with their CAC points of contact and the relationship development must begin from the beginning. Ongoing relationships with CAC contacts as MDT partners naturally support effective transitions. For example, if military partners ask to be invited to CAC community events, case review, continuing education trainings, and quarterly update meetings, the regular contact this provides will prompt notification of upcoming changes in personnel.



Conclusion


By taking the steps outlined in this guide, military partners can be proactive in establishing CAC partnerships and lay a strong foundation for working together to provide coordinated services.

For support with starting or strengthening your CAC partnership, please contact Amber Garrison-Ahmed, Coordinator for Federal Partnerships, at agarrisonahmed@nca-online.org or Heather Provencher, Senior Manager for Federal Partnerships to Military Families, at hprovencher@nca-online.org.

Additional Resources

Learn more about the CAC model, CAC services, and how you can partner to provide coordinated services to military families by exploring the resources below.

- [NCA Website–Support for Military Families Page](#)
Access to publicly available reports, links to maps, and fact sheets.
- [NCA Engage Learning Center – Military Partnerships Page](#)
Learning center site for the CAC audience that includes the full CAC-Military Partnership Webinar Series, fact sheet links, and the latest news on CAC-military partnerships.
- [NCA Engage Learning Center–Resources for Military Partners](#)
Resources and information for military-specific audiences.
- [National Children’s Alliance Member Directory](#)
Interactive search feature on NCA website to find a local CAC near you.



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