

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-581](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

VA sends hundreds of millions of pieces of mail to veterans and their dependents, including prescription medications and information about benefits or disability compensation. However, VA's reported mail volume and costs—\$355 million in 2016—are among the highest in the federal government. GAO was asked to review VA's mail management practices.

This report examines the extent to which VA manages its outgoing mail effectively. GAO identified key elements of an effective mail management program from federal regulation and internal control standards; reviewed VA-reported mail expenditure and volume data for fiscal years 2015 and 2016; collected information on mailing practices at 10 VA facilities with the highest mail volume in fiscal year 2015; and interviewed representatives of VA, GSA, the U.S. Postal Service, VA's two primary mailing equipment vendors, and two of the nation's largest veterans service organizations.

What GAO Recommends

To manage its mail program more effectively, VA should develop and document a plan to improve how VA procures mailing equipment, update mail policy to include goals and performance measures, and determine and document the authority and responsibilities of the agency and administration-level mail managers to enable them to better manage and oversee mail operations. VA concurred with these recommendations.

View [GAO-17-581](#). For more information, contact Lori Rectanus at (202) 512-2834 or rectanusl@gao.gov.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

Actions Needed to More Effectively Manage Outgoing Mail

What GAO Found

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is not managing its outgoing mail effectively as it lacks key elements of an effective mail management program, including reliable data on mail volume and expenditures, agency-wide performance measures for mail operations, and mail managers with appropriate authority and responsibilities.

- *Reporting reliable mail expenditure and volume data:* The mail data VA reports to the General Services Administration (GSA) are unreliable, in part because VA's fragmented process for procuring mailing equipment prevents VA from tracking mail volume and expenditures consistently across facilities. Specifically, each fiscal year, hundreds of VA facilities individually enter their mail expenditure and volume data into a GSA database that collects mail data from federal agencies. These data are collected through inconsistent processes. For example, some facilities use mailing equipment and associated software that can automatically track volume and costs by service provider and mail class, while other facilities' equipment may be too old to have this capability or they use spreadsheets, bills, or receipts to track their costs. These processes are inconsistent because VA's different components and facilities contract for mailroom equipment independently of one another. VA lacks an overall plan to procure mailing equipment strategically. Through such procurement, VA could implement a system that would more consistently track data on mail expenditures and volume. This step would not only improve the reliability of these data but could also allow VA to take advantage of price discounts typically available under broader contracts.
- *Measuring performance:* VA is unable to evaluate the overall efficiency of its mail program because its mail management policy does not include agency-wide goals and performance measures for its mail operations, and it has inconsistent measures across its facilities. For example, of the 10 VA facilities GAO reviewed, some assessed performance using customer service, efficiency, volume, and cost, while others used annual expenditures, among other measures. Updating the policy to include agency-wide goals and performance measures would allow VA to track progress toward consistent goals and provide it with crucial performance information needed to make programmatic decisions.
- *Mail managers with appropriate authority and responsibilities:* VA's ability to oversee mailing practices across its facilities is limited because it has not provided its mail managers with appropriate authority and responsibilities, per federal internal control standards. The agency mail manager's responsibilities are limited to oversight of VA's mail policy, with no operational role in mail management. Additionally, mail managers for the Veterans Health Administration and Veterans Benefits Administration reported that they advise individual facilities on mail management but have no authority to direct their mail operations. Without determining appropriate authority and responsibilities for its mail managers, VA is unable to ensure that its facilities are managing their mail effectively.