

Why GAO Did This Study

PCS involves moving military personnel to new locations and is a key tool used by the military services to fill assignments both in the United States and overseas. In fiscal year 2014, DOD obligated \$4.3 billion for approximately 650,000 servicemember PCS moves.

Senate Report 113-176 included a provision for GAO to report on aspects of the PCS program. This report evaluates the extent to which (1) PCS per-move costs have changed since 2001, (2) military personnel are meeting time-on-station requirements, and (3) OSD's September 2014 study on increasing time-on-station addressed the elements in Senate Report 112-196 and used approaches consistent with generally accepted research standards.

GAO analyzed PCS cost and move data for fiscal years 2001 through 2014 using fiscal year 2014 dollars; obtained and analyzed available time-on-station data; reviewed OSD's September 2014 report to Congress on increasing time-on-station; and interviewed OSD and service officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD, in coordination with the services, take actions to report complete and consistent PCS budget data; conduct periodic evaluations of the PCS program; and address limitations on the availability of data on exceptions and waivers for PCS moves that occur prior to reaching minimum time-on-station lengths. DOD generally agreed with the recommendations.

View [GAO-15-713](#). For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov.

MILITARY COMPENSATION

DOD Needs More Complete and Consistent Data to Assess the Costs and Policies of Relocating Personnel

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) has experienced an overall increase in Permanent Change of Station (PCS) per-move costs since 2001. GAO's analysis of DOD budget data shows that average PCS per-move costs, after accounting for inflation, increased by 28 percent from fiscal years 2001 to 2014. However, GAO's review of the services' annual budget materials found that the services have not reported complete and consistent PCS data, thereby limiting the extent to which DOD can identify and evaluate changes occurring within the PCS program. For example, the services did not completely or consistently report budget data on non-temporary storage costs, temporary lodging expenses, or tour extension payments. Program changes and factors outside the program can affect PCS costs. The specific factors driving the growth in per-move costs are unclear, however, because DOD does not periodically evaluate whether the PCS program is efficiently supporting requirements to relocate personnel. DOD therefore is not in a position to identify and evaluate changes that may be occurring over time in PCS per-move costs, or to take steps to manage and control cost growth.

DOD does not have information for determining whether personnel are meeting time-on-station requirements. DOD guidance specifies time-on-station lengths for U.S. and overseas locations and also allows for personnel to move prior to reaching these lengths if they qualify for an exception or obtain a waiver. However, DOD does not have complete or consistent data on the reasons why PCS moves occur prior to reaching specified lengths, because the services (1) do not maintain required data on their usage of exceptions and (2) do not have a requirement to maintain data on their usage of waivers. Moreover, availability of service data on time-on-station lengths is limited and varies by service. For example, each service has different years of available data. In addition, one service provided time-on-station data for officers and enlisted personnel separately, and these data covered different time periods.

In its September 2014 report to Congress on increasing time-on-station, the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) addressed the elements that were specifically identified in congressional direction. OSD also used approaches consistent with generally accepted research standards in preparing its report. Nonetheless, OSD could have included additional information, such as more explicitly discussing constraints and information about the model used to develop cost savings estimates, and thereby improved the utility of the report for decision makers. The report stated that DOD plans to take actions aimed at extending servicemembers' time-on-station, which OSD believes could reduce PCS costs. However, without more complete and consistent data on both PCS costs and the use of exceptions and waivers, DOD does not have the information it needs for evaluating whether the implementation of its planned actions will be effective in extending time-on-station lengths and reducing PCS costs.