

Why GAO Did This Study

Despite a large decline over the past decade, an estimated 37,000 veterans in the United States experienced homelessness in 2019. GAO was asked to review federal assistance programs for homeless veterans. Among other objectives, this report (1) discusses challenges agencies and service providers cited in implementing selected programs; (2) evaluates how USICH, VA, and HUD collaborate; and (3) reviews selected programs' performance.

GAO analyzed federal guidance and performance data; interviewed VA, DOL, HUD and USICH officials; and met with local VA staff and service providers from selected programs at six sites. Programs were selected based on size (the largest based on funding and veterans served) and the kinds of services they offer; sites were selected for geographic diversity, among other factors. The results of these interviews are not generalizable.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations: VA should provide additional information on how local providers can collaborate; DOL should document data quality validation processes for its homeless veterans program; and VA should clearly communicate with local VA staff and providers about how it measures performance and how to obtain and provide feedback. VA agreed with the recommendations. DOL neither agreed nor disagreed. GAO maintains that DOL should document its data quality processes, as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-20-428](#). For more information, contact Alicia Puente Cackley at (202) 512-8678 or cackleya@gao.gov.

HOMELESS VETERANS

Opportunities Exist to Strengthen Interagency Collaboration and Performance Measurement Procedures

What GAO Found

The Departments of Veterans Affairs (VA), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Labor (DOL) provide programs aimed at assisting homeless veterans. Local VA staff and service providers—who receive grants from federal agencies—provide services to homeless veterans within their communities. In interviews with GAO, they cited challenges in implementing selected programs:

- **Staffing shortages.** Shortages in VA case managers may limit the number of veterans they are able to serve.
- **Housing cost and availability.** High housing costs and limited stock make it difficult to find affordable housing for homeless veterans.
- **Transportation limitations.** Service providers may cover large geographic areas and limited public transportation strains their ability to provide services.

Steps that VA and other agencies are taking to address these challenges include contracting out for services to address limited staffing, offering rental subsidies for very low-income veterans, and working with community partners to assist with transportation.

Two key federal collaboration mechanisms to address veteran homelessness are a U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) working group to coordinate agencies at the national level and a HUD initiative that coordinates stakeholders at the local level. Both efforts incorporate many leading practices for effective interagency collaboration identified by GAO in prior work. However, local VA staff and service providers stated that they would like additional information—such as on best practices—from VA on how to collaborate more effectively at the local level. While VA has issued some broad guidance, more specific information on effective collaboration on issues such as making referrals and data sharing could better position local VA staff and service providers to aid homeless veterans.

VA and DOL have multiple measures in place to assess the performance of the programs GAO selected for review, and most of the measures met their national targets from 2015 to 2019. The measures incorporated most leading practices for performance measurement—such as having measureable targets. However, DOL does not have a written policy on its process for validating its performance data, and as a result may not have reasonable assurance that these are the most accurate and reliable performance data available. Further, some local VA staff and service providers misunderstood how program data were used in assessing performance while others were unaware of VA's feedback processes on performance measures. Additional clarity and communication about VA's performance measures would help local VA staff and service providers better understand how program data are used to measure—and can be used to improve—performance.