

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-107170](#), a testimony before the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Some veterans and servicemembers experience challenges, such as mental illness, when readjusting to civilian life or continued military service. This can be due to trauma experienced during military service. VHA's Vet Centers provide services to eligible veterans, servicemembers, and their families.

This statement describes the findings from GAO's May 2022 report, [GAO-22-105039](#), which examined VHA's efforts to assess Vet Center clients' needs, tailor outreach activities and assess their effectiveness, and identify and address barriers to care. This statement also describes the status of VHA's efforts to implement GAO's recommendations. For this statement, GAO reviewed VHA's reports of steps RCS has taken to address GAO's recommendations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO made five recommendations in the May 2022 report to VHA to improve Vet Center processes. VHA concurred with GAO's recommendations and has implemented one of the recommendations. As of January 2024, VHA had taken steps to implement the remaining four, which remain open.

View [GAO-24-107170](#). For more information, contact Sharon M. Silas at (202) 512-7114 or silass@gao.gov.

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VETERANS HEALTH CARE

VHA Has Taken Steps towards Improving Vet Centers

What GAO Found

The Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) Readjustment Counseling Service (RCS) provides counseling to individuals, groups, couples, and families through 303 Vet Centers nationwide. In fiscal year 2023, RCS data show that Vet Centers provided about 1.3 million counseling visits to more than 104,000 clients.

Example of a Department of Veterans Affairs Vet Center Exterior



Source: Department of Veterans Affairs. | GAO-24-107170

In its May 2022 report, GAO found that VHA lacked processes that would help it better assess Vet Center activities. Specifically,

- **VHA did not collectively assess whether Vet Centers were meeting clients' needs.** GAO found that RCS and Vet Centers used assessments and feedback surveys to assess each individual client's needs. However, RCS had not assessed the extent to which Vet Centers were meeting the needs of client subpopulations, like those with traumatic brain injury, that may experience different readjustment challenges.
- **VHA lacked data to tailor outreach and assess its effectiveness.** GAO found that Vet Centers used data from outreach activities, such as the number of contacts made, to try to assess their effectiveness. However, there were limitations to using these data because not all outreach activities resulted in contacts, according to officials from RCS and Vet Centers.
- **VHA did not identify whether its actions were minimizing barriers to Vet Center care.** GAO found that RCS and Vet Center officials identified barriers to Vet Center care, such as lack of awareness of Vet Center services. Officials also identified steps they have taken to address barriers. However, RCS officials did not know the extent to which barriers to Vet Center care remained because RCS did not have an assessment process.

Based on these findings, GAO made five recommendations in its May 2022 report. As of January 2024, VHA had implemented one of GAO's recommendations by assessing the extent to which Vet Centers were meeting the needs of their clients collectively. VHA has taken some steps towards implementing the other four recommendations. Continued attention to these recommendations will help ensure veterans and servicemembers are receiving the help they need readjusting to civilian life or to continued military service.