

December 2012

MILITARY SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

DOD Can Improve Guidance and Performance Monitoring



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Why GAO Did This Study

The approximately 725,000 spouses of active duty servicemembers face challenges to maintaining a career, including having to move frequently. Their employment is often important to the financial well-being of their families. For these reasons, DOD has taken steps in recent years to help military spouses obtain employment. Moreover, the federal government has hiring mechanisms to help military spouses obtain federal jobs.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012 requires GAO to report on the programs that help military spouses obtain jobs. This report examines: (1) DOD's recent efforts to help military spouses obtain employment, (2) DOD's steps to assess effectiveness of these efforts, and (3) the hiring mechanisms to help military spouses obtain federal jobs. GAO conducted interviews with DOD, the Office of Personnel Management, and two advocacy groups; conducted site visits; analyzed relevant data; and reviewed relevant documents, laws, and regulations.

GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD consider incorporating (1) key collaboration practices as it develops its spouse employment guidance, and (2) key attributes of successful performance measures as it develops and finalizes its performance measures. DOD partially concurred with the two recommendations, citing steps it has already taken. GAO recognizes DOD's efforts, but given their preliminary nature, GAO continues to believe DOD would benefit from further incorporating key practices and attributes.

View [GAO-13-60](#). For more information, contact Andrew Sherrill at (202) 512-7215 or sherrilla@gao.gov.

MILITARY SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

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What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) has recently created three new programs to help military spouses obtain employment: (1) the Military Spouse Career Advancement Accounts (MyCAA) tuition assistance program, (2) the Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP), which connects military spouses with employers, (3) and the Military Spouse Career Center, consisting of a call center and a website for military spouses to obtain counseling and information. DOD's goals for these programs are to reduce unemployment among military spouses and close their wage gap with civilian spouses. Aside from these new programs, military spouses can also use employment assistance programs that the military services have long operated on DOD installations. However, GAO's site visits and interviews indicate that there may be gaps in coordination across the various programs that result in confusion for military spouses. Currently, DOD does not have guidance describing its overall strategy and how all of its programs should coordinate to help military spouses obtain employment, but DOD is in the process of developing such guidance.

DOD is not yet able to measure the overall effectiveness of its military spouse employment programs and its performance monitoring is limited, but DOD is taking steps to improve its monitoring and evaluation. To determine whether its programs have been effective in reducing unemployment among military spouses and closing their wage gap with civilian spouses, DOD is planning to contract with a research organization for a long-term evaluation. With regard to its performance monitoring for these programs, DOD has performance measures for MSEP and MyCAA, but has no measures for the Career Center. In addition, reliability of the data is questionable on the MSEP performance measure because DOD's data are derived from an informal and inconsistent process. DOD's other measure—the percentage of courses funded by MyCAA tuition assistance that military spouses complete with a passing grade—is a useful interim measure for monitoring how the funds are being used, but it does not provide information on whether the funds help military spouses obtain employment. DOD has efforts underway to improve its performance monitoring, including identifying additional measures it would like to track and collecting additional data on participants' employment and educational outcomes.

The federal government has two hiring mechanisms that can provide military spouses who meet the eligibility criteria with some advantages in the federal hiring process. The first mechanism—a non-competitive authority—allows federal agencies the option of hiring qualified military spouses without going through the competitive process. The second mechanism—DOD's Military Spouse Preference program—provides military spouses priority in selection for certain DOD jobs. These hiring mechanisms can increase a military spouse's chances of obtaining federal employment, but they do not guarantee that military spouses will obtain the job they apply for. In fiscal year 2011, agencies used the noncompetitive authority to hire about 1,200 military spouses, which represented approximately 0.5 percent of all federal hires that year. Military spouses represented 0.4 percent of the working-age population in 2010. With regard to the Military Spouse Preference program, DOD has placed about 12,500 military spouses into civil service jobs in the past 10 years, which includes both new hires and conversions of DOD employees.

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Abbreviations

Career Center	Military Spouse Career Center
CPDF	Central Personnel Data File
DOD	Department of Defense
MSEP	Military Spouse Employment Partnership
MSP	Military Spouse Preference
MyCAA	Military Spouse Career Advancement Accounts
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
SECO	Spouse Education and Career Opportunities
TAP	Transition Assistance Program

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Accountability * Integrity * Reliability

United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

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Congressional Committees

For many of the approximately 725,000 spouses of active duty servicemembers, the special conditions of military life may make it difficult to start or maintain a career. Military spouses may have to move frequently to keep families together when servicemembers are relocated, or they may have to bear a larger share of family responsibilities, particularly during servicemembers' deployments. Some studies have found that being a military spouse is correlated with a higher unemployment rate and a lower wage on average, compared to civilian spouses.¹ The employment situation of military spouses, in turn, affects the well-being of the military family and may also influence whether a servicemember chooses to remain in the military. For these reasons, the Department of Defense (DOD) has recently made new efforts to help military spouses obtain employment. In addition, the federal government has established special hiring mechanisms targeted to those military spouses interested in obtaining federal jobs.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012 mandates that we review the DOD spouse employment programs as well as the federal hiring mechanisms targeted to help military spouses.² This report addresses the following questions: (1) What efforts has DOD recently made to help military spouses prepare for and obtain employment? (2) What steps has DOD taken to assess the effectiveness of these programs? (3) What hiring mechanisms exist to help military spouses obtain federal jobs? In June and July 2012, we provided briefings to cognizant committee staff. This report summarizes those briefings and provides additional information.

To identify DOD's efforts to help military spouses prepare for and obtain employment and to examine the steps DOD has taken to assess the

¹Nelson Lim and David Schulker, *Measuring Underemployment Among Military Spouses* (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 2010); Nelson Lim, Daniela Golinelli, and Michelle Cho, *Working Around the Military' Revisited: Spouse Employment in the 2000 Census Data* (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 2007).

²Pub. L. No. 112-81, § 578, 125 Stat. 1298.

effectiveness of these programs, we conducted interviews with key officials involved in DOD's spouse employment programs from DOD headquarters and each of the military services (Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, and Navy). We also reviewed DOD's program descriptions, funding data, strategic planning documents, performance reports, guidance, and other relevant documents. To identify the hiring mechanisms that can help military spouses obtain federal jobs, we interviewed officials at the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and DOD's civilian personnel office and reviewed relevant federal laws, regulations, and guidance. To determine how many spouses were hired under these mechanisms, we analyzed data from OPM's Central Personnel Data File (CPDF) and obtained data from DOD. We assessed the reliability of these data by reviewing relevant documents, interviewing DOD and OPM officials about the data, and conducting electronic testing of the CPDF data. We found the data sufficiently reliable for our purposes. To supplement the information we obtained from DOD central offices and OPM, we interviewed local program officials and spouses at three military installations in the Washington, D.C.-area—Fort Meade (Army and Navy programs), Joint Base Andrews (Air Force), and Henderson Hall (Marine Corps). The information we obtained from these site visits is not generalizable. We also interviewed two advocacy groups for military families to obtain their perspectives on DOD's efforts to provide employment services to military spouses.

We conducted this performance audit from March 2012 to December 2012, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives (see appendix I for further information on our scope and methodology).

