

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-133](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

VA has pressing infrastructure demands and a backlog of real property projects. VA can accept up to five real property donations through the CHIP-IN pilot program, which is authorized through 2021. GAO previously reported on the CHIP-IN pilot program in 2018.

The CHIP-IN Act includes a provision for GAO to report on donation agreements entered into under the pilot program. This report examines: (1) the status of VA's efforts to execute CHIP-IN partnerships and identify additional potential partners and (2) the extent to which VA has collected lessons learned from the pilot, among other objectives. GAO reviewed VA documents, including project plans and budget information, and interviewed VA officials, donor groups for projects in Omaha and Tulsa, and selected non-profits with experience in fundraising. GAO compared VA's efforts to collect lessons learned with key practices for an overall lessons-learned process.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations to VA to implement a lessons-learned process. Recommendations include documenting and disseminating lessons learned from CHIP-IN pilot projects. VA concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-21-133](#). For more information, contact Andrew Von Ah at (202) 512-2834 or vonaha@gao.gov.

December 2020

VA CONSTRUCTION

VA Should Enhance the Lessons-Learned Process for Its Real-Property Donation Pilot Program

What GAO Found

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has received one real property donation through a partnership pilot program authorized by the Communities Helping Invest through Property and Improvements Needed for Veterans Act of 2016 (CHIP-IN Act) and is planning for a second. This Act authorized VA to accept donated real property—such as buildings or facility construction or improvements—and to contribute certain appropriated funds to donors that are entering into donation agreements with VA. Under VA's interpretation, its ability to contribute to such funds is limited to major construction projects (over \$20 million). The first CHIP-IN project—an ambulatory care center in Omaha, Nebraska—opened in August 2020. Pending requested appropriations for a second CHIP-IN project, VA intends to partner with another donor group to construct an inpatient medical center in Tulsa, Oklahoma. (See figure.) Other potential donors have approached VA about opportunities that could potentially fit the CHIP-IN pilot, but these project ideas have not proceeded for various reasons, including the large donations required. VA officials told us they have developed a draft legislative proposal that seeks to address a challenge in finding CHIP-IN partnerships. For example, officials anticipate that a modification allowing VA to make funding contributions to smaller projects of \$20 million and under would attract additional donors.

Completed Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Ambulatory Care Center in Omaha, NE, and Rendering of Proposed Inpatient Facility in Tulsa, OK



Sources (left to right): VA; Veterans Hospital in Tulsa, LLC by GH2 Architects, LLC of Tulsa, Oklahoma. | GAO-21-133

VA has discussed and documented some lessons learned from the Omaha project. For example, VA officials and the Omaha donor group identified and documented the benefits of a design review software that helped shorten timeframes and reduce costs compared to VA's typical review process. However, VA has not consistently followed a lessons-learned process, and as a result, other lessons, such as the decision-making that went into developing the Omaha project's donation agreement, have not been documented. Failure to document and disseminate lessons learned puts VA at risk of losing valuable insights from the CHIP-IN pilot that could inform future CHIP-IN projects or other VA construction efforts.