THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1200

MAR 5 1997

MEMORANDUM FOR: SURGEON GENERAL OF THE ARMY
SURGEON GENERAL OF THE NAVY
SURGEON GENERAL OF THE AIR FORCE

SUBJECT: Policy for Catchment Areas Under TRICARE

We have recently received reports indicating some military medical treatment facilities (MTFs) have denied TRICARE Prime enrollment to otherwise eligible beneficiaries because they reside outside of their catchment area. This memorandum is to clarify the role of catchment areas with respect to TRICARE.

By law, a catchment area is used to define the geographic area surrounding an MTF with inpatient capabilities, where an inpatient NAS is required for nonenrolled beneficiaries. Under TRICARE, a catchment area is also used as a planning tool to identify our eligible population, and define areas where our managed care support contractors must offer the TRICARE Prime benefit. Catchment areas shall not be used to limit enrollment for beneficiaries who reside outside of them. Beneficiaries who desire to enroll in TRICARE Prime may do so, with full understanding of the rules associated with enrollment. If beneficiaries who reside outside of the zip codes comprising the geographic area where TRICARE Prime has been established desire to enroll, they must be informed that the TRICARE drive time standards will not apply to them. Based on the scope of the managed care support contractor's network, an enrolled beneficiary residing outside of the area may be required to drive more than 30 minutes for primary care, and more than one hour for specialty care, and should fully understand their projected drive times upon enrollment.

If you have any question regarding this policy, our point of contact is Major Kathy Larkin at (703) 695-3323.

Edward D. Martin, M.D.
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary

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