

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-107083](#), a testimony before the Committees on Armed Services and Veterans' Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Each year, around 200,000 servicemembers transition out of the military. Various federal programs are designed to facilitate this transition. This includes helping servicemembers achieve their education, employment, and other goals and overcome potential challenges in adjusting to civilian life.

This testimony is based on GAO's past work on transition assistance and addresses: (1) DOD credentialing programs; (2) DOD's Transition Assistance Program; and (3) VA's Solid Start program.

For that work, GAO analyzed DOD and VA data and documents; interviewed relevant agency officials and representatives of selected veterans organizations; conducted site visits to military installations selected based on numbers of transitioning servicemembers and variation in service branch and location; and reviewed relevant federal laws and policies.

What GAO Recommends

Since February 2022, GAO has made 10 recommendations related to these military transition programs. The recommendations included assessing the effectiveness of DOD's credentialing programs and its service branches' use of TAP performance information to improve 2-day class attendance and timeliness of starting TAP. DOD concurred with the recommendations and identified planned steps and time frames toward their implementation. VA implemented the recommendation to further collaborate with veterans organizations to identify and address any outreach gaps.

View [GAO-24-107083](#). For more information, contact John D. Sawyer at (202) 512-7215 or sawyerj@gao.gov.

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MILITARY AND VETERAN SUPPORT

Programs to Help Servicemembers and New Veterans Transition to Civilian Life Could Be Enhanced

What GAO Found

GAO reviewed selected programs to help servicemembers transition to civilian life and has made numerous recommendations to the Departments of Defense (DOD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) to enhance their performance.

Servicemembers have the opportunity to obtain civilian credentials related to their military training and skills before they leave the military, which they can use to obtain civilian jobs after they leave. DOD facilitates credential attainment through two programs:

- Credentialing Opportunities Online helps servicemembers match their military occupations to civilian occupational credentials and may pay expenses related to pursuing professional certification, including books, tuition, and exam fees.
- United Services Military Apprenticeship Program allows servicemembers to complete civilian apprenticeship requirements while on active duty.

In [February 2022](#), GAO found that DOD had not fully assessed the effectiveness of these programs, resulting in an evidence gap. Such an assessment would enhance DOD's decision-making and ability to help servicemembers succeed in the civilian workforce after leaving the military.

Servicemembers preparing to leave the military generally must participate in the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). DOD service branches have implemented elements of TAP, such as ensuring that servicemembers meet with a TAP counselor, attend tailored 2-day classes, and participate in a counseling pathway tailored to the level of transition support a servicemember needs. However, in [July 2021](#), GAO found that selected small or remote installations experienced implementation challenges, according to TAP officials. Challenges included limited nearby employment opportunities, which officials mitigated by building relationships with local employers. In addition, GAO's [December 2022](#) analysis of TAP data from April 1, 2021, to March 31, 2022, showed that nearly a quarter of servicemembers who were required to attend a 2-day TAP class did not do so. GAO also found that most servicemembers (70 percent) did not start TAP more than 1 year in advance, as generally required. Additionally, DOD and the service branches were not using available performance data to understand root causes of poor participation and take appropriate corrective action.

Solid Start provides tailored information about resources and benefits to support veterans during their first year after leaving the military. GAO found in [January 2023](#) that VA representatives successfully contacted about 71 percent of eligible veterans in 2021, and these veterans used VA benefits to a greater extent than those who did not speak with a representative. However, GAO found that VA had not collaborated with veterans organizations to help connect with hard-to-reach veterans. As a result, GAO recommended greater collaboration with these organizations. VA has since implemented the recommendation by augmenting its collaboration and outreach efforts. As a result, VA should be able to connect directly with even more veterans and make them aware of their benefits.