

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-581](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

HUD reported in 2011 that nearly 8.5 million lower-income families paid more than half their monthly income for rent, lived in substandard housing, or both. As the number of those needing assistance is greater than existing federal programs can serve, if families were able to increase their income and no longer require housing assistance, spaces could become available for other needy families. HUD offers several competitive grants that PHAs can use to hire staff who link residents to services or implement programs that encourage self-sufficiency. GAO was asked to examine the effectiveness of HUD's efforts to promote self-sufficiency among residents. Among its objectives, this report describes (1) costs and resident participation in HUD grant programs for PHAs that encourage work and self-sufficiency and (2) available information on the programs' effects on residents.

GAO reviewed HUD's goals for encouraging self-sufficiency, program descriptions, and regulations; analyzed grant award data for fiscal years 2006-2011 and available outcome information; and interviewed HUD and PHA officials.

What GAO Recommends

For three of its self-sufficiency programs, HUD should develop processes and program-specific reporting guidance to better ensure required data on participation and outcomes are complete. HUD agreed with three recommendations but disagreed that it should analyze data for the ROSS SC program. GAO believes that analysis of program data is critical for assessing outcomes.

View [GAO-13-581](#). For more information, contact Mathew Scire at (202) 512-8678 or ScireMJ@gao.gov.

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RENTAL HOUSING ASSISTANCE

HUD Data on Self-Sufficiency Programs Should Be Improved

What GAO Found

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds five key grant programs that encourage resident self-sufficiency. In fiscal year 2011, HUD awarded \$113 million to the Housing Choice Voucher Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS), Public Housing FSS, and Resident Opportunity and Self-Sufficiency Service Coordinators (ROSS SC) programs. Public housing agencies (PHA) with HOPE VI grants or designated as Moving to Work (MTW) agencies spent a portion of their funds on activities that encourage self-sufficiency, but the amounts MTW agencies spent are not known for the program as a whole. Additionally, data on resident participation in the five programs were limited. The number of families that participated in the FSS programs and ROSS SC cannot be reliably assessed due to missing start dates, end dates, and annual updates, and a lack of reporting guidance. HOPE VI data on residents' participation does not include information on the elderly or persons with disabilities. Programwide MTW data on participation generally were unavailable. Internal control standards for the federal government state that program managers need operational data to determine whether they are meeting goals for accountability (effective and efficient use of resources). Without complete participation data, HUD lacks key information to effectively manage and evaluate its programs and Congress lacks data needed to oversee the programs.

HUD lacks a strategy for using data it requires of PHAs to expand what is known about outcomes in four of the programs. HUD has performed limited analysis of the data related to self-sufficiency outcomes for both types of FSS grants reported into its information systems. HUD has not analyzed similar data reported for ROSS SC and MTW activities. However, for HOPE VI HUD collects consistent, outcome-based measures for participation in self-sufficiency activities and uses the data to track residents' progress towards self-sufficiency. Internal control standards underline the importance not only of collecting but also using information to achieve programmatic goals. Also, the GPRM Modernization Act of 2010 (GPRAMA) emphasizes the need for information on the effectiveness of federal programs to improve congressional decision making. A strategy for using these data could inform overall management review, congressional oversight, and planning for these programs. Using such data could help HUD identify from which PHAs to draw lessons to help improve HUD management of the programs as well as PHA management of self-sufficiency-related activities. GAO's analysis of available data on residents who participated in the FSS programs suggests positive changes for those who completed the programs, but the results are not conclusive because data indicating whether a family exited FSS or subsidized housing were missing for 35 percent of families that started an FSS program in 2006.