



July 2021

MILITARY INSTALLATIONS

DOD Should Consider Various Support Services when Designating Sites as Remote or Isolated



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GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-276](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

DOD operates hundreds of installations in the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii, which support the daily operations of military units. The support services provided to servicemembers and their dependents at these installations include morale, welfare, and recreation services; medical care; housing; and education.

Senate Report 116-48, accompanying a bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, included a provision for GAO to review support services at remote or isolated installations. This report assesses the extent to which DOD (1) designated installations in the United States since 2011 as remote or isolated for the provision of support services, and (2) established objectives for support services at installations and assessed whether current support services are meeting the needs of servicemembers and their dependents.

GAO reviewed relevant policies and guidance, conducted interviews with four selected installations and conducted a non-generalizable web-based survey of 756 active-duty servicemembers.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations to DOD to develop policy for designating installations in the United States as remote or isolated that includes a process for considering support services in addition to MWR, and to assess the risks of not providing support services and subsequently develop strategies to meet identified needs. As discussed in the report, DOD concurred with the recommendations and described some related actions.

View [GAO-21-276](#). For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov.

July 2021

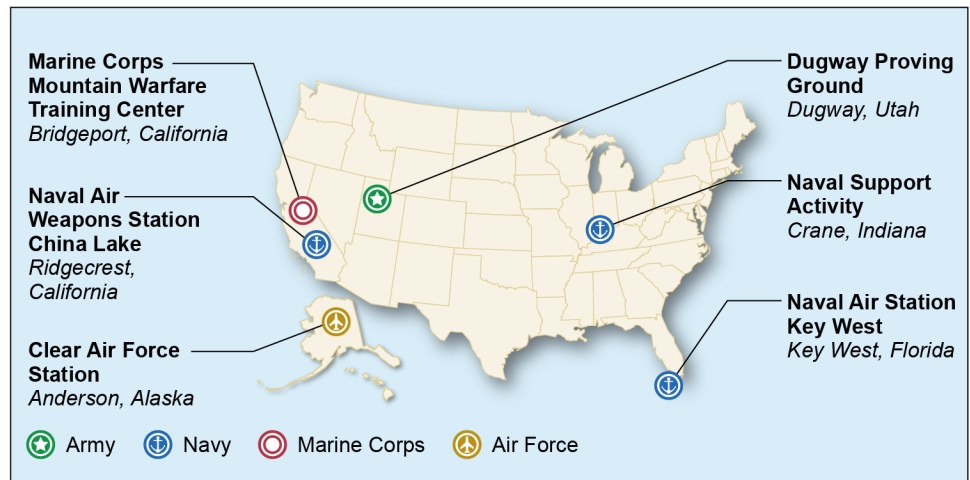
MILITARY INSTALLATIONS

DOD Should Consider Various Support Services when Designating Sites as Remote or Isolated

What GAO Found

Between 2011 and 2020, the Department of Defense (DOD) designated three installations as remote or isolated in the United States for morale, welfare, and recreation (MWR) services (e.g., fitness centers and child care centers). Those designations bring the current total to 43 installations as established by either the House of Representatives or DOD since 1989. However, DOD's current process does not consider other support services. This is because it has not developed policy that addresses this designation for support services other than MWR, such as housing and medical care. Military installations that are far from key support services often have fewer services, such as more limited access to health care and housing options. See figure. DOD officials responsible for a variety of support services told GAO that servicemembers and dependents would benefit from an overarching policy that included a process for designating installations as remote or isolated that considers all support services. This would better position DOD to increase awareness of the unique needs of servicemembers and dependents at these locations and help target needed resources like funding for improvements to housing and better access to specialty medical care.

GAO-Selected Examples of Remote or Isolated Military Installations within the United States



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense data; Map Resources (map). | GAO-21-276

DOD has set broad program objectives for providing support services such as ensuring that eligible personnel have access to affordable, quality housing. Servicemembers and officials at the installations included in GAO's review identified concerns related to meeting these needs. For example, GAO found that servicemembers at three remote or isolated installations faced commutes of an hour or more to reach health care providers within DOD's TRICARE network. While DOD and the services use a variety of methods to assess whether support services meet the needs of servicemembers and dependents, DOD has not systematically assessed the associated risks to recruiting, retention, and quality of life that these concerns pose and developed strategies to mitigate these risks. Assessing risk and taking action based on that assessment would better position DOD to address the needs of servicemembers in remote or isolated areas.

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Abbreviations

BAH	Basic Allowance for Housing
COLA	Cost of Living Adjustment
CONUS	Continental United States
DOD	Department of Defense
DODEA	Department of Defense Education Activity
MTF	Medical Treatment Facility
MWR	Morale, Welfare, and Recreation
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense

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July 29, 2021

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman
The Honorable James M. Inhofe
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman
The Honorable Mike Rogers
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

The Department of Defense (DOD) operates hundreds of military installations in the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii, which support the daily operations of units in the Army, the Air Force, the Navy, and the Marine Corps. Various support services are provided to servicemembers and their dependents at these locations, including morale, welfare, and recreation (MWR); health care; housing; and education services.¹

DOD installations that could be considered remote or isolated often have reduced support services for servicemembers and their dependents, such as limited access to health care and housing options.² To ensure needed support services are available on or near remote or isolated installations, servicemembers and their dependents are screened and compared to a list of the services available before being assigned to these locations. For example, the military services conduct health screenings of servicemembers and their dependents prior to their assignment to a

¹DOD's Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) programs are a multibillion-dollar effort to provide servicemembers and their families with a wide range of benefits designed to support military missions and readiness, both in times of war and peace. DOD's three categories of MWR programs are mission-sustaining programs promoting the physical and mental well-being of servicemembers (Category A), community support system programs for servicemembers and their families (Category B), and recreational activities for servicemembers and their families that are revenue generating (Category C).

²For this report, we are using the term "remote or isolated" to refer to some installations in the United States depending on their location and access to certain support services.

remote or isolated installation to ensure that the medical facilities available at that location are sufficient. Other support services, such as housing and MWR, may be limited because of the number of active-duty servicemembers assigned to the installation.

Senate Report 116-48, accompanying a bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, included a provision for us to review the process by which DOD designates installations as remote or isolated and ensures the sufficiency of support services provided at those installations.³ This report assesses the extent to which DOD (1) designated installations in the United States since 2011 as remote or isolated for the provision of support services, and (2) established objectives for support services at installations and assessed whether current support services are meeting the needs of servicemembers and their dependents.

For our first objective, we reviewed DOD, military service, TRICARE, Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA), and Office of Management and Budget policies, guidance, and procedures to determine if there was a comprehensive process to designate an installation as remote or isolated for all types of support services provided at remote or isolated installations.⁴ To discuss DOD's processes and oversight of installation support services, we interviewed relevant DOD and military service officials as well as officials with the Defense Health Agency, TRICARE's Prime Remote managed health care system, and DODEA. To determine the process currently in place to designate installations as remote or isolated for MWR purposes, we reviewed the process used in 2018 to designate Naval Support Activity, Indiana, and 2019 to designate Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, California, as remote for MWR purposes. For both locations, we reviewed relevant

³S. Rep. No. 116-48, at 191 (2019).

⁴The Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) is a DOD field activity responsible for planning, directing, coordinating, and managing prekindergarten through 12th grade educational programs on behalf of DOD. None of the four installations we visited for this review had schools that were managed by DODEA. Instead, each of the installations we visited, with the exception of Clear Air Force Station, which is an unaccompanied assignment, relied on local public schools to provide prekindergarten through 12th grade education services to the dependents of active-duty servicemembers stationed at those locations. Under TRICARE, DOD maintains a purchased medical care system of civilian providers to augment its military treatment facility capabilities.

documents and procedures and interviewed DOD, Navy, and installation officials involved in the process and the final determination.

We found that a key principle of internal control, as outlined in *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, was significant to this objective—namely, that management should use quality information to achieve an entity’s objectives. We assessed the policies, guidance, and procedures against this principle—in particular that management should implement control activities through policies, and should internally and externally communicate quality information to achieve the entity’s objectives. Quality information is current, complete, accurate, and accessible.⁵

For our second objective—to assess the extent to which DOD established objectives for support services provided at installations and assessed whether current support services are meeting the needs of servicemembers and their dependents—we reviewed DOD and military service policies and guidance to identify what, if any, broad program objectives existed for providing support services at installations, including those that could be considered remote or isolated.⁶ In addition, we interviewed installation commanders and relevant support service officials at a non-generalizable sample of remote or isolated installations within the U.S. to assess the implementation and effect of the policies, guidance, and procedures.

