

MILITARY PERSONNEL

Performance Measures Needed to Determine How Well DOD's Credentialing Program Helps Servicemembers

Why GAO Did This Study

DOD reimburses the Department of Labor quarterly for unemployment compensation payments provided to former servicemembers. In 2015, DOD reported that unemployment compensation for veterans was \$434 million. Differences between military and civilian occupational classification systems can make it difficult for servicemembers to identify civilian jobs that are comparable to their military occupational specialties. Section 2015 of Title 10 directed DOD to carry out a program to enable servicemembers to obtain professional credentials related to their military training that translate into civilian occupations.

Senate Report 114-49 accompanying the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016 included a provision for GAO to review DOD's credentialing program. This report (1) assesses the extent to which DOD implemented the statutorily required credentialing program and developed performance measures to guide the program; and (2) describes how DOD engages with states to enhance opportunities for servicemembers to attain credentials. GAO reviewed DOD policies and procedures and other documentation and interviewed relevant officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD develop and implement performance measures for its credentialing program. DOD did not concur with the recommendation, but GAO continues to believe that performance measures are needed to measure the success of the program, as discussed in the report.

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What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) has taken steps to establish the statutorily required credentialing program, but it has not developed performance measures to gauge the program's effectiveness. Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) officials are in the process of coordinating a draft DOD instruction for the program that will assign responsibilities and prescribe procedures for its operation, and each of the services has established websites to help its servicemembers find information on certifications and licenses related to their jobs. Servicemembers can use these websites to obtain background information on credentialing and detailed information on credentials related to a military occupational specialty, credential requirements, potential gaps between military training and civilian credentialing requirements, and resources available to fill in those gaps. Neither the draft DOD instruction nor any other guidance provided by OSD, however, establishes any performance measures by which to evaluate the program's effectiveness. By using performance measures, conducting ongoing monitoring, and reporting on progress in meeting its desired outcomes transparently, key decision makers can obtain feedback for improving the program. DOD officials collected some credentialing data for fiscal year 2015, such as the number of credentials that active duty and reserve servicemembers successfully attained and expenditures for the credentialing program. However, without performance measures that have targets and a baseline against which to measure current performance, DOD officials and other decision makers may find it difficult to determine whether DOD's credentialing program is on track to achieve desired results or, alternatively, needs corrective actions.

DOD engages with states in various efforts to further assist servicemembers in attaining credentials, including working at the state level to encourage and support the development of credentials for servicemembers, with efforts varying by state. For example, DOD created the "USA 4 Military Families" initiative to engage with state-level policymakers, not-for-profit associations, concerned business interests, and other state leaders regarding the needs of military members and their families. DOD also provided data and subject matter expertise to an 18-month partnership project with the Department of Labor and National Governors Association. This project was designed to identify state-level professional requirements that can be met through the training received by servicemembers in the armed forces and to identify strategies to remove barriers to servicemembers' efforts to attain credentials. The six states participating in the project found that transitioning servicemembers and veterans encounter various barriers when trying to attain civilian credentials, such as civilian licensing boards that are not accustomed to military documentation of a servicemember's training and experience. The project also identified strategies to enable states to accelerate the licensing and certification of veterans based on the challenges identified, such as working with educational institutions to set up accelerated programs that provide veterans advanced standing in existing programs, or offer bridge courses to prepare veterans entering existing programs.