Background

Employment Conditions of Military Spouses

Among the 1.4 million active duty servicemembers in fiscal year 2011, over half (57 percent) were married, according to DOD's data.³ More than 90 percent of the spouses of active duty servicemembers were women. Recent studies have found that among those in the labor force, being a military spouse is correlated with a higher unemployment rate, compared to civilian spouses.⁴ In addition, among those employed, being a military spouse is correlated with a lower wage on average, relative to civilian spouses. Researchers have posited several possible reasons for this. First, military spouses tend to be a younger group than civilian spouses, as well as more likely to be caring for young children. As a result, a larger proportion of military spouses are more likely to be at the beginning of their careers compared to civilian spouses, and a larger proportion have childrearing responsibilities that may make obtaining or maintaining a job more challenging. Second, military spouses move more often than civilian spouses as a whole, which may make it more difficult to retain jobs and develop careers. Some have also speculated that employers may be less willing to hire military spouses than other populations, for example, if they are concerned that military spouses will relocate. Third, demanding work schedules for the servicemembers may mean that spouses bear a larger share of childrearing or other family responsibilities, particularly when servicemembers are deployed. One recent study controlled for many of these characteristics and found that they explained some, though not all,

³Department of Defense, *2011 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community* (November 2012).

⁴Lim, Golinelli, and Cho, 2007; Lim and Schulker, 2010. The 2007 study by Lim, Golinelli, and Cho examined differences in employment situations between military wives and civilian wives, as well as between military husbands and civilian husbands, using 2000 Census data. This study found that among both wives and husbands, being married to an active duty servicemember was correlated with a higher unemployment rate and a lower wage on average, compared to their civilian counterparts. The 2010 study by Lim and Schulker examined differences in employment situations between military and civilian wives using data from the 2006 Current Population Survey data and a DOD survey of military spouses. The study found that being a military wife was correlated with a higher unemployment rate relative to civilian wives. Both studies also found that being a military spouse was correlated with a lower rate of labor force participation, compared to civilian spouses.

of the correlation between being a military spouse and having a higher unemployment rate and lower average wage, relative to civilian spouses.⁵

DOD Employment Assistance Programs and Other Efforts to Help Military Spouses

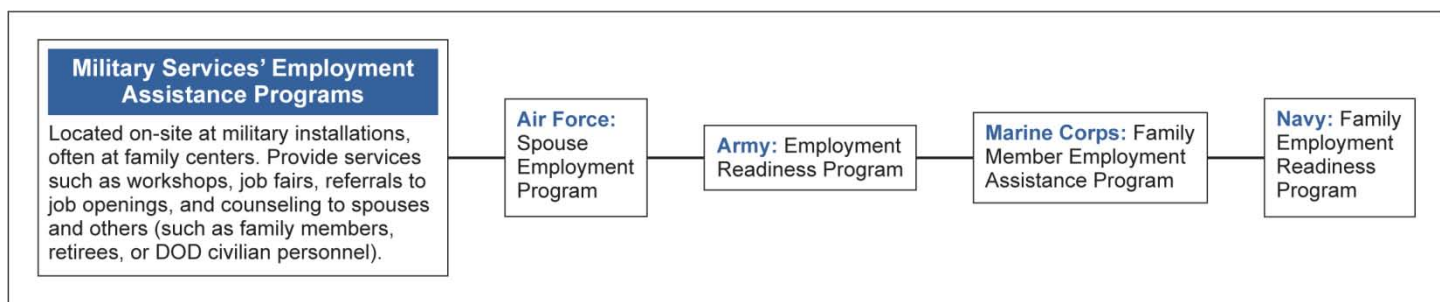
Recognizing the challenges that military spouses face in beginning or maintaining a career, DOD has historically had efforts to help military spouses obtain employment. The military services have operated employment assistance programs at military installations since the 1980s. While these programs serve spouses, they also serve many other populations in the military community, including dependent children, active duty servicemembers, active Reserve and National Guard members, DOD civilian personnel, servicemembers transitioning to civilian life, wounded warriors, and DOD retirees (see fig. 1). These programs assist in a variety of ways, including providing referrals to job openings, job fairs, one-on-one employment counseling, and workshops on resume writing, networking, entrepreneurship, and other topics. These programs are often located at military installations' family centers, where a variety of "family readiness services" are provided.⁶ These services may include relocation assistance (e.g., providing information on housing, child care, and schooling options), non-medical counseling, financial education and counseling, deployment assistance (e.g., educating servicemembers and their families about challenges they may face and services to help them cope), services for family members with special needs, child abuse and domestic violence prevention and response, emergency family

⁵Lim, Golinelli, and Cho, 2007. A 2010 study by Lim and Schulker controlled for several demographic and contextual factors and did not find significant differences in unemployment rates between military and civilian wives. However, they found that being a military wife was correlated with a greater likelihood of working part-time involuntarily and working in a job for which she might have more years of education than average among workers in her occupation, compared to civilian wives with similar characteristics.

⁶The family centers are the Airman and Family Readiness Center, Army Community Service, Marine Corps Community Services, and Navy Fleet and Family Support Center. DOD issued a new instruction on family readiness services in July 2012. Pursuant to that instruction, family readiness services are composed of both DOD-operated and community-based services that are delivered through a variety of access points, including Military and Family Support Centers (the new term that refers to family centers). The purpose of family readiness services is to help servicemembers and their families manage the challenges of daily living experienced in the unique context of military service. DOD Instruction 1342.22, *Military Family Readiness* (July 3, 2012).

assistance, and transition assistance to help servicemembers separating from the military and their families to reenter the civilian workforce.⁷

Figure 1: Military Services' Employment Assistance Programs



Source: GAO analysis of DOD documents and interviews.

Over the years, the Congress and the executive branch have sought to enhance the employment assistance provided to military spouses. In 2001, Congress directed DOD to examine its spouse employment programs and develop partnerships with private-sector firms to provide for improved job portability for spouses, among other things.⁸ A study we conducted in 2002 discussed a number of efforts DOD was making, including holding a “spouse employment summit” to identify needed actions, establishing partnerships with private-sector employers, and seeking the Department of Labor’s assistance to resolve issues with different state residency and licensing requirements for particular occupations.⁹ More recently, in 2008, Congress authorized DOD to establish programs to assist spouses of active duty servicemembers in obtaining the education and training required for a degree, credential, education prerequisites, or professional license that expands employment

⁷Aside from the military services’ employment assistance programs, spouses may also access state-run employment centers mandated by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, known as “one-stops.” At these one-stops, states and localities are required to provide access to the services of many federally funded employment and training programs.

⁸National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2002, Pub. Law No. 107-107, § 571, 115 Stat. 1012, 1120 (2001).

⁹GAO, *Military Personnel: Active Duty Benefits Reflect Changing Demographics, but Opportunities Exist to Improve*, [GAO-02-935](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 18, 2002).

and portable career opportunities.¹⁰ Congress also authorized DOD to establish a pilot program to help military spouses secure internships at federal agencies by reimbursing agencies for the costs associated with the first year of employment of an eligible spouse.¹¹ In 2011, the administration issued a report identifying commitments federal agencies made to help military spouses obtain employment.¹² In that report, DOD committed to expanding an employer partnership program that the Army initiated in 2003 to the other military services, improving employment counseling, and providing financial assistance to help certain spouses obtain further education.

DOD Has Initiated Programs and Is Developing Guidance for Collaboration

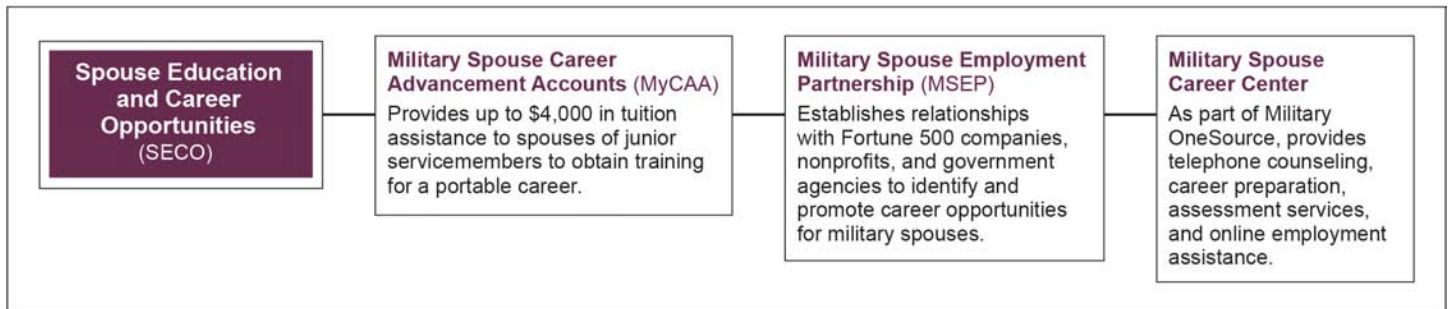
Since 2009, DOD has established three programs targeted to military spouses to help them obtain employment: (1) the Military Spouse Career Advancement Accounts (MyCAA) tuition assistance program; (2) the Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP), which connects military spouses with employers; and (3) the Military Spouse Career Center, consisting of a call center and a website through which spouses can obtain counseling and information. These three programs comprise DOD's Spouse Education and Career Opportunities (SECO) initiative (see fig. 2). DOD has two goals for its SECO programs: (1) reduce unemployment among military spouses and (2) close their wage gap with civilian spouses.

¹⁰National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009, Pub. Law No. 110-417, § 582, 112 Stat. 4356, 4473 (2008).

¹¹National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010, Pub. Law No. 111-84, § 564, 123 Stat. 2190, 2308 (2009). In fiscal year 2011, DOD piloted an internship program to help spouses obtain jobs with federal agencies. During the 1-year pilot program, DOD helped seven spouses obtain internships. DOD reimbursed federal agencies for the first year's salary, benefits, and training costs for those spouses, with the intent that after the first year, they would be able to obtain permanent positions and career progression. DOD discontinued this pilot in fiscal year 2012 because according to a DOD official, it was difficult to promote the internship program to federal agencies. In addition, the official said there were existing hiring mechanisms to assist spouses in obtaining federal employment without expending DOD funds.

¹²*Strengthening our Military Families: Meeting America's Commitment* (January 2011). This report was issued pursuant to a presidential directive to national security staff (Presidential Study Directive #9).

Figure 2: DOD Employment Programs Targeted to Military Spouses



Source: GAO analysis of DOD documents and interviews.

Military Spouse Career Advancement Accounts (MyCAA): DOD created the MyCAA program to help spouses obtain further education and training toward a portable career. To enroll in this program, spouses must identify the course of study they want to pursue, develop an educational plan, and apply to DOD for tuition assistance. The tuition funds must be used for education or training toward a portable career field, defined by DOD and the Department of Labor as a high-growth, high-demand career field that is likely to have job openings near military installations.¹³ Since its inception in 2009, there have been several changes to the program’s eligibility criteria and benefits. After a pilot period, DOD established that any spouse of an active duty servicemember could participate in the program and could receive up to \$6,000 in tuition funds for any continuing education, including educational programs to obtain certificates and licenses, as well as bachelor’s and advanced degrees.¹⁴ Due to concerns about rising costs and enrollment requests, however, DOD (1) tightened the eligibility criteria to target the program to spouses of junior servicemembers, (2) reduced the benefit amount to \$4,000, and (3) restricted the funds’ use to the attainment of certificates and licenses for

¹³According to DOD officials, DOD relies on the Department of Labor’s database of in-demand occupations to identify portable careers eligible for MyCAA tuition assistance. DOD provides a list of portable careers on their Military OneSource website and encourages spouses to contact a Career Center counselor to help them identify portable careers.

¹⁴MyCAA began in 2007 as a demonstration project with the Department of Labor to provide tuition assistance to spouses of junior servicemembers in eight states.

portable careers, not for bachelor's or advanced degrees.¹⁵ In our site visits and interviews with advocacy groups, some felt that the program should be expanded to allow spouses to obtain higher-level degrees or enable more spouses to use the program. DOD officials said that MyCAA's revised criteria reflects the original intent of the program and ensures fiscal sustainability. In fiscal year 2011, DOD spent approximately \$55 million on the MyCAA program; however, MyCAA's expenditures have fluctuated as the program has changed. Specifically, DOD's spending increased in the first 2 years after it was launched, and then declined 70 percent in its third year, after DOD changed the eligibility criteria, benefit amount, and types of training or educational programs for which the funds could be used (see appendix II for further information on MyCAA expenditures). According to a DOD official, approximately 125,000 spouses received MyCAA tuition assistance from October 2008 to May 2012.

Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP): DOD created MSEP in 2011 as an expansion of an Army program to connect spouses from all services to employment opportunities at Fortune 500 companies, nonprofits, and government agencies.¹⁶ Specifically, MSEP establishes partnerships with employers who pledge to offer spouses transferrable, portable career opportunities. Any spouse interested in working for these employers then registers for MSEP and accesses MSEP's web-based portal. The MSEP portal allows spouses to search for job openings posted by participating employers, build their resume, and apply for jobs. Currently, MSEP is partnering with more than 125 companies, according to DOD. In fiscal year 2011, DOD spent \$1.2 million on the MSEP program for the contractors that operate and enhance the web-based portal and work with employers (see appendix II for further information on MSEP expenditures).

Military Spouse Career Center (the Career Center): The Career Center consists of a call center, through which spouses can speak with

¹⁵Specifically, those eligible for MyCAA are spouses of servicemembers on active duty in pay grades E1 to E5, W-1 to W-2, and O-1 to O-2 who can start and complete their coursework while the servicemember is on Title 10 military orders. This includes spouses married to members of the National Guard and Reserve Components in these same pay grades.

¹⁶The MSEP program was an expansion of the Army Spouse Employment Partnership, which was instituted in 2003.

employment counselors, and a website with employment information.¹⁷ The counselors at the call center and the website provide assistance with spouses' general employment needs, such as exploring career options, resume writing, interviewing, and job search. In addition, the Career Center helps spouses learn about and navigate DOD's other spouse employment programs. For example, spouses interested in MyCAA may speak with a counselor at the Career Center to help them develop their education plan, which is a requirement for receiving MyCAA benefits. Until recently, the Career Center was part of DOD's Military OneSource, which provides information and referral to services for servicemembers and their families. Information has not been available on the amount spent on the Career Center because expenditure data for the center was not separated from Military OneSource expenditures. DOD has recently separated the Career Center from Military OneSource.

In addition to the three SECO programs, spouses can also receive employment assistance from the long-standing programs operated at military service installations.¹⁸ The services' programs also provide counseling to spouses and information about DOD's spouse employment programs, but they differ from the Career Center in that they are provided in-person. For example, some of the activities offered for spouses at installations we visited in the Washington, D.C. area include an annual spouse job fair, a dress-for-success workshop with stylists at a department store, and a spouse support group with guest speakers, such as MSEP representatives.¹⁹ DOD officials explained that they created the Career Center to supplement the services' programs, which may not have been fully meeting the needs of all spouses. The military services'

¹⁷According to DOD data, the Career Center received about 185,000 phone calls in fiscal year 2011.

¹⁸Spouses may also use services provided by the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), a partnership among DOD, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Veterans Affairs. TAP helps servicemembers transitioning out of the military with employment and relocation assistance and with assistance obtaining a variety of other benefits and services, such as veterans benefits, educational opportunities, health and life insurance, and financial planning. DOD officials said that although TAP services may be available to spouses, few spouses use TAP for employment assistance. A DOD official stated that the TAP program is currently being revised and plans to have three new tracks available for spouses in late 2012.

¹⁹The services' employment programs are generally part of broader budgets, such as base operations and support, and funds spent on employment assistance for military spouses are not separately tracked.

programs are available only during business hours and may not be accessible to spouses who do not live on a military installation. In contrast, any military spouse may access the Career Center, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Furthermore, DOD officials noted that installations vary in the level of employment assistance they provide to spouses. For example, some of the services' employment assistance programs are staffed by generalists who provide other types of counseling as well, and many of the services' programs also serve other members of the military community, such as servicemembers and retirees. In contrast, the Career Center is staffed by counselors with specialized knowledge in employment services, and the counselors are focused specifically on assisting military spouses. With the Career Center, spouses who do not feel that the employment assistance programs at their local installation are meeting their needs have an alternative resource they can turn to.

The creation of the new SECO programs has had many benefits, according to advocacy group representatives, program staff, and spouses we interviewed. Officials and spouses agreed that these programs help address unique challenges faced by military spouses, such as frequent relocation to installations with varying services offered. For example, a spouse we spoke with explained how she spoke with a Career Center counselor to identify job opportunities in a rural installation and applied for MyCAA tuition assistance upon relocating to another installation. Additionally, one official with a spouse group praised MSEP for connecting spouses with private sector job opportunities throughout the nation.

However, with the establishment of the new SECO programs overlaid on the services' existing programs, program staff, spouses, and advocacy groups we spoke with expressed some confusion and noted gaps in coordination:

- A representative from an advocacy group noted that the information spouses are provided about the various employment programs is inconsistent across installations and websites, and the names and terminology used for the programs also varies. This may make it confusing for spouses as they move and seek assistance in different locations.
- The advocacy group representatives also said that while the various programs refer spouses to other programs, spouses may not be provided information to help them make the best use of other programs. For example, they said that staff at the services' employment assistance programs may refer spouses to the Career

Center website but do not inform them about the breadth of services that Career Center counselors can provide. As a result, some spouses may not be aware of the various types of assistance that the Career Center can offer. With regard to MSEP, the representatives said that counselors at the Career Center and the services' employment assistance programs refer spouses to the MSEP web portal but do not provide them with further guidance on how they can effectively use the portal to obtain a job with an MSEP partner.

- An advocacy group representative and program managers we spoke with indicated that the various programs' websites may not be easy to navigate or find. For example, a representative from an advocacy group noted that the Career Center website has good information, but it is difficult for spouses to find it within the Military OneSource website. A program manager at one installation said that some spouses have had difficulty finding the MyCAA website. Another program manager said that the Career Center website does not have links to local installations' employment assistance programs.

Additionally, during our site visits and interviews, we heard about some issues that have been created by having two different programs—the Career Center and the military services' employment assistance programs—that appear to offer some similar services. Specifically, we heard the following accounts about how often spouses are referred to the Career Center, instances where spouses have been referred back and forth between the two programs, and potential duplication of efforts:

- A program manager at one installation noted that she would not refer spouses to the Career Center unless she was unable to handle the workload.
- A program manager at one installation said that she refers spouses to the Career Center when she believes the type or level of services they need would be better provided by Career Center counselors. However, she said, in several cases, those spouses have been referred back to her.
- At a different installation, a program manager said that she encourages her staff to refer spouses to the Career Center because of the quality of services offered. However, she also noted that because the Career Center provides some of the same services as her office (e.g., counseling and help with resume writing and interviewing skills), there is a potential duplication of effort. She said that it would be acceptable to her if her office no longer provided

those employment services that the Career Center can provide and instead, focused on delivering other services spouses need.

DOD has taken some steps to help spouses navigate among the various programs. Its guidance for its family readiness programs, which the military services' employment assistance programs are one part of, directs military services' staff to assess a spouse's need for SECO services and identify opportunities to refer spouses to other services that support their well-being. In addition, DOD officials said they recently established a policy to ensure that MyCAA participants were referred to the other SECO programs. Beginning in early 2012, spouses who want to enroll in MyCAA are expected to speak with a counselor at the Career Center first and also register for MSEP.

However, DOD does not currently have guidance describing its overall strategy and how its various programs should coordinate to help spouses obtain employment. According to DOD officials, DOD is in the process of developing such guidance to provide direction on SECO programs and address coordination and referral among the various programs. To do so, DOD has convened an advisory group that includes representatives from all of the services. As DOD develops its new guidance, our prior work on enhancing and sustaining collaboration may be helpful. We identified the following eight practices that can help sustain collaboration across organizational boundaries:²⁰

1. Define and articulate a common outcome.
2. Establish mutually reinforcing or joint strategies.
3. Identify and address needs by leveraging resources.
4. Agree on roles and responsibilities.
5. Establish compatible policies, procedures, and other means to operate across agency boundaries.

²⁰GAO, *Results-Oriented Government: Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies*, [GAO-06-15](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 21, 2005). See also our report on interagency collaborative mechanisms, *Managing for Results: Key Considerations for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms*, [GAO-12-1022](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 27, 2012).

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6. Develop mechanisms to monitor, evaluate, and report on results.
 7. Reinforce agency accountability for collaborative efforts through agency plans and reports.
 8. Reinforce individual accountability for collaborative efforts through performance management systems.

While all of these are relevant to DOD's spouse employment programs, two are particularly relevant because of the issues raised in our site visits and interviews: (1) agreeing on roles and responsibilities, and (2) establishing compatible policies, procedures, and other means to operate across agency boundaries. The concerns about duplication of effort and referrals back and forth between the Career Center and the military services' programs may indicate that the roles and responsibilities of the two programs may not be sufficiently clear or defined. Similarly, the inconsistencies and gaps in collaboration may indicate a need to establish compatible policies, procedures, or other operational means, for example, common names and terminology for the programs and new procedures or mechanisms to ensure spouses are informed about the programs that can help them.

DOD Currently Cannot Measure the Effectiveness of Its Programs, but Efforts Are Underway

DOD is not yet able to measure the overall effectiveness of its spouse employment programs in achieving the goals of reducing unemployment among military spouses and the wage gap with civilian spouses. Additionally, DOD only has limited information on the performance of its individual programs.²¹ DOD is aware of these limitations and is taking steps to assess the programs' effectiveness and develop a more robust performance monitoring system.

²¹Measuring performance has important distinctions from assessing effectiveness. Performance measurement is the ongoing monitoring and reporting of program accomplishments, particularly progress toward pre-established goals. Performance measures may address the type or level of program activities conducted (process), the direct products or services delivered by a program (outputs), or the results of those products and services (outcomes). However, when a program's desired outcomes are known to be influenced by factors outside the program, measures of program outcomes alone may provide limited information on a program's effectiveness. In these cases, an impact evaluation can be used to assess a program's effectiveness. Impact evaluations attempt to isolate the program's impact from other factors, but they can be expensive and difficult to conduct.

To assess effectiveness of the three SECO programs, DOD is planning on contracting with a research organization to conduct a long-term evaluation. DOD officials would like the research organization to examine whether the programs have affected spouses' unemployment rates and their wage gap with civilian spouses, as well as determine whether the programs have had an effect on servicemembers' retention in the military and the families' financial well-being. It is too soon to tell whether this evaluation will be able to measure these possible outcomes and also demonstrate whether the outcomes can be attributed to DOD's spouse employment programs.²² DOD officials anticipate establishing the contract for this evaluation in fiscal year 2013.

In the meantime, DOD is conducting limited monitoring of the performance of two of its spouse employment programs. First, DOD monitors the number of spouses hired by employers participating in MSEP. Second, DOD tracks the percentage of courses funded by MyCAA tuition assistance that spouses complete with a passing grade.

DOD's performance monitoring is limited for several reasons. First, DOD has no performance measures for the Career Center. Second, DOD's data on the MSEP program are of questionable reliability because they derive from an informal, nonstandardized process. Specifically, the data on the number of spouses hired by employers participating in MSEP are collected primarily by Army program managers through informal contacts with spouses. These informal methods create the potential that DOD is not obtaining reliable data. For example, if program managers vary in the questions they ask spouses, information spouses provide may be inconsistent. Moreover, by using data primarily from Army program managers, DOD is missing information from spouses of servicemembers in the Air Force, Marine Corps, and Navy who are working at MSEP employers.²³ Finally, DOD's performance measure for MyCAA—showing

²² For example, changes in military spouses' unemployment rates over time are likely to be affected by labor market conditions in the United States. An impact evaluation would attempt to isolate the effect of the program from the effects of labor market conditions and other external factors by comparing program outcomes with an estimate of what would have happened in the absence of the program.

²³ Aside from the Army data, DOD also includes spouses hired at exchanges and commissaries at DOD installations when reporting data on the number of spouses hired by employers participating in MSEP. DOD exchanges and commissaries are employer partners in MSEP.

that more than 80 percent of courses funded with MyCAA tuition assistance were completed with passing grades in fiscal year 2011—may be a useful interim measure for monitoring how the funds are being used. However, this does not show whether the MyCAA funds are helping spouses obtain employment or increase their earnings.²⁴

DOD recognizes the need to improve its performance monitoring for its spouse employment programs and is taking steps to improve the data it collects on its individual programs:

- For the Career Center, DOD is planning to ask the contractor who runs the call center to follow up with spouses who use the center's services and ask them about their employment situation. DOD officials said that these follow-ups could be used to obtain information on employment outcomes of spouses who used the center, as well as those who used MyCAA and MSEP programs, since the call center also provides counseling to spouses using those programs.²⁵
- For MSEP, DOD is planning to implement new procedures to collect data from participating employers on the number of military spouses they hire. Spouses hired by an MSEP employer will self-identify to the employer that they are a military spouse. Employers will then report to DOD the number of spouses they hired through a reporting mechanism in the MSEP web portal.
- For MyCAA, DOD has established methods to obtain data on when spouses complete their planned programs of study and the educational degrees they have obtained due to MyCAA funding.

²⁴With regard to the military services' employment assistance programs, each of the services tracks data on their programs, but they track different data. Generally speaking, they compile data on the number of services provided over a period of time, for example, the number of group trainings or workshops, one-on-one consultations, or job fairs provided, though the specific items they track vary across the military services. The Army's program is the only one that collects outcomes data on whether their clients obtained a job, but as discussed above, it does so using informal and non-standardized procedures, so reliability of the data cannot be assured.

²⁵DOD officials said that the contractor who operates the call center has been conducting follow-up with military spouses who called to obtain their feedback on how they were served. To obtain military spouses' feedback on the other SECO programs, DOD has an email address specifically for spouses to provide their feedback on MyCAA, and DOD officials said that spouses can send messages with their feedback through the MSEP web portal.

DOD's web-based portal for MyCAA now asks spouses to report to DOD when they are taking a class that will complete their planned program of study. It also asks schools to report when a spouse has obtained a certificate or degree.

DOD has also identified four measures that it would like to track, including three broader measures related to the SECO programs' goals and one measure for MyCAA: (1) spouses' unemployment rate, (2) the wage gap between military and civilian spouses, (3) spouses' ability to maintain their jobs or similar jobs after relocation, and (4) the change in earnings among MyCAA participants. DOD has been conducting a survey of spouses biennially to obtain information on military spouses' unemployment rate, and it will be fielding a new survey in late 2012 to obtain updated information. DOD does not yet have processes for collecting data on a regular basis on the three other measures it is considering.

As DOD continues to develop its performance monitoring system, our previous work on developing effective performance measures may be helpful.²⁶ Specifically, we identified nine key attributes of successful performance measures (see table 1).²⁷ No set of performance measures is perfect, and a performance measure that lacks a key attribute may still provide useful information. However, these attributes can help identify areas for further refinement. For example, one of the attributes calls for covering core program activities. As we noted above, DOD does not have a performance measure for the Career Center, and thus its measures do not cover all of its core program activities intended to support military spouse employment. DOD's performance measure for MSEP has also been lacking the attribute of reliability, since DOD has not had a standardized process for collecting the data. Reliability refers to whether

²⁶Federal agencies are required to measure their performance under the Government Performance and Results Act, as amended. Specifically, the act requires federal agencies to have a performance plan that covers each program activity set forth in their budget, to have objective, quantifiable, and measurable performance goals that are aligned with an agency's goals and missions, to establish a balanced set of performance indicators to measure progress toward those goals, and to include a description of how the agency ensures the accuracy and reliability of its performance data. 31 U.S.C. § 1115. For further information on requirements under the Government Performance and Results Act, see GAO, *Managing for Results: Opportunities for Congress to Address Government Performance Issues*, [GAO-12-215R](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 9, 2011).

²⁷GAO, *Tax Administration: IRS Needs to Further Refine Its Tax Filing Season Performance Measures*, [GAO-03-143](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 22, 2002).

standard procedures for collecting data or calculating results can be applied to the performance measures so that they would likely produce the same results if applied repeatedly to the same situation. Another key attribute that may be relevant is limiting overlap. There is potential for overlap if DOD has performance measures that track employment outcomes for each of the three SECO programs, but military spouses often use more than one program. For example, if many spouses who use MSEP also use the Career Center, a measure on the number of spouses who obtained employment through MSEP could overlap with a measure to track spouses' employment through the Career Center, since the two measures would capture employment attainment for many of the same individuals.

Table 1: Key Attributes of Successful Performance Measures

Attribute	Definition
Balance	Balance exists when a suite of measures ensures that an organization's various priorities are covered.
Clarity	Measure is clearly stated and the name and definition are consistent with the methodology used to calculate it.
Core program activities	Measures cover the activities than an entity is expected to perform to support the intent of the program.
Governmentwide priorities	Each measure should cover a priority such as quality, timeliness, and cost of service.
Limited overlap	Measure should provide new information beyond that provided by other measures.
Linkage	Measure is aligned with division and agencywide goals and mission and clearly communicated throughout the organization.
Measurable target	Measure has a numerical goal.
Objectivity	Measure is reasonably free from significant bias or manipulation.
Reliability	Measure produces the same result under similar conditions.

Source: GAO.

Because DOD has multiple employment programs that military spouses may use, our work on practices for enhancing and sustaining collaboration, which we discussed above, may offer some helpful insights as DOD refines its performance monitoring system.²⁸ Specifically, we

²⁸ [GAO-06-15](#) and [GAO-12-1022](#).

noted that developing mechanisms for monitoring, evaluating, and reporting on results of collaborative efforts can help agencies identify areas for improvement. We also stated that agencies can use their strategic and annual performance plans as tools to drive collaboration and establish complementary goals and strategies for achieving results.

Two Hiring Mechanisms Can Provide Advantages to Military Spouses Seeking Federal Employment

The federal government has two hiring mechanisms targeted specifically to military spouses seeking federal jobs. The first mechanism—a noncompetitive hiring authority for military spouses—is available to any federal agency. The second—DOD’s Military Spouse Preference (MSP) program, which allows DOD to give military spouses preference in hiring for civilian or nonappropriated fund positions—applies only to DOD. These two mechanisms can increase a military spouse’s chances of obtaining federal employment, but they do not guarantee that spouses will obtain the jobs they apply for. DOD provides general information to military spouses on these mechanisms through the Career Center’s website and the military services’ employment assistance programs. Civilian personnel offices at local installations may provide more detailed information and also inform spouses about how to apply for DOD and other federal job openings.

Noncompetitive Authority

The noncompetitive authority, which became effective in late fiscal year 2009,²⁹ allows any federal agency the option of hiring qualified military spouses into the competitive service without going through the competitive examination process.³⁰ In other words, this authority allows eligible military spouses to be considered separately from other candidates, meaning that military spouses do not have to compete directly against other candidates as is the case under the competitive examination process. To be considered for a position under this authority, military spouses applying for federal jobs indicate in their applications that they would like to be considered and include documentation verifying their eligibility. According to OPM, the purpose of the noncompetitive authority

²⁹This authority was provided by Executive Order 13473 (2008). It became effective on September 11, 2009.

³⁰The competitive examination process is the traditional method for hiring into federal service positions. The federal hiring process typically involves notifying the public that the government will accept applications for a job, screening applications against minimum qualification standards, and assessing applicants’ relative competencies or knowledge, skills, and abilities against job-related criteria to identify the most qualified applicants.

is to minimize disruptions in military families due to permanent relocations, disability, and deaths resulting from active duty service. Agencies can use the noncompetitive authority to hire: (1) spouses who are relocating because of their servicemember's orders for up to 2 years after the relocation, (2) widows or widowers of servicemembers killed during active duty, and (3) spouses of active duty servicemembers who retired or separated from the military with a 100 percent disability.

The extent to which use of this authority results in employment of a military spouse depends on a variety of factors. First, federal hiring managers have the discretion whether to consider candidates under this authority for a job vacancy. Second, if the hiring manager chooses to consider candidates under this authority, the hiring manager is not required to select a qualified military spouse, and the manager can ultimately decide to select a qualified candidate other than a military spouse. This authority allows for eligible military spouses to be considered and selected for federal jobs, but it does not provide a hiring preference over other qualified applicants. Federal agencies may also consider using noncompetitive appointment authorities or hiring mechanisms for other populations, such as those for veterans, people with disabilities, and federal employees who lost their jobs due to downsizing or restructuring.

OPM officials told us that they conduct oversight of this authority as part of their general oversight of federal agencies' human capital systems. OPM officials said that thus far, they have found no irregularities in agencies' use of this hiring mechanism. OPM officials also said they have provided technical assistance and briefings to federal agencies and stakeholders on this authority and other ways to support military families, such as using authorities for hiring veterans.

Federal agencies hired about 2,000 military spouses using this hiring authority in the first 2 years of implementation, with more hired in the second year (about 1,200 in fiscal year 2011 and about 800 in fiscal year 2010). The approximately 1,200 military spouses hired in fiscal year 2011 represented about 0.5 percent of all federal hires that year.³¹ For context, spouses of active duty servicemembers represented 0.4 percent of the

³¹ These numbers do not reflect military spouses who may have obtained federal jobs without using the noncompetitive authority. Data on the number of military spouses hired under the noncompetitive authority are from OPM's Central Personnel Data File.

Military Spouse Preference Program

working-age population in 2010.³² DOD has been the primary user of this authority, hiring 94 percent of all military spouses hired under the authority. OPM officials said this was likely due to military spouses' greater familiarity with DOD, and that DOD is more likely than other agencies to have job openings where military spouses are located.

DOD's Military Spouse Preference (MSP) program provides military spouses priority in selection for DOD positions. The MSP includes two hiring mechanisms—one for spouses seeking DOD civilian positions, and one for spouses seeking DOD nonappropriated fund positions. With regard to the mechanism for DOD civilian positions, the MSP provides hiring preference to qualified spouses for DOD positions if the spouse is among persons determined to be best qualified for the position.³³ The other mechanism provides military spouses with preference in hiring for nonappropriated fund positions below a certain pay level.³⁴

Nonappropriated fund positions within DOD include those paid for by funds generated from services provided, such as at exchanges, recreation programs, and child care centers on military installations. To be considered for a position under the MSP program, military spouses must register for MSP, provide supporting documentation, and identify which types of jobs they would be willing or able to perform based on their backgrounds and geographic location. When a spouse's qualifications and desired job characteristics match a job opening, the spouse must submit his or her application through MSP.

As with the noncompetitive authority, the extent to which this authority is used depends on several factors. MSP only applies to civilian jobs at DOD that a hiring manager chooses to fill through a competitive process, which generally means that the hiring manager is to consider more than one candidate for the position and select the best-qualified candidate

³² This estimate is obtained from DOD's data on the number of military spouses, according to its report *Demographics 2010: Profile of the Military Community*, as well as data from the 2010 decennial census on the size of the U.S. working-age population (ages 18-64). We present 2010 data in order to use population data from the decennial census.

³³ 10 USC § 1874(b).

³⁴ Exec. Order No. 12,568 (1986). The 1986 executive order gives preference in hiring in DOD nonappropriated fund activities to spouses of servicemembers stationed in the same geographical area as the activity. MSP may be used for nonappropriated fund positions in pay band level NF-3 and below (equivalent to GS-8 positions and below) and positions paid at hourly rates.

based on job-related criteria.³⁵ The characteristics of the job opening (location, type, level) must also match the criteria indicated by the spouse when he or she registered for MSP.³⁶ In addition, the spouse must be among the best qualified applicants for the job. Furthermore, according to DOD officials, the agency also uses hiring preferences for other populations who may have a higher priority than the spouse, such as DOD employees whose positions were recently eliminated. If the registered MSP spouse is determined to be among the best qualified applicants, and if there are no other best qualified candidates with a higher priority preference, the hiring manager must select the military spouse for the job.³⁷ For nonappropriated fund jobs, the MSP program only applies to jobs below a certain pay level. A DOD official said that these positions generally have relatively high turnover rates, so spouses often do not need to use the MSP to obtain the job.

DOD's civilian personnel office oversees the MSP and other preference programs, and officials said that they have found no irregularities in MSP use. DOD's civilian personnel office also tracks the number of spouses who register for MSP and are placed into jobs on a monthly basis. While these are useful measures of program activity, DOD officials said that they do not provide information on whether the agency is making sufficient use of MSP. Examining sufficiency of MSP use would require a study that takes into account the many complex factors that affect MSP, including how many vacancies DOD had at spouses' locations, how many vacancies matched the types of jobs spouses identified in their registration as being qualified for, how the qualifications of spouses who applied compared to those of other candidates, and whether other candidates for the position were eligible for special hiring mechanisms as

³⁵MSP does not apply if the hiring manager chooses to fill the job from a list of noncompetitive candidates. Additionally, MSP does not apply in certain situations, such as when MSP would violate requirements regarding veteran's preference or adversely affect programs for the achievement of minority and gender equality, programs for persons with disabilities, or programs for the affirmative employment of veterans. Defense Civilian Personnel Advisory Service, *Department of Defense Priority Placement Program (PPP) Handbook* (Arlington, VA: July 2011).

³⁶In discussions with DOD officials about whether they may use MSP to fill mission-critical positions, DOD officials said that DOD would want to hire spouses for mission-critical positions (e.g., electronics engineer, contract specialist), but whether they can do so depends upon the spouses' qualifications.

³⁷If more than one spouse is among the best qualified, the hiring manager can select among the spouses.

well, such as noncompetitive appointments. DOD officials indicated that such an analysis would be challenging to conduct, and DOD has not attempted a comprehensive study. Nonetheless, DOD officials we spoke with felt that the MSP program had helped a large number of spouses obtain jobs.

Over the 10-year period of fiscal years 2002 to 2011, a total of about 12,500 military spouses were placed in civil service jobs through the MSP, according to DOD's data. This number includes both new hires and conversions of DOD employees.³⁸ The numbers have fluctuated from year to year in this time period, from a low of 890 to a high of 1,722. DOD officials said that the fluctuations likely correspond with overall DOD hiring levels. With regard to nonappropriated fund jobs, DOD does not consistently track the number of spouses hired through the MSP, but overall, about 26,000 military spouses were employed by DOD in nonappropriated fund jobs as of June 2012. This represented 19 percent of all employees in these jobs.

Conclusions

While DOD is at an early stage of implementing its new spouse employment programs, it has an opportunity to ensure that a well-coordinated structure is in place to deliver employment services to spouses, and that its system for monitoring performance is well-designed. Specifically, through its advisory group, DOD has the potential to include program stakeholders in a meaningful effort to support spouses and military families, while also ensuring effective delivery of services and addressing potential areas of duplication. As its advisory group moves forward with developing guidance on spouse employment programs, DOD has an opportunity to incorporate practices that can enhance and sustain coordination, including agreeing on roles and responsibilities for both SECO and the military services to provide employment assistance to spouses. Without guidance that incorporates key collaboration practices, DOD may miss opportunities to ensure all spouses consistently receive high quality employment assistance from SECO and the military services and can navigate smoothly from program to program, while avoiding duplication of efforts.

³⁸DOD was not able to provide us with breakdowns of their MSP numbers into new hires and conversions.

With regard to its performance monitoring, DOD has taken steps in the right direction by exploring options to collect outcome data and planning for a long-term evaluation. However, as DOD works to identify the performance measures it will use to conduct ongoing monitoring of its programs and report its progress to policymakers, DOD can benefit by considering attributes of successful performance measures. These include ensuring that it uses reliable data and that its performance measures enable it to monitor all of its key program activities and their planned outcomes. Without integrating successful elements of performance measurement into its evaluation efforts, DOD runs the risk that it will not collect sufficient and accurate information to determine if DOD funds are being used in the most effective way to help military spouses obtain employment.

Recommendations for Executive Action

To enhance collaboration among the various entities involved in delivering employment services to military spouses and to better monitor the effectiveness of these services, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense take the following actions:

- consider incorporating key practices to sustain and enhance collaboration when developing and finalizing its spouse employment guidance, such as agreeing on roles and responsibilities and developing compatible policies and procedures.
- consider incorporating key attributes of successful performance measures when developing and finalizing performance measures, such as ensuring reliability of the data used in the measures and covering key program activities.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to the Secretary of Defense and the Director of OPM for review and comment. In DOD's written comments, which are reproduced in appendix III, DOD partially concurred with our recommendations. DOD said that in general, our report correctly addresses the issues concerning collaboration and performance measure development. DOD also provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate. OPM had no comments.

DOD partially concurred with our recommendation to consider incorporating key collaboration practices to sustain and enhance collaboration when developing and finalizing its spouse employment guidance. While DOD said it looked forward to incorporating collaboration practices as the SECO program matures, DOD stated that it has already taken initial action in this area. For example, DOD cited the advisory group it created, as well as partnerships developed with various organizations. Our report recognizes DOD's efforts. However, these initial actions do not directly address the particular area highlighted in our recommendation—developing and finalizing guidance for its spouse employment programs. As we state in our report, the programs under the SECO initiative are new and there are some gaps in coordination. Thus, we continue to believe that incorporating key collaboration practices into the guidance that DOD is developing, such as agreeing on roles and responsibilities, would be beneficial. This could help ensure that the various entities involved in DOD's multiple spouse employment programs work cohesively and avoid duplicating efforts while helping military spouses seamlessly navigate across the programs.

DOD also partially concurred with our recommendation to consider incorporating key attributes of successful performance measures when developing and finalizing its performance measures. DOD said that it looks forward to improving performance measurement but that it has already taken steps to incorporate key attributes of successful performance measures. For example, DOD said it is developing employment data collection for military spouses directly from MSEP partners and anticipates completion by winter of 2013. We recognize DOD's efforts to collect additional data. However, because DOD is in the early stages of this process, we continue to believe that it can benefit from incorporating attributes of successful performance measures as it further develops its performance monitoring system.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of Defense, the Director of OPM, and other interested parties. The report is also available at no charge on the GAO website at www.gao.gov.

If you or your staff members have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-7215 or at sherrilla@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Staff members who made key contributions in this report are listed in appendix IV.



Andrew Sherrill
Director
Education, Workforce,
and Income Security

List of Committees

The Honorable Carl Levin
Chairman
The Honorable John McCain
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Daniel Inouye
Chairman
The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

The Honorable Howard P. "Buck" McKeon
Chairman
The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

The Honorable C. W. Bill Young
Chairman
The Honorable Norman D. Dicks
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

We addressed the following research objectives in this study:

1. What efforts has DOD recently made to help military spouses prepare for and obtain employment?
2. What steps has DOD taken to assess the effectiveness of these programs?
3. What hiring mechanisms exist to help military spouses obtain federal jobs?

Objective 1: Identifying DOD Efforts

We identified DOD's recent efforts to help military spouses prepare for and obtain employment by interviewing DOD officials and reviewing literature and documents, including DOD websites, reports, program descriptions, strategic planning documents, and guidance. We focused on identifying programs that would be a primary resource for military spouses to enhance their job skills and increase their employability, identify job opportunities, and/or help them obtain employment. We did not include in our review programs that may have an employment focus but generally did not serve spouses of active duty servicemembers, nor did we include programs that may target military spouses but had a primary focus other than employment. We developed a preliminary list of programs that included the three programs under DOD's Spouse Education and Career Opportunities (SECO) initiative, as well as the employment assistance programs that the military services have long operated. We shared our list with DOD officials, who agreed with our assessment that these are the primary programs that provide employment services to spouses. Our first objective is focused primarily on the three new SECO programs, but we note that spouses can also use the military services' employment assistance programs, and we discuss coordination across the SECO and military services' programs.

As we identified the programs to examine, we conducted further interviews with officials involved in each of DOD's spouse employment programs, both at DOD headquarters and with each of the military services (Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, and Navy). We requested more detailed information, such as on the programs' purposes, budgets, services they provide, and coordination. In examining coordination among

the programs, we consulted GAO's prior work that identified practices that can help federal agencies enhance and sustain collaboration.¹

To obtain additional perspectives, we interviewed two advocacy groups who support military families, and we visited employment assistance programs at three military installations in the Washington-D.C. area. These installations are: Fort Meade (Army and Navy programs), Joint Base Andrews (Air Force), and Henderson Hall (Marine Corps). During our visits to these installations, we spoke with local program officials, and we spoke to military spouses in three of the four services. The information we obtained from these installations is not generalizable.

Objective 2: Identifying DOD's Steps to Assess Effectiveness

To identify the steps DOD has taken to assess the effectiveness of its spouse employment programs, we interviewed DOD officials to obtain information on how DOD is currently measuring effectiveness, as well as its plans to conduct evaluations or collect data on performance. We also reviewed documents DOD provided, including internal and external reports, strategic planning documents, and descriptions of existing and potential performance measures. In assessing DOD's performance measures, we consulted with GAO's prior work that identified attributes of successful performance measures and described requirements for reporting on performance under the Government Performance and Results Act, as amended.² We also assessed the reliability of the data used for DOD's performance measures by interviewing officials knowledgeable about the data and reviewing relevant documents. Based on our work, we determined that the data used for the performance measure on the Military Spouse Employment Program are of questionable reliability, and we discuss this in our report.

Objective 3: Identifying Federal Hiring Mechanisms

We identified the hiring mechanisms intended to help military spouses obtain federal employment by interviewing officials at OPM and DOD and reviewing relevant federal laws, regulations, executive orders, and

¹GAO, *Results-Oriented Government: Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies*, [GAO-06-15](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 21, 2005).

²GAO, *Tax Administration: IRS Needs to Further Refine Its Tax Filing Season Performance Measures*, [GAO-03-143](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 22, 2002); *Managing for Results: Opportunities for Congress to Address Government Performance Issues*, [GAO-12-215R](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 9, 2011).

guidance. Our interviews and the documents also provided information on the processes for how these mechanisms can be used.

To obtain data on the number of spouses hired through one of these mechanisms, the noncompetitive authority, we analyzed data from OPM's Central Personnel Data File (CPDF), a database of federal employees.³ We present data for fiscal years 2010 and 2011, since the authority was implemented in late fiscal year 2009. We reviewed the reliability of the data by interviewing OPM officials, conducting electronic testing, and reviewing relevant documents. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for our purposes. The information we present from our analysis of the CPDF is on the number of individuals hired under the noncompetitive authority for military spouses. It does not include military spouses hired by federal agencies without using this authority, and as such does not represent the total number of military spouses hired by federal agencies. Data are not available in the CPDF to identify the total number of military spouses hired by federal agencies.

On the other hiring mechanism that we examined, the Military Spouse Preference (MSP) program, DOD's civilian personnel office provided us with data on the number of spouses placed into civil service positions, including both hires and conversions. We assessed the reliability of this data by reviewing relevant documents and interviewing DOD officials on the processes through which the data are input and validated. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for our purposes. With regard to the number of spouses hired into nonappropriated fund positions using the MSP, DOD officials noted that such data are not collected in a consistent manner by the military services' nonappropriated fund offices so we do not present these data. DOD's Defense Manpower Data Center provided us with data on the number of spouses in nonappropriated fund positions overall, and we present this information in our report for context.

³The CPDF contains individual records for most federal employees and is the primary governmentwide source for information on federal employees. The CPDF includes all executive branch agencies except the U.S. Postal Service, the Postal Rate Commission, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the National Security Agency, the Defense Imagery and Mapping Agency, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the White House, the Office of the Vice President, the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, and the Defense Intelligence Agency. Judicial branch employees and most legislative branch employees are also excluded from the CPDF.

Appendix II: DOD's Spending on Military Spouse Employment Programs

Table 2 provides information on DOD's expenditures on the two military spouse employment programs for which data were available—MyCAA and MSEP. Data were not available on how much was spent on the Career Center because the center was included in DOD's broader contract for Military OneSource. According to a DOD official, DOD intends to have an overall SECO budget that encompasses the three spouse employment programs for fiscal year 2013. Data were also unavailable on how much DOD spends on spouse employment activities on local installations because the resources used for military services' employment programs are embedded in broader budget categories, such as base operations and support.

Table 2: Expenditures on Selected DOD Employment Programs for Military Spouses, Fiscal Years 2009 to 2011

(In millions)

Program	Fiscal Year		
	2009	2010	2011
Military Spouse Career Advancement Accounts (MyCAA) Program ^a	\$64.8	\$186.8	\$54.8
Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP)/Army Spouse Employment Partnership ^b	\$0.7	\$0.7	\$1.2

Source: GAO analysis of DOD documents.

^aMyCAA expenditures include tuition assistance funds and the web-based portal.

^bThe Army Spouse Employment Partnership transitioned to MSEP in fiscal year 2011.

Appendix III: Comments from the Department of Defense



OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

NOV 27 2012

Andrew Sherrill
Director, Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues
United States Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Sherrill:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO Draft Report, GAO-13-60, "MILITARY SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS: DOD Can Improve Guidance and Performance Monitoring," dated October 23, 2012 (GAO Code 131155). The Department of Defense (DoD) is committed to supporting military spouses to attain fulfilling career paths, reducing the 26% unemployment rate and closing the 25% wage gap with their civilian counterparts. In October 2010, the Spouse Education and Career Opportunities Program (SECO) was launched. Since the introduction of the Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP) program in June 2011, over 815,777 jobs have been posted on the MSEP Career Portal and over 32,323 military spouses have been hired by MSEP Partners. We consider military spouse education and employment to be a significant challenge for military families with direct impact on the effectiveness and readiness of the force.

The report identifies the successful foundation of collaboration between the DoD, government and non-government agencies, and private sector organizations and a basis for performance measure development. In general, we believe that the report correctly addresses those issues. DoD wishes to provide additional information on what we have accomplished to date. DoD's formal response to the GAO recommendations are provided in Enclosure (1).

The MSEP program was built from the Army Spouse Employment Partnership's (ASEP) strong foundation and uses DoD's definitive data as a basis to define the needs of military spouses. We have already incorporated key practices of collaboration by creating an advisory committee composed of key representatives of each Service's spouse employment programs. In addition, through MSEP, DoD has created partnerships with organizations employing military spouses, as well as partnering with those organizations providing advocacy, education and resources for military spouses such as the National Military Family Association, Blue Star Families, Military Officers Association of America, and the Association of the United States Army. Additionally, we have initiated the Spouse Ambassador program allowing the DoD to directly connect with military spouses at the community level.

With regard to performance measures, the DOD is taking the following actions:

- Developing MSEP employment data collection for military spouses directly from MSEP Partners for which we anticipate completion by winter 2013.

- Separated SECO Career Center from the other Military OneSource services in order to clearly identify the means to collect data and develop metrics for performance measurements.
- Developed a mechanism for collecting data by directly contacting military spouses who received services from the Career Center for which we anticipate implementation by winter 2013.

We appreciate GAO's review of DoD's SECO and MSEP programs and recommendations. Our responses to the recommendation and technical responses are attached for your review. We look forward to continual dialogue and receiving GAO's recommendations to continue to improve opportunities for our military spouses to pursue growth and education so that they may find fulfilling careers that contribute to resilience and stability for their military families.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Milam
Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
(Military Community & Family Policy)

Enclosure:

1. Department of Defense Comments to the GAO

GAO DRAFT REPORT DATED OCTOBER 23, 2012
GAO-13-60 (GAO CODE 131155)

“MILITARY SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS: DOD CAN
IMPROVE GUIDANCE AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING”

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS
TO THE GAO RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATION 1: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense take action to consider incorporating key practices to sustain and enhance collaboration when developing and finalizing its spouse employment guidance, such as agreeing on roles and responsibilities and developing compatible policies and procedures.

DoD RESPONSE: The Department of Defense partially concurs with the GAO recommendation. DoD has already taken initial action to incorporate key practices to sustain and enhance collaboration.

The comprehensive Spouse Education and Career Opportunities Program (SECO) was launched in October 2010, with the Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP) launching in June of 2011. These programs were built from the Army Spouse Employment partnership Program’s (ASEP) strong foundation and using DoD’s definitive data as a basis to support military spouses. We have already incorporated key practices of collaboration by creating an advisory committee composed of key representatives of each Service’s spouse employment programs. In addition, through MSEP, DoD has created partnerships with organizations employing military spouses and has partnered with those organizations providing advocacy, education and resources for military spouses such as the National Military Family Association, Blue Star Families, Military Officers Association of America, and the Association of the United States Army. Lastly, we have initiated the Spouse Ambassador program allowing the DoD to directly connect with military spouses at the community level. As the program matures and continues to evolve, DoD looks forward to continuing to incorporate and improve the eight practices for sustained collaboration recommended by the GAO.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense take action to consider incorporating key attributes of successful performance measures when developing and finalizing performance measures, such as ensuring reliability of the data used in the measures and covering key program activities.

Enclosure (1)

DoD RESPONSE:

The Department of Defense partially concurs with the GAO recommendation. DoD has already taken actions to incorporate key attributes of successful performance measures:

- MSEP program - Currently developing employment data collection for military spouses from MSEP (anticipate completion by winter 2013.)
- SECO Career Center - Career center has been separated from the other Military OneSource services in order to clearly identify the means to collect data and develop metrics for performance measurements.
- DoD is developing a mechanism for collecting data by directly contacting military spouses who received services from the Career Center.

DoD looks forward to and improving performance measurement by continuing to incorporate the key attributes of successful performance measures into our military spouse employment programs.

Enclosure (1)

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Appendix IV: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

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Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Lori Rectanus (Assistant Director), Keira Dembowski, and Yunsian Tai made significant contributions to this report. Also contributing to this report were James Bennett, David Chrisinger, Brenda Farrell, Cynthia Grant, Joel Green, Yvonne Jones, Kirsten Lauber, Kathy Leslie, Benjamin Licht, Trina Lewis, James Rebbe, Sarah Veale, and Gregory Wilmoth.

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