To determine the extent to which support services are provided to servicemembers and their dependents at selected remote or isolated installations, we conducted virtual site visits at selected military installations in remote or isolated areas. We obtained data from DOD, TRICARE, DODEA, and the Census Bureau to identify installations that are, among other things, 50 miles from a military treatment facility and are

⁵GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.; Sept. 10, 2014).

⁶On December 20, 2019, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, Public Law 116-92, established the United States Space Force as a military service within DOD. Since we did not gather data from the Space Force given its status as a new organization, throughout this report we refer only to four military services within DOD.

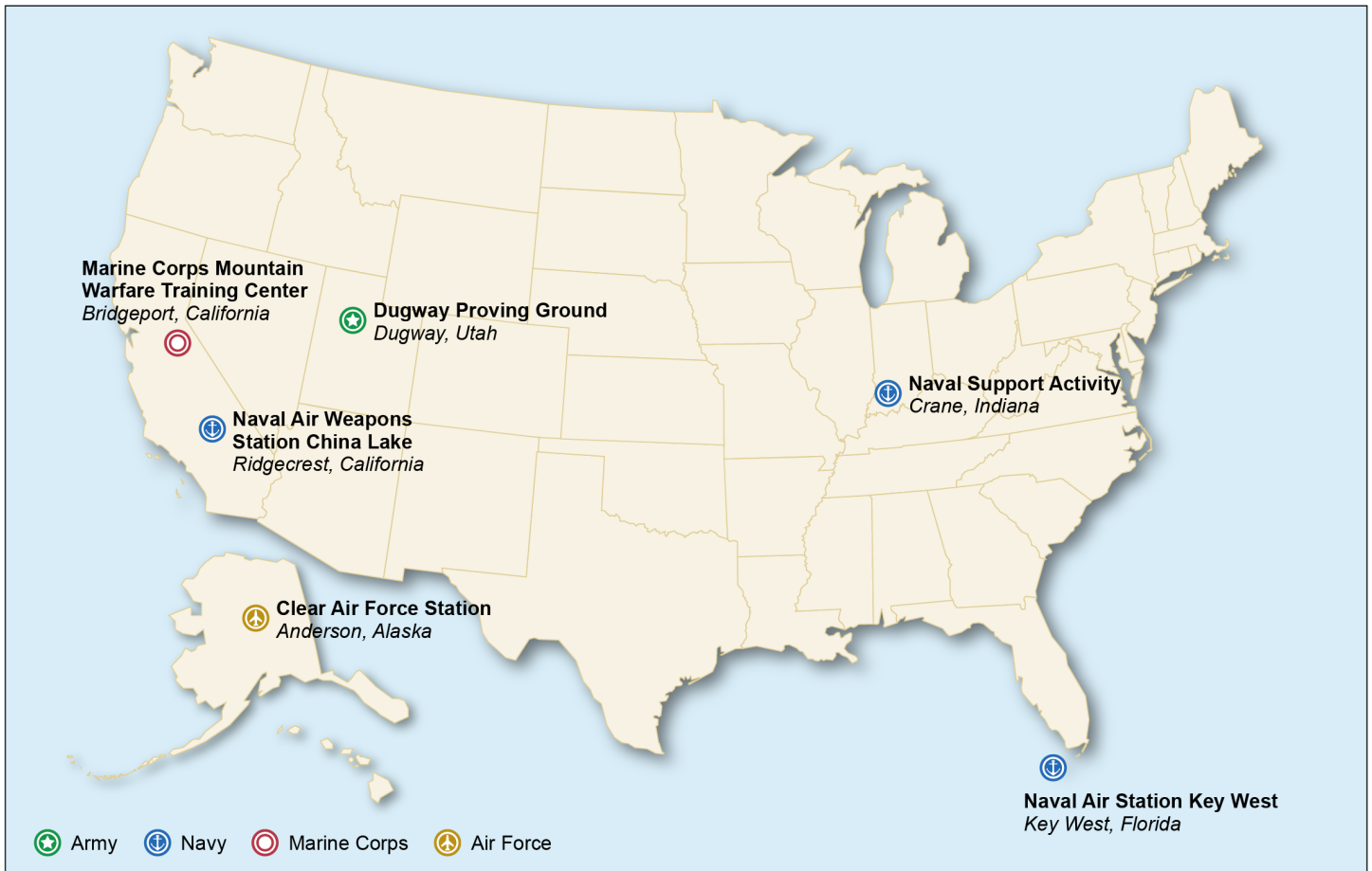
located in a rural area.⁷ We used this data to select four installations, one from each military service, based on five criteria and conducted interviews with relevant officials about the provision of support services at these locations.

Our five selection criteria included (1) the installation being an active-duty location, (2) located in the United States to include Alaska and/or Hawaii, (3) designated as remote or isolated for MWR, (4) having a public school located on the installation, and (5) servicemembers being eligible for TRICARE Prime Remote. All four installations selected were active-duty installations located in the United States to include Alaska and/or Hawaii. To ensure representation across the military services, final selections were made using the remaining three criteria. As a result, we selected Dugway Proving Ground, Utah (Army) (5 of 5 criteria); Naval Air Station Key West, Florida (Navy) (4 of 5 criteria); Clear Air Force Station, Alaska (Air Force) (4 of 5 criteria); and the Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center, California (Marine Corps) (4 of 5 criteria). Although Clear Air Force Station is an installation that does not have dependents (it is an unaccompanied assignment), we selected it for geographical representation and congressional interest to include installations from Alaska and/or Hawaii in our scope. We determined that the selection of Clear Air Force Station was appropriate for our design and objectives, and that the selection would generate valid and reliable evidence to support our work.

See figure 1 for a map of the United States showing the location of the two installations where we interviewed officials involved in the process for designating installations as remote or isolated for MWR purposes, and the location of the four remote or isolated installations where we interviewed relevant officials about the provision of support services. The results of our interviews are not generalizable, but provide useful insight into support services provided at installations in remote or isolated areas.

⁷The Census Bureau defines a rural area as any population, housing, and territory not included in an urban area. An urban area consists of a densely settled territory that contains 50,000 or more people. An urban cluster consists of a densely settled territory that contains at least 2,500 people, but fewer than 50,000 people. 77 Fed. Reg. 18652 (Mar. 27, 2012).

Figure 1: Selected Remote or Isolated Military Installations Contacted by GAO



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense data; Map Resources (map). | GAO-21-276

Note: To discuss the Department of Defense (DOD) process for designating locations as remote or isolated for morale, welfare, and recreation purposes, we met with officials at two installations: (1) Naval Support Activity, Indiana, and (2) Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, California. To discuss the provision of support services at these types of locations, we met with officials at four installations previously designated as remote or isolated for morale, welfare, and recreation purposes: (1) Dugway Proving Ground, Utah; (2) Naval Air Station, Key West, Florida; (3) Clear Air Force Station, Alaska; and (4) the Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center, California.

We also conducted interviews with relevant DOD, military service, TRICARE, and DODEA officials to identify policies, guidance, and procedures for assessing the sufficiency of the support services provided at remote or isolated installations. We reviewed these policies, guidance, and procedures to determine what, if any, processes exist for installations to assess the support services provided at remote or isolated installations. We found that a key principle of internal control, as outlined

in *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, was significant to this objective—namely that, management should identify, analyze, and respond to risks related to achieving defined objectives. We compared the processes for installations to assess the support services provided to this key principle of internal control to determine if the processes identified, analyzed, and provided responses to the risks that not providing support services posed to program objectives.

Moreover, we conducted a web-based survey of the universe of 756 active-duty servicemembers assigned to these four locations as of September 3, 2020, to document the servicemembers' views on the extent to which the support services provided at these installations met the needs of the servicemembers and their dependents where applicable since Clear Air Force Station is an unaccompanied assignment. We received responses from 212 servicemembers for a response rate of about 28 percent.⁸ While the survey is not generalizable to all remote or isolated installations, the results can be used to identify issues where support services may not be meeting the needs of servicemembers assigned to the four installations surveyed. A more detailed discussion of our scope and methodology can be found in appendix I and selected survey results can be found in appendix II.

We conducted this performance audit from October 2019 to July 2021 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

Installations Management

A military installation in the United States is defined as a base, camp, post, station, yard, center, or other activity under the jurisdiction of the Secretaries of the military departments.⁹ Management of these

⁸Although we surveyed the universe of servicemembers at the four locations, the characteristics of nonrespondents may differ and bias may exist. We did not have characteristics of all servicemembers at each location so we were unable to conduct a non-respondent analysis to assess whether those who did not respond to our survey were inherently different than those who did respond. Therefore, our findings are generalizable only to those servicemembers who responded to the survey.

