

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-23](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Since fiscal year 2015, hundreds of thousands of servicemembers have left the military and transitioned into civilian life, with hundreds of thousands more soon to follow. To help ease their transition, pursuant to federal law DOD must require that all eligible separating servicemembers take TAP, with some exceptions. GAO's previous work on TAP implementation showed mixed results, and GAO was asked to re-examine the program.

This report examines, among other questions: 1) the extent of transparency in DOD's public performance reporting, 2) TAP participation levels and attainment of Career Readiness Standards or referrals for additional services, and 3) DOD's TAP monitoring and performance measures.

GAO surveyed all 181 installations that conduct TAP and achieved a 100 percent response rate; analyzed TAP data from fiscal year 2016; visited seven installations that reflected diversity in service, size, and geography; compared DOD's performance measures to GAO criteria; reviewed federal laws and regulations, and interviewed TAP staff, servicemembers, and DOD officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO makes six recommendations, including that DOD improve transparency in reporting TAP participation and career readiness rates and monitor certain key areas of TAP implementation. DOD generally agreed with all but the one on access to additional 2-day classes. GAO believes this recommendation is still valid as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-18-23](#). For more information, contact Cindy S. Barnes at (202) 512-7215 or brownbarnesc@gao.gov.

November 2017

TRANSITIONING VETERANS

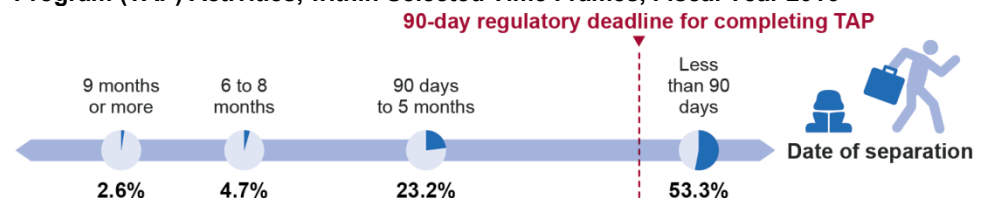
DOD Needs to Improve Performance Reporting and Monitoring for the Transition Assistance Program

What GAO Found

In fiscal year 2016, the Department of Defense (DOD) lacked data for 48 percent of National Guard and Reserve members and 12 percent of active duty servicemembers which resulted in DOD potentially misstating performance of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) in its public reporting. Under the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011, DOD must require that all eligible separating servicemembers participate in TAP, with some exceptions. However, the VOW Act compliance rates that DOD publicly reported were not based on all eligible servicemembers—they excluded servicemembers for whom DOD lacked data. For example, had DOD included all transitioning National Guard and Reserve members—including those for whom they lacked participation data—the resulting participation rate for Guard and Reserve members may have been as low as 47 percent instead of 94 percent, which DOD publicly reported in fiscal year 2016. In November 2016, DOD launched a new data collection system that officials say will improve data completeness and reporting abilities.

In fiscal year 2016, DOD met its goal of 85 percent of active duty servicemembers (i.e., not members of the National Guard and Reserves) who met VOW Act requirements and attained Career Readiness Standards, according to GAO's analysis. In order to complete TAP, servicemembers generally must participate in three required courses and have their Career Readiness Standards verified by a unit commander or designee. In addition, commanders or their designee must ensure that servicemembers who do not meet these standards are referred to staff of partner agencies, such as the Department of Labor and Department of Veterans Affairs, for additional services, commonly called a "warm handover." However, fewer than half of all eligible servicemembers completed TAP on time—90 days or more before separation.

Percent of Servicemembers Who Completed Required Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Activities, within Selected Time Frames, Fiscal Year 2016



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) fiscal year 2016 data. | GAO-18-225T

DOD monitors several key areas of TAP implementation, such as TAP participation and career readiness standards rates, but not others, including timeliness of participation in required courses and access to additional classes. Regulations require DOD to ensure that servicemembers complete TAP more than 90 days before leaving the military but DOD has not monitored timeliness because it has focused on ensuring participation. Federal law also requires DOD to ensure that servicemembers who want to attend additional 2-day classes, such as on higher education, can do so. However, DOD does not require the services to document the extent to which servicemembers can access these classes. Unless DOD monitors these and other TAP requirements, it cannot ensure they have been met.