⁹10 U.S.C. § 2801.

installations includes overseeing, planning, programming, and implementing major activities, such as installation master planning, facility planning and design, and military construction. Other examples of DOD programs that fall under military installations management include the Military Housing Privatization Initiative and MWR programs, such as child development centers.

The acquisition, management, and disposal of real property within DOD is a function of the military departments acting on behalf of DOD, subject to specific exceptions as established by law or by direction of the Secretary of Defense. The Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment has overall responsibility and oversight of DOD real property and establishes overarching guidance and procedures for the acquisition, management, and disposal of DOD real property.¹⁰

According to DOD officials, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Sustainment provides additional guidance and procedures, as required, for implementing real property management policy. The Secretaries of the military departments establish programs and procedures to manage real property that conform with applicable law, policies, guidance, and procedures.¹¹

DOD's Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Program

The Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, under the authority, direction, and control of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, serves as the principal point of contact on all MWR policy matters. Specifically, the principal deputy oversees DOD's MWR programs, develops policy, and oversees MWR programs' funding. DOD Instruction 1015.10, *Military Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) Programs*, establishes and implements policy, assigns responsibilities, and prescribes procedures for operating and managing programs for military MWR programs.¹² Specifically, the policy states that the DOD components are to establish MWR programs to maintain individual, family, and mission readiness and that these programs are an integral part of the military and its benefits package. DOD's instruction also specifies the purpose of, the funding

¹⁰Department of Defense Directive 4165.06, *Real Property* (Oct. 13, 2004) (incorporating change 1, Aug. 31, 2018).

¹¹Department of Defense Instruction 4165.70, *Real Property Management* (Apr. 6, 2005) (incorporating change 1, Aug. 31, 2018).

¹²Department of Defense Instruction 1015.10, *Military Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) Programs* (July 6, 2009) (incorporating change 1, May 6, 2011).

sources for, and the activities within each of MWR's three designated program categories. For a complete listing of MWR activities by program category, see appendix III.

In 2018, we assessed, among other things, the extent to which the military services have met DOD's established funding targets for each category of MWR programs and the extent to which DOD has oversight structures and performance measures to review its MWR programs.¹³ We made two recommendations including that DOD evaluate the funding targets for its MWR programs and develop measurable goals for its MWR programs to determine the programs' cost-effectiveness. DOD concurred with both recommendations, and in September 2020 stated that the department is conducting a comprehensive review of the entire DOD MWR program that will encompass a review of funding targets and, once the review is complete, DOD instructions 1015.10 and 1015.15 will be updated with the new policy.

DOD Health Care Services

Active-duty servicemembers and their dependents may obtain health care services through DOD's direct care system of military hospitals and clinics—referred to as military treatment facilities—or from TRICARE, its purchased care system of civilian providers.¹⁴ To develop its purchased care system, DOD contracts with private sector companies to develop and maintain networks of civilian providers and perform other customer service functions, such as processing claims, enrolling beneficiaries, and assisting beneficiaries with finding providers for its purchased care system.¹⁵ In fiscal year 2019, purchased care accounted for 55 percent of the total costs for health care services delivered to TRICARE beneficiaries.¹⁶

Active-duty servicemembers assigned to remote or isolated locations in the United States may be eligible for TRICARE Prime Remote. To receive

¹³See GAO, *Military Personnel: DOD Needs to Improve Funding Process for Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Programs*, [GAO-18-424](#) (Aug. 8, 2018).

¹⁴10 U.S.C. § 1074 and 32 C.F.R. § 199.17 (2020).

¹⁵Eligible beneficiaries include active-duty servicemembers and their dependents, medically eligible National Guard and Reserve members and their dependents, and retirees and their dependents and survivors, among others. Active-duty personnel include Reserve component members on active duty for at least 30 days.

¹⁶See GAO, *Defense Health Care: Implementation of Value-Based Initiatives in TRICARE*, [GAO-20-695R](#) (Sept. 17, 2020).

health care services under this program, the servicemember must be an active-duty member of the Uniformed Services on orders for more than 30 consecutive days and have a permanent duty assignment and residence that is greater than 50 miles or approximately 1-hour drive from a military treatment facility or military clinic.¹⁷ TRICARE Prime Remote for Active-Duty Family Members provides benefits to certain active-duty family members of the TRICARE Prime Remote-enrolled servicemember.

Military Housing

Since 1996, DOD has been working with private-sector developers and property management companies to provide military family housing in the United States. The private sector currently is responsible for the construction, renovation, maintenance, and repair of about 99 percent of domestic military housing—more than 200,000 homes on and around military bases—in the continental United States, Alaska, and Hawaii.

In recent years, we have issued multiple reports on DOD's privatized housing program. In 2020, we reviewed, among other things, the extent to which DOD has conducted oversight of privatized housing and implemented initiatives to improve privatized housing.¹⁸ We made 12 recommendations including that DOD take steps to improve housing condition oversight, performance metrics, data, and resident satisfaction, and to assess the risk of the initiatives on project finances. DOD generally concurred with the recommendations and has completed actions to implement six of these recommendations including providing updated guidance for oversight of privatized military housing and developing a process for collecting and calculating resident satisfaction in a standardized and accurate way across the military departments.

In 2018, we reviewed, among other things, the financial condition of DOD's privatized housing projects and found that DOD should take steps to improve monitoring, reporting, and risk assessment.¹⁹ We recommended, among other things, that DOD improve the information reported on the financial condition of its privatized housing projects, fully assess the effects of reductions in basic allowance for housing on the

¹⁷32 C.F.R. § 199.16 (2006).

¹⁸GAO, *Military Housing: DOD Needs to Strengthen Oversight and Clarify Its Role in the Management of Privatized Housing*, [GAO-20-281](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 26, 2020).

¹⁹GAO, *Military Housing Privatization: DOD Should Take Steps to Improve Monitoring, Reporting, and Risk Assessment*, [GAO-18-218](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 13, 2018).

projects, and clarify when project changes require notice.²⁰ DOD concurred with our recommendations and is taking steps to address them. Specifically, according to DOD officials, DOD revised its reporting guidance to the military departments to ensure that financial data were consistent and comparable and planned to update guidance to include a requirement to report on the risk of changes in the basic allowance for housing.

Dependent Education Services

DOD operates a worldwide school system to meet the educational needs of military dependent students and others, such as the children of DOD's civilian employees overseas. DODEA is the DOD field activity responsible for planning, directing, coordinating, and managing prekindergarten through 12th-grade educational programs on behalf of DOD. The agency operates 160 accredited schools in eight districts located in 11 foreign countries, seven states, Guam, and Puerto Rico.

At military installations in the United States where there are no DODEA schools, military dependent students attend local public schools in the communities near the installation. At some of these installations, like those that are remote or isolated, the public school is physically located on the military installation. According to the Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation, in the 2018 school year, there were 172 public schools physically located on military installations in the United States.

Congressional Designation of Remote or Isolated Installations

In April 1989, the House Armed Services Committee designated 207 installations as remote or isolated for MWR purposes and 42 of the installations are in the CONUS.²¹ In November 1989, the House Armed Services Committee added an additional six installations to its list, four CONUS and two installations in Hawaii. Since then, Congress has not added or removed any installations from its list of designated remote or isolated locations, and DOD has assumed the responsibility for designating installations as remote or isolated. For a list of the military

²⁰DOD's Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy annually calculates rent and utility rates for locations across the United States based on estimates of local market conditions, which are then adjusted for an individual's pay grade and dependency status. These calculations, which can fluctuate from year to year, are then used to determine each servicemember's monthly basic allowance for housing payments. Servicemembers' rent is paid—whether living on the installation or off—with basic allowance for housing payments.

²¹While these installations were designated as remote or isolated for MWR purposes in April 1989, DOD retroactively considered these installations remote or isolated as of October 1, 1988. Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Management and Personnel Memorandum, *Remote and Isolated Installations* (Apr. 24, 1989).

installations that Congress designated as remote or isolated in 1988 and 1989 for MWR purposes, see appendix IV.

DOD Has a Process to Designate Installations as Remote or Isolated for Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Services, but Not for Other Support Services

Between 2011 and 2020, DOD designated three installations as remote or isolated in the United States for MWR purposes. DOD's actions bring the current total to 43 installations designated as remote or isolated by either the House of Representatives or DOD since 1989.²² When an installation receives this designation, it is authorized the use of appropriated funds to support certain MWR activities that are not capable of self-sufficiency because the installations are isolated or considered exceptional due to conditions that make them similar to remote and isolated locations. The three installations, which applied and received approval for designation as remote or isolated for MWR purposes, are noted in table 1.

Table 1: Department of Defense Installations Designated since 2011 as Remote or Isolated for Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Purposes

Military installation	Year designated as remote or isolated
Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, Ridgecrest, California	2020
Naval Support Activity, Crane, Indiana	2019
Fort Hunter Liggett, Monterey, California	2011

Source: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. | GAO-21-276

A DOD instruction outlines how installations may be designated as remote or isolated to qualify for additional funding for MWR services.²³ Installations interested in using additional funds for MWR services must submit financial data about the self-sufficiency of their MWR programs for the current year and 4 prior years, among other data, which are reviewed at the military department-level before being sent to the Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness for consideration. Appendix V includes a list of the financial data required for an installation to be considered for designation as remote or isolated for MWR purposes.

²²According to DOD officials, between 1996 and 2011, several military installations were added to or removed from DOD's list of remote or isolated installations for MWR purposes. However, DOD provided data only for installations that have been added since 2011.

²³DOD Instruction 1015.10.

In addition, installations seeking additional funding for MWR services are required by DOD's MWR instruction to provide non-financial information. For example, installations must provide information on extreme climate or other environmental conditions that routinely and for extended periods prevent the use of off-base recreational activities. Other information that may be relevant includes special security conditions that prevent authorized personnel from using on- and off-base recreational facilities, such as a continued threat of civil disorder, political unrest, criminal activity, or terrorist attack. Also, an installation may need to document significant cultural differences that make it difficult to operate business activities at a profit. However, designations are based principally on the financial data that installations submit, according to officials with the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.

Beyond the MWR designation process, we found that DOD does not have a process for designating installations as remote or isolated for other types of support services. We reviewed DOD housing, medical, and educational policies and determined that these policies did not include a process for designating an installation as remote or isolated.

- **Housing:** DOD and military service housing guidance does not include a process for designating remote or isolated installations.²⁴ Instead, DOD's housing management manual states the policy that eligible personnel and their families will have access to affordable, quality housing facilities and services consistent with grade and dependent status and will generally reflect contemporary community living standards. Further, DOD's policy is to rely on the private sector as the primary source of housing for accompanied and unaccompanied personnel normally eligible to draw housing allowance, and to use a consistent DOD-wide analytical methodology for calculating the need to provide housing.²⁵

²⁴Department of Defense Manual 4165.63, *DOD Housing Management* (Oct. 28, 2010) (incorporating change 2, Aug. 31, 2018); Army Regulation 420-1, *Army Facilities Management* (Feb. 12, 2008) (incorporating rapid action revision, Aug. 24, 2012); Commander, Navy Installations Command Instruction 11103.4A, *Responsibility for Housing Programs in the Navy* (Jan. 31, 2014); Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Instruction 5009.1, *Responsibility for Navy Housing and Lodging Programs* (Dec. 26, 2007); Marine Corps Order 11000.22, *Marine Corps Bachelor and Family Housing Management* (July 14, 2014) (incorporating change 1, Jan. 22, 2018); and Air Force Instruction 32-6000, *Civil Engineering: Housing Management* (Mar. 18, 2020).

²⁵DODM 4165.63.

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- **Medical Services:** DOD, the Army, the Air Force, and the Navy's medical guidance do not include a process for designating an installation as remote or isolated for medical services.²⁶ However, the Navy's Bureau of Medicine and Surgery defines remote duty as a location where the servicemember resides and is assigned to a duty station that is greater than 2 hours driving time from a military treatment facility under normal driving conditions.²⁷ The Navy has designated eight installations as remote duty locations.
 - **Education:** DOD Education Activity guidance for providing preschool through grade 12 education to military dependents does not include a process for designating installations as remote or isolated.²⁸

According to *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, management documents in policies for each unit responsibility for, among other things, an operational process's objectives and operating effectiveness. Each unit, with guidance from management, determines the policies necessary to operate the process based on the objectives for the operational process. Also, each unit documents policies in the appropriate level of detail to allow management to effectively monitor the control activity. Further, management communicates to personnel the policies and procedures so that personnel can implement the control activities for their assigned responsibilities.

However, DOD has not documented a process for designating remote or isolated installations because it has not developed and implemented policy that addresses the designation of such installations. Officials responsible for access to housing and health care services told us that installations, servicemembers, and dependents would benefit if DOD had an overarching policy that outlined a process for applying for designation

²⁶Department of Defense Instruction 6000.19, *Military Medical Treatment Facility Support of Medical Readiness Skills of Health Care Providers* (Feb. 7, 2020); Army Regulation 40-501, *Standards of Medical Fitness* (June 27, 2019); Marine Corps Tactical Publication 3-40A, *Health Service Support Operations* (Dec. 10, 2012) (incorporating change 1, Apr. 4, 2018); Air Force Instruction 44-102, *Medical Care Management* (Mar. 17, 2015) (certified current Apr. 22, 2020).

²⁷Department of the Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery Instruction 1300.2B, *Suitability Screening, Medical Assignment Screening, and Exceptional Family Member Program Identification and Enrollment* (July 27, 2016).

²⁸Department of Defense Directive 1342.20, *Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA)* (July 7, 2020). Neither the Office of the Secretary of Defense nor the military services have policies that direct education activities for dependents enrolled in preschool through grade 12 education programs.

as remote or isolated that accounted for all support services. Officials provided additional details in these areas:

- **Housing:** Officials at Naval Air Station Key West, Florida, told us that policy that allows for a designation as remote or isolated for housing purposes would draw needed attention to the challenges they face in providing adequate housing in a remote or isolated location. Also, they stated it would likely increase their ability to obtain additional resources to address the need for improved or additional housing. For example, Naval Air Station Key West has developable land on the installation that could be utilized for additional privatized housing, which would help to alleviate the lack of long-term rental property experienced in the Key West area.
- **Health Care:** Officials at Naval Air Station Key West, Florida, and the Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center, California, told us that policy for designating installations as remote or isolated for health care purposes would improve their ability to provide services that are not available on the installations or in the community outside the installations. For example, neither the medical clinic on Key West nor the community outside the installation currently provide some types of specialty care, such as obstetric and gynecological care. As a result, servicemembers and their dependents must drive 3 hours to Miami, Florida, to receive these types of care. According to the officials, a policy that designates installations as remote or isolated for health care purposes would give them the ability to draw wider attention to this situation and request the additional resources needed for providing specialized medical care.²⁹

Moreover, officials with Army Installations Management Command and the Office of the Commander, Navy Installations Command, told us that policy placing an equal emphasis on factors such as geography and local community resources—in addition to the financial wellbeing of an installation’s MWR programs—would provide a more objective designation of remote or isolated installations. Additionally, three of the installation commanders we interviewed at remote or isolated installations told us that a revised process to designate installations as remote or isolated for support services beyond the usual MWR programs would increase the awareness of the challenges they face in providing support services at these installations. Such a revised process also could improve

²⁹While 32 C.F.R. § 199.16(e) sets forth criteria for servicemembers who may be eligible for TRICARE Prime Remote, the criteria apply only to an individual’s eligibility for the program, and do not address whether an installation is remote or isolated.

installation commanders' ability to request additional resources for maintaining support services, such as housing and health care.

We have reported on DOD efforts to provide support services at military installations in general, and identified challenges that may impact the availability and quality of those services. These types of challenges may be exacerbated at installations located in remote or isolated areas, which may have limited access to support services needed by servicemembers and their dependents.

- **Housing:** As stated previously, in recent years we have issued multiple reports on DOD's privatized housing program.³⁰ In 2020, we found that the military departments conducted some oversight of the physical condition of housing, but some efforts have been limited in scope. For example, annual interior walk-throughs are limited to just a few homes at some installations, which may not comprehensively reflect the condition of the housing units at those installations. We also found that the military departments use performance metrics to monitor private partners, but the metrics do not provide meaningful information on the condition of housing. For example, a common indicator is how quickly the private partner responded to a work order, not whether the issue was actually addressed. According to DOD officials, a number of military housing reforms were implemented since 2020 to include comprehensive housing inspections at each change of occupancy and revised and enhanced performance metrics to monitor private partners and the condition of the privatized housing units.
- **Health Care:** In 2020, we reported on DOD efforts to restructure its medical treatment facilities and found that civilian health care assessments conducted by DOD did not consistently account for provider quality, and DOD generally assumed that identified providers were of sufficient quality.³¹ We also found that DOD's civilian health

³⁰[GAO-21-389T](#), [GAO-20-281](#), and [GAO-18-218](#).

³¹See GAO, *Defense Health Care: Additional Information and Monitoring Needed to Better Position DOD for Restructuring Medical Treatment Facilities*, [GAO-20-371](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 29, 2020). In this report, we recommended that DOD consistently collect complete and accurate information about (1) the quality of available civilian health care in proximity to its military treatment facilities; (2) the extent to which current health care providers within the TRICARE networks meet access-to-care standards; and (3) the extent to which non-network civilian health care providers that could be incorporated into the TRICARE network meet access-to-care standards in terms of drive time. DOD generally concurred with our recommendations.

care assessments did not account for access to an accurate and adequate number of providers near military treatment facilities, and DOD may have included in its assessments providers who do not meet DOD's access-to-care standards for certain beneficiaries.

- **Other Support Service Challenges:** We have also reported on the impact military service in general can have on the dependents of servicemembers. For example, in 2021, we reported that DOD survey data estimates roughly one-quarter of military spouses who were in the workforce and in career fields that required credentials (state licenses or certifications) were unemployed in 2017.³² In that same year, about one-quarter of spouses who were employed in credentialed career fields were working outside their area of expertise, and about one in seven were working part-time due to a lack of full-time opportunities—two potential indicators of underemployment. Employment outcomes for military spouses may also vary due to other factors, including their partner's rank and frequent moves, according to DOD survey data and our literature review.

In 2018, we reported that the support provided to families with special needs through DOD's Exceptional Family Member Program varies widely for each branch of military service.³³ In addition, DOD's most recent annual reports to Congress did not indicate the extent to which each military service provides plans or allocates sufficient resources for family support providers. According to our analysis, the military services have developed relatively few plans, and there is wide variation in the number

³²See GAO, *Military Spouse Employment: DOD Should Continue Assessing State Licensing Practices and Increase Awareness of Resources*, [GAO-21-193](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 27, 2021). In this report, we recommended that DOD ensure continued assessment and reporting on each state's progress toward implementing best practices for facilitating licensure portability for military spouses, and explore options for assessing whether states' actions are improving spouses' experiences with transferring licenses. We also recommended that DOD establish strategies for sharing information on their outreach approaches to raise awareness of employment resources among military spouses. DOD concurred with our recommendations.

³³See GAO, *Military Personnel: DOD Should Improve its Oversight of the Exceptional Family Member Program*, [GAO-18-348](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 8, 2018). We recommended that DOD assess the extent to which each military service is (1) providing sufficient resources for an appropriate number of family support providers, and (2) developing services plans for each family with special needs and to include these results as part of any gaps in services for military families with special needs in each annual report issued to the congressional defense committees. We also recommended that DOD develop common performance metrics for assignment coordination and family support in accordance with leading practices for performance measurement. DOD concurred with our recommendations.

of family support providers employed, which raises questions about potential gaps in services for families with special needs. We also found that each military service uses various mechanisms to monitor how servicemembers are assigned to installations and obtain family support, but DOD has not established common performance measures to assess these activities. In 2020, we testified that DOD had made limited progress in improving oversight of the Exceptional Family Member Program.³⁴

By developing policy for designating installations as remote or isolated that includes a process that considers support services beyond MWR programs, DOD and the military services may be better positioned to increase awareness of the unique needs of servicemembers and their dependents stationed at these locations and help target needed resources.

DOD Has Identified Objectives for Support Services at Its Installations and Assessed Those Services, but Has Not Assessed Risks Associated with the Lack of Needed Services

DOD has set broad program objectives for providing support services, and the military services and installations are responsible for identifying specifically what support services will be provided and how that will be accomplished. As a result, the support services provided at each installation varies. We identified a number of concerns from not providing some support services during our review. While DOD and the military services use a variety of methods such as surveys and town hall meetings to assess whether support services are meeting the needs of servicemembers and their dependents, DOD has not systematically assessed the associated risks to recruiting, retention, and quality of life that not addressing these concerns pose.

³⁴GAO, *Military Personnel: DOD Has Made Limited Progress toward Improving Oversight of the Exceptional Family Member Program*, [GAO-20-400T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 5, 2020).

DOD Established Objectives for Providing Support Services and These Services Vary at Four Selected Installations in Remote or Isolated Areas

While DOD has established broad program objectives for determining the different types of support services that should be provided at military installations, including those that could be considered remote or isolated, we found that the support services provided at the four installations included in our review varied based on factors such as mission and the number of active-duty servicemembers assigned. DOD's broad program objectives include:

- **MWR programs:** DOD policy states that MWR programs are designed to maintain individual, family, and mission readiness.³⁵ The military services are responsible for implementing MWR programs that, among other things, provide comparable and consistent support to all eligible personnel based on customer demand, usage, and satisfaction.
- **Medical services:** DOD provides health care services through DOD's direct care system of military hospitals and clinics—referred to as military medical treatment facilities (MTF)—or from TRICARE, its purchased care system of civilian providers.³⁶ According to DOD policy, the direct care system supports the critical wartime medical readiness skills and core competencies of health care providers within the military services.³⁷ Similarly, the TRICARE program is designed to provide comprehensive managed health care for the delivery and finance of health care services within the Military Health System.³⁸
- **Housing:** It is DOD policy to ensure that eligible personnel and their families have access to affordable, quality housing and services consistent with grade and dependent status.³⁹ Such housing should generally reflect contemporary community living conditions. In addition, DOD's policy is to rely on the private sector as the primary source of housing for accompanied and unaccompanied personnel normally eligible to draw housing allowance, and to use a consistent DOD-wide methodology for calculating the need to provide housing.

³⁵DOD Instruction 1015.10.

³⁶10 U.S.C. § 1074 and 32 C.F.R. § 199.17 (2020).

³⁷DOD Instruction 6000.19.

³⁸32 C.F.R. § 199.17 (2020).

³⁹Department of Defense Instruction 4165.63, *DOD Housing* (July 21, 2008) (incorporating change 2, Aug. 31, 2018) and DOD Manual 4165.63, *DOD Housing Management* (Oct. 28, 2010) (incorporating change 2, Aug. 31, 2018).

- **Education:** The objective of the educational mission within DOD is to provide an exemplary education for prekindergarten through 12th grade to eligible dependents of servicemembers. Within the United States, DOD generally relies on local communities to provide educational opportunities to the dependents of servicemembers.⁴⁰

As shown in table 2, the specific support services provided at the four installations included in our review varied by location. For example, with respect to MWR programs, the revenue-generating activities, such as bowling alleys, food and beverage services, and marinas varied by location and the installations' ability to support such activities. Similarly, by design, the installations relied on a combination of direct services provided by their military health clinics and care provided through TRICARE to meet the medical needs of the servicemembers and their dependents.

Table 2: Support Services Provided at the Four Installations GAO Contacted

	Clear Air Force Station	Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center	Dugway Proving Ground	Naval Air Station Key West
Morale, welfare, and recreation (MWR)	MWR programs include fitness center; bar; bowling center food and beverage; gaming center; outdoor recreation rentals; and recreational trips (fishing, snowmobiling, rafting, etc.).	MWR programs include fitness center; youth sports; outdoor recreation and equipment; recreation center; entertainment and special events; movies; vehicle storage; storage facility; exchange services (mini-marts); mobile canteen; barber shop; child and youth services; and community services.	MWR programs include fitness centers; library; child and youth services; outdoor recreation and equipment; car wash; swimming pool; recreation events; nonappropriated fund services; food, beverage, and entertainment; diner; recreational vehicle storage lot; recreational vehicle park and campground; and Army community services.	MWR programs include fitness centers; bowling center; marina; food and beverage; outdoor recreation; auto skills shop; storage lots; child and youth center; teen center; recreational vehicle park; car wash; water park and pool; community center; vacation rentals (cottages and townhouses); and commissary and exchange.
	Designated remote or isolated in fiscal year 1989.	Designated remote or isolated in fiscal year 1989.	Designated remote or isolated in fiscal year 1989.	Designated remote or isolated in fiscal year 1989.

⁴⁰DOD operates 45 schools located in seven states within the continental United States. None of the four installations we visited has a DOD-owned and operated school.

	Clear Air Force Station	Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center	Dugway Proving Ground	Naval Air Station Key West
Medical services	Contractor operated primary care and occupational health clinic.	Branch Health Clinic Bridgeport provides medical care to active-duty servicemembers including primary care, counseling, radiology, laboratory, pharmacy, immunizations, preventive medicine, minor procedures and reproductive health services.	Dugway Proving Ground Health Clinic provides occupational health and selected primary care services. Other primary care or specialty care such as orthopedics, cardiology, or physical therapy are available through TRICARE or nearest MTF.	Naval Branch Health Clinic Key West provides a variety of medical services including primary care, basic pediatrics, adult care, and flight physicals. Limited mental health care, optometry, basic dental care, radiology, and pharmacy are also available.
	Specialty care such as orthopedics, cardiology, or physical therapy available through TRICARE or nearest medical treatment facility (MTF).	Specialty care such as orthopedics, cardiology, or physical therapy available through TRICARE or nearest MTF.	n/a	Specialty care such as orthopedics, cardiology, and physical therapy available through TRICARE.
	n/a	Dependents receive services through TRICARE.	Dependents receive services through TRICARE.	Dependents receive services on a space available basis or through TRICARE.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nearest MTF is more than 55 miles away. • TRICARE options: TRICARE Prime Remote or TRICARE Select. • Closest urbanized area is about 65 miles away. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nearest MTF is more than 65 miles away. • TRICARE options: TRICARE Prime Remote or TRICARE Select. • Closest urbanized area is about 54 miles away. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nearest MTF is about 100 miles away • TRICARE options: TRICARE Prime Remote or TRICARE Select. • Closest urbanized area is about 75 miles away. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nearest MTF is located on the installation. • TRICARE options: TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select. • Closest urbanized area is about 110 miles away.
Housing	Required to live on base in barracks-style housing because this is an unaccompanied assignment.	On-base housing consists of government-owned single or unaccompanied barracks located on the installation and privatized family housing located about 21 miles from the installation. Off-base private housing is available. Gardnerville, NV—located about 53 miles away—is the primary area where servicemembers reside.	Servicemembers are required to live on the installation in either government-owned duplexes—for single or unaccompanied personnel—or in family housing.	On-base housing consists of government-owned single or unaccompanied barracks or privatized family housing located on the installation. Off-base private housing is available in Key West and throughout the rest of the Florida Keys.

	Clear Air Force Station	Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center	Dugway Proving Ground	Naval Air Station Key West
Education	Not applicable, this is an unaccompanied assignment.	Dependent children attend public schools close to where their family lives. There is a public school located in Coleville where the base family housing is located. Dependents of servicemembers who chose to live off base, attend the public schools that serve the community in which they live—typically in Douglas County, Nevada.	Children attend the public school—operated by Tooele County—that is located on the installation.	Children attend public schools operated by Monroe County. One of these is a K-8 charter school located on the installation.

Source: GAO analysis of installation data. | GAO-21-276

Note: n/a = not applicable

Selected Installations in Remote or Isolated Areas Identified Concerns Associated with a Lack of Support Services

Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Services

The installations we reviewed face a number of concerns with regard to providing support services or programs—such as MWR services, medical services, housing, and education—in a remote or isolated area.⁴¹

According to DOD guidance, the military services should provide comparable and consistent MWR support to all eligible personnel assigned to or supported on DOD installations. This would include the four installations in remote or isolated areas included in our review. However, about 45 percent of respondents to our survey noted they were somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the availability of recreation programs and travel services at their installations. Similarly, about 45 percent of respondents to our survey stated they were somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the quality of the recreation programs and travel services at their installations.

While DOD guidance expects many MWR programs to be self-sufficient, it provides some flexibility for funding MWR programs at remote or isolated installations. Officials at the four installations included in our

⁴¹We considered five criteria when selecting installations: 1) The installation is an active-duty location, 2) the installation is located in the United States to include Alaska and/or Hawaii, 3) designation as remote or isolated for MWR, 4) having a public school located on the installation, and 5) being located more than 50 miles from an MTF. We considered installations meeting these criteria to be remote or isolated for the purposes of our review; however, not all installations selected met all five criteria.

review stated that they gauge the interests of the servicemembers in specific MWR programs and work with regional and service-level MWR officials to maximize the programs that the installation is able to offer. However, officials also stated that their ability to provide MWR services is negatively affected by factors such as low pay, commute time, and cost of living that impact their ability to fill and retain civilian employees at installations in remote or isolated areas. For example, officials at Clear Air Force Station, Alaska, told us that it is difficult to find civilian workers to support the food and beverage services on the installation because of low salaries, such as \$11 an hour, and the commute from the nearest community, which is about 25 miles from the installation.

Medical Services

Health clinics serving the four installations in our review vary in terms of size and capabilities. For example, the clinic at Dugway Proving Ground primarily provides occupational health services to the servicemembers, contractors, and civilians employed at the installation. The MTF that supports Naval Air Station Key West offers a variety of services including primary care, pediatrics, dental, and optometry. Regardless of location, servicemembers and their dependents rely on the TRICARE network to provide additional services not provided at the health clinics located at installations. TRICARE offers a specific coverage plan, TRICARE Prime Remote, for servicemembers located more than 50 miles or an approximately 1-hour drive from the closest MTF. Under this plan, servicemembers and their dependents have greater flexibilities with respect to using out-of-network providers on a reimbursable basis and could be eligible for reimbursement of travel expenses.

We found that servicemembers at three of the four remote or isolated installations we visited face commutes of an hour or more to reach providers in the TRICARE network. At the fourth installation, which had an MTF and a local community to support the installation, there were few TRICARE providers in the local community and specialty services required a significant commute. Almost 40 percent of respondents to our survey were either somewhat or very dissatisfied with the availability of specialists within the TRICARE network to provide services for their dependents. For example, several respondents from Naval Air Station Key West noted that in order to receive specialty care, they must make a 3-hour trip to Miami to find a network provider. In February 2020, we reported that DOD had not implemented any of the required elements for TRICARE's managed care support contracts related to providing improved services in rural, remote, and isolated areas of the United States. Defense Health Agency officials told us that these elements are

Housing for Servicemembers and Families

planned to be addressed in the fifth generation of TRICARE contracts that are expected to begin in 2023.⁴²

Officials at three of the four installations we visited identified the condition of the base housing as an area of concern. Servicemembers responding to our survey provided similar comments, with just over 50 percent of respondents stating they were somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with the condition of their housing whether that housing is located on or off base. Servicemembers responding to our survey identified conditions such as mold in base housing and dormitories, inadequate air conditioning systems, and general disrepair. Generally, the owner of the dwelling is responsible for its maintenance and upkeep—private owners/landlords are responsible for off-base housing, the military installation is responsible for government-owned housing, and the applicable owner under the Military Housing Privatization Initiative is responsible for privatized housing. In addition, each installation has a housing office that is available to assist servicemembers with disputes with property owners or privatized housing providers.

We identified two key issues: the lack of available, affordable housing and insufficient basic allowance for housing. First, some servicemembers responding to our survey from two of the four installations we visited reported the lack of available, affordable housing within the local community.⁴³ Specifically, approximately 73 percent of respondents to our survey noted that they were somewhat or very dissatisfied with the availability of housing options and 88 percent of respondents were dissatisfied with the affordability of housing at their current duty station. For example, survey respondents at Naval Air Station Key West identified both availability and affordability issues related to housing.

Data from the American Community Survey shows that the inventory of available long-term rental properties in Key West is limited because Key West is a tourist destination and the vast majority of properties are held as short-term vacation rentals. Consequently, servicemembers have to make the choice to live on base, lease an apartment instead of a single-

⁴²GAO, *Defense Health Care: Plans Needed to Ensure Implementation of Required Elements for TRICARE's Managed Care Support Contracts*, [GAO-20-197](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 7, 2020).

⁴³Servicemembers at Dugway Proving Ground and Clear Air Force Station are required to live in base housing. Consequently, affordability of housing in the local community is not an issue for these installations.

family home, or lease a single-family home that will result in a significantly longer commute.

In Bridgeport, California, the distance to the nearest community is the largest factor that influences the availability of housing. Privatized base housing is located over 20 miles from the installation. If servicemembers choose not to live in the privatized housing, they must find housing in local communities that are located even farther from the installation. Each installation is responsible for determining its need for on-base housing by completing a market analysis within a minimum 4-year interval. This process involves evaluating the ability of local communities to provide housing to servicemembers.

Second, 40 percent of respondents to our survey stationed at Key West or Bridgeport provided comments to open-ended survey questions concerning the basic allowance for housing (BAH) not being sufficient.⁴⁴ BAH is determined on an annual basis by DOD through a process that involves a contractor and the installations. In January 2021, we reported that DOD's process to determine BAH has not always collected rental data on the minimum number of rental units needed to estimate the total housing cost for certain locations and housing types.⁴⁵ In addition, DOD had taken steps to monitor the appropriateness of BAH rates, but we determined that DOD could strengthen its efforts through more consistent monitoring. By law, housing allowance rates are to be based on the costs

⁴⁴DOD's Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy annually calculates rent and utility rates for locations across the United States based on estimates of local market conditions, which are then adjusted for an individual's pay grade and dependency status. These calculations, which can fluctuate from year to year, are then used to determine individual servicemembers' monthly basic allowance for housing payments. Servicemembers' rent is paid—whether living on the installation or off—with basic allowance for housing payments. Servicemembers at Dugway Proving Ground and Clear Air Force Station are required to live in base housing. Consequently, BAH is not an issue for these installations.

⁴⁵GAO, *Military Housing: Enhancements Needed for DOD's Housing Allowance Program and Congressionally Required Payments to Privatized Housing Lessors*, [GAO-21-137](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 20, 2021). We recommended that DOD (1) assess its process for collecting rental property data to determine ways to increase sample size of current representative data and ensure sample size targets are met, and (2) establish and implement a process for consistently monitoring anchor points, the interpolation table, external alternative data, and any indications of potential bias by using quality information to set BAH rates and ensuring timely remediation of any identified deficiencies. DOD partially concurred with our recommendations and noted that in some instances the failure to reach the required sample size for determining BAH was the result of a lack of appropriate housing in that location.

Education Services for Dependents

of adequate housing for civilians with comparable income levels in the same areas.⁴⁶

Approximately 83 percent of respondents to our survey that have school-aged children stated that the schools at their installations met the needs of their dependents to a moderate extent. About 29 percent of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the educational options available at the installations for prekindergarten to 12th grade. For example, several respondents to our survey noted a lack of special education resources, athletic programs, and extracurricular activities at the schools at three of the installations.⁴⁷ School liaison officers at each installation in our review work with local school districts to facilitate military children having access to appropriate educational programs. In addition, DODEA manages grant programs to assist local school districts that serve military-connected children.

Installation officials and respondents to our survey also identified several issues that, while not directly related to the support services at the installations, can make living in remote or isolated areas difficult. For example:

- **High cost of living.** Officials from two of the four installations—Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center and Naval Air Station Key West—and survey respondents from three of the installations identified the issue of the high cost of living and stated that either the installation should receive a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) or a higher COLA than the servicemembers at an installation were currently receiving. Clear Air Force Station is located outside the continental United States. Servicemembers stationed at the installation are required to live on base and receive hardship duty pay. None of the officials or survey respondents from Clear Air Force Station identified high cost of living as a concern. Further, servicemembers stationed at the Mountain Warfare Training Center, Bridgeport, California, currently receive a 1 percent COLA.
- **Lack of employment opportunities for spouses.** In addition, officials from two of the four installations and respondents to our

⁴⁶37 U.S.C. § 403(b)(2).

⁴⁷As described earlier in this report, none of the four installations we included in this review had schools that were managed by DODEA. In addition, one of the installations we visited, Clear Air Force Station, Alaska, is an unaccompanied assignment, so support services related to dependents are not applicable in categories such as education.

survey identified the lack of employment opportunities for their spouses as a concern. For example, at Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center, Bridgeport, California, servicemembers have to choose between living in family housing or in communities located another 30 miles from the installation so that their spouses can find employment. If they live in family housing, both the servicemember and the spouse face total commutes of over an hour a day; the servicemembers face a commute of over 2 hours a day if they live in the nearest community. As mentioned previously, Clear Air Force Station is an unaccompanied assignment. As such, employment for spouses at the installation or in the local community is not an issue.

- **The reliability and affordability of internet services.** Finally, officials from three of the four installations identified the reliability and affordability of internet service as an issue at remote or isolated installations. For example, according to officials at Bridgeport, the internet service on the installation is very reliable, but the service available in the privatized base housing is poor because the bandwidth is not sufficient to support the needs of the community.

DOD and the Military Services Use Various Methods to Assess whether Support Services Are Meeting the Needs of Servicemembers and Their Dependents

DOD and the military services use a variety of methods—including surveys, town hall meetings, and point-of-service comment cards—to assess whether support services are meeting the needs of servicemembers and their dependents, including those stationed at installations that could be considered remote or isolated.

Surveys: DOD has conducted surveys at the department-wide level to gather information about the support services provided by DOD. Surveys also help collect information on user satisfaction. For example, the Interactive Customer Evaluation system is a web-based, survey-related tool that allows users to provide feedback on the services provided from a variety of categories such as dining, health care, recreation, and shopping services, among others, at their installation. While this survey provides the opportunity for users of the various support services to provide feedback, the results of the survey are generally used at the installation level to identify areas where support services can be improved. This approach does not necessarily focus on the risks that not providing support services has on meeting program objectives.

Within the medical community, the annual Military Health System Patient Satisfaction Survey collects information, such as:

- availability of services provided, type of services received, and facilities where provided;

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- familiarity with availability and facilities;
 - health status; and
 - satisfaction with system and quality provided.

The survey system includes targeted surveys to measure satisfaction with the medical services being provided. For example, the Joint Outpatient Experience Survey measures TRICARE beneficiaries' satisfaction with outpatient encounters and the TRICARE Inpatient Satisfaction Survey measures TRICARE beneficiaries' satisfaction with inpatient stays. In addition, the Healthcare Survey of DOD Beneficiaries is sent to approximately 300,000 eligible TRICARE beneficiaries each year. According to DOD officials, the results of these surveys are published quarterly. The survey results are used to support strategic planning and marketing, improve care and access and contractual performance, and respond to Military Health System and DOD requests. While these surveys evaluate the medical services being provided and user experiences, they do not necessarily provide a holistic evaluation of the risks that not providing support services has on the installations' ability to achieve program objectives.

DOD also routinely surveys resident satisfaction with privatized military housing.⁴⁸ In March 2020, we found that reported metrics used to measure resident satisfaction may not provide a real measure of satisfaction and that data on resident satisfaction are unreliable due to variances in the data provided to the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) by the military departments and in how OSD has calculated and reported these data.⁴⁹ DOD uses these surveys to manage performance contracts for privatized housing and report the status of privatized housing projects to Congress. Consequently, the surveys do not necessarily provide DOD with information about how the condition of or

⁴⁸Privatized military housing accounts for approximately 99 percent of the military housing located in the United States.

⁴⁹GAO, *Military Housing: DOD Needs to Strengthen Oversight and Clarify Its Role in the Management of Privatized Housing*, [GAO-20-281](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 26, 2020). We found that indicators of resident satisfaction, such as satisfaction with maintenance, are not necessarily good indicators of satisfaction because maintenance surveys focus on timeliness of maintenance and do not always seek feedback related to the quality of the maintenance performed. We recommended that the Secretaries of the military departments review their indicators underlying the privatized housing project performance metrics to ensure they provide an accurate reflection of the condition and quality of the homes. DOD concurred with these recommendations and, as of June 2021, the Air Force had completed action on these recommendations.

satisfaction with privatized housing affects the installations' ability to achieve program objectives or meet mission requirements.

Similarly, officials from each of the four installations included in our review stated that they use local surveys to gather feedback about the support services provided. These surveys gather feedback about a specific support service such as health care, housing, or MWR. For example, according to installation officials, the companies providing privatized base housing at Key West, Florida, and Bridgeport, California, routinely survey residents concerning their satisfaction with the housing and maintenance support provided. In addition, officials from each of the four installations told us that local surveys are used to gauge the level of satisfaction with the MWR programs provided at the installation and to identify interest in additional MWR offerings, which provides periodic program measurement as directed by DOD Instruction 1015.10.

Town hall meetings and comment cards: Officials from each installation in our review stated that town hall meetings and comment cards are also used to gather information and feedback from users of their support services. For example, officials stated that:

- commanding officers use town hall meetings to discuss issues that are of interest to the servicemembers and their families related to a variety of support services, including medical services, housing, MWR, and childcare;
- parent-teacher association meetings provide an opportunity to obtain feedback about the educational opportunities provided to the dependents of servicemembers; and
- point-of-service comment cards are available at MWR programs at each installation we visited so that users can provide feedback.

Both town hall meetings and comment cards provide the installations with feedback on specific support services from the user's perspective, but may not provide information that will inform the installation on the effects that any lack of services has on the ability of the installation to meet program objectives or mission requirements.

DOD, Service, and Installation Officials Are Aware of the Concerns, but Have Not Assessed the Risk Associated with the Reported Lack of Support Services at Remote or Isolated Installations

DOD, military service, and installation officials are generally aware of the concerns related to providing support services at remote or isolated installations. For example, representatives from TRICARE discussed the department-wide measures in place to ensure that network providers are available in communities located near installations and department-wide plans for providing improved services in rural, remote, and isolated areas of the United States in 2023.⁵⁰ Similarly, housing officials discussed the annual process for assessing the ability of the local community to support the housing needs of the installations and the determination of the BAH, which are established by the Military Compensation Policy directorate within the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy. In addition, installation officials stated that they work with local school districts to obtain the best educational experiences for the children of servicemembers. Finally, regional and installation officials described the collaboration that occurs among them to balance and reallocate resources in order to provide as many MWR programs as possible at remote or isolated installations.

According to *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, management should identify, analyze, and respond to risks related to achieving defined objectives. Specifically, management should consider all significant interactions within the entity and with external parties, changes within the entity's internal and external environment, and other internal and external factors to identify risks. Once risks are identified, management should analyze the risks to estimate their significance by considering factors such as the magnitude of impact, likelihood of occurrence, and nature of risk. The estimate of significance then serves as the foundation for identifying the response to the risks, which are used to design the specific actions or strategy for responding to the risks.

DOD guidance states that installations should rely on local communities to provide support services when possible. However, for military installations in remote or isolated areas, a local community is not always within close proximity. For example, all four of the installations in our review are more than 50 miles from the nearest urbanized area.⁵¹ Moreover, 61 installations within the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii, are more than 50 miles from the nearest urbanized area and 83 installations are more than 50 miles from the nearest MTF. In addition,

⁵⁰GAO-20-197.

⁵¹An urbanized area is an incorporated area with a population of 50,000 or more that is designated as such by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.

responsibility for support services rests with a number of different offices within DOD. Consequently, the efforts of DOD, the military services, and installations to manage and ensure that needed support services are provided at installations located in remote or isolated areas may not receive a holistic evaluation. As a result, DOD is not in the best position to assess the risks associated with meeting program objectives and mission requirements at installations located in remote or isolated areas.

Officials from the four installations included in our review noted that when servicemembers or their dependents must travel to receive support services, such as medical care, that it takes the servicemember away from their assigned duties. Similarly, officials from three of the four installations included in our review and respondents to our survey described a number of financial effects associated with living in remote or isolated areas, such as increased commuting costs, higher cost of consumer goods, travel distance and time needed to reach grocery stores, and the high cost of off-base housing, among other things. These financial effects impact the quality of life that servicemembers and their dependents experience at remote or isolated installations. In addition, officials from the four installations included in our review mentioned that finding and retaining personnel was an issue. For example, officials from two of the installations indicated that in some instances, young servicemembers leave the military after being posted at a remote or isolated installation. In addition, officials from all four installations stated that it could be challenging to find and retain civilian employees to fill key positions responsible for providing support services.

Finally, officials from the four installations included in our review stated that while their installations are located where they are for mission-related reasons, the relatively small size of the installations could place them at a disadvantage for funding for facilities upgrades or new construction. Without systematically assessing the additional risks found at installations in remote or isolated areas, DOD and the military services may not be positioned to target needed resources or to develop strategies to better meet the needs of servicemembers and their dependents.

Conclusions

DOD maintains hundreds of installations in the United States to help support the different missions of the military services. A number of these installations are located in areas considered to be remote or isolated. DOD has developed and implemented a process to approve additional funding for morale, welfare, and recreation programs for servicemembers and dependents stationed at remote or isolated installations. While DOD does have processes to consider the availability of other support services

such as housing and health care, its policies generally rely on communities located near the installations to provide servicemembers and their dependents with support services. Frequently, remote or isolated installations do not have local communities within close proximity to the installation. If DOD develops and implements policy that includes a process for designating remote or isolated installations for support services beyond just morale, welfare, and recreation, DOD and the military services would increase awareness of the unique needs of servicemembers and their dependents at these locations and may be better positioned to provide the appropriate type and level of support services at these locations.

DOD and the military services use a variety of methods to assess whether support services are meeting the needs of servicemembers and their dependents. However, DOD has not assessed the additional risks to recruiting, retention, and quality of life associated with stationing servicemembers and their dependents in locations that are considered remote or isolated. Without systematically assessing the additional risks associated with installations located in remote or isolated areas, DOD and the military services may not be positioned to target needed resources or to develop strategies to better meet the needs of servicemembers and their dependents.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making two recommendations to the Department of Defense.

The Secretary of Defense, in collaboration with the Secretaries of the military departments and the Commandant of the Marine Corps, should develop policy for designating installations in the United States as remote or isolated that includes a process for considering support services for servicemembers and dependents in areas besides morale, welfare, and recreation. (Recommendation 1)

The Secretary of Defense, in collaboration with the Secretaries of the military departments and the Commandant of the Marine Corps, should systematically assess the risks associated with not having needed support services for servicemembers and their dependents stationed in remote or isolated areas and subsequently develop strategies to better meet those needs as appropriate. (Recommendation 2)

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to DOD for review and comment. In its written comments, reproduced in their entirety in appendix VI, DOD concurred with both of our recommendations and cited actions it plans to

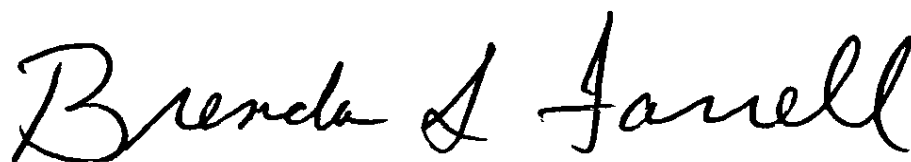
take to address them. DOD also provided technical comments, which we have incorporated as appropriate.

In concurring with recommendation 1, DOD stated that it would review policies to designate installations in the United States as remote or isolated, including those that address support services such as MWR. However, as described in this report, DOD has not developed and implemented policy that addresses the designation of such installations beyond MWR. As a result, we continue to believe that developing policy for designating installations as remote or isolated that considers support services beyond MWR is needed. In doing so, DOD and the military services may be better positioned to increase awareness of the unique needs of servicemembers and their dependents stationed at these locations and help target needed resources.

In concurring with recommendation 2, DOD stated that it would review risk assessment processes associated with the services provided to remote or isolated locations and the means by which military family needs are met. As described in this report, the current efforts of DOD, the military services, and installations to manage and ensure that needed support services are provided at installations located in remote or isolated areas may not receive a holistic evaluation. As a result, DOD is not in the best position to assess the risks associated with meeting program objectives and mission requirements at installations located in remote or isolated areas. Therefore, we continue to believe that without systematically assessing the additional risks found at remote or isolated areas, DOD and the military services may not be positioned to target needed resources or develop strategies to better meet the needs of servicemembers and their dependents.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary or Acting Secretary of the military departments, and the Commandant of the Marine Corps. In addition, this report will be available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or members of your staff have any questions regarding this report, please contact me at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov. Contact points for our Office of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made significant contributions to this report are listed in Appendix VII.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brenda S. Farrell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Brenda S. Farrell
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

For our first objective—to assess the extent to which the Department of Defense (DOD) designated installations in the United States since 2011 as remote or isolated for the provision of support services—we reviewed DOD,¹ military service, TRICARE², Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA),³ and Office of Management and Budget⁴ policies, guidance, and procedures to determine if there was a comprehensive process to designate an installation as remote or isolated for all types of support services provided at these installations.⁵

To determine the process currently in place to designate installations as remote or isolated for morale, welfare, and recreation (MWR) purposes,

¹Department of Defense Instruction 1015.10, *Military Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) Programs* (July 6, 2009) (incorporating change 1, May 6, 2011); Department of Defense Instruction 1015.15, *Establishment, Management, and Control of Nonappropriated Fund Instrumentalities and Financial Management of Supporting Resources* (Oct. 31, 2007) (incorporating change 1, Mar. 20, 2008); and Department of Defense Manual 4165.63, *DOD Housing Management* (Oct. 28, 2010) (incorporating change 2, Aug. 31, 2018).

²TRICARE Operations Manual 6010.59-M, ch.16, *TRICARE Prime Remote (TPR) Program* (Mar. 10, 2017). Under TRICARE, DOD maintains a purchased medical care system of civilian providers to augment its military treatment facility capabilities.

³Department of Defense Directive 1342.20, *Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA)* (July 7, 2020). The Department of Defense Education Activity is a DOD field activity responsible for planning, directing, coordinating, and managing prekindergarten through 12th grade educational programs on behalf of DOD. None of the four installations we visited for this review had schools that were managed by DODEA. Instead, each of the installations we visited relied on local public schools to provide prekindergarten through 12th grade education services to the dependents of active-duty servicemembers stationed at those locations.

⁴Office of Management and Budget Circular No. A-45 Revised, *Rental and Construction of Government Housing* (Nov. 25, 2019).

⁵Army Regulation 215-1, *Military Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Programs and Nonappropriated Fund Instrumentalities* (Sept. 24, 2010); Air Force Instruction 65-106, *Appropriated Fund Support of Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) and Other Nonappropriated Fund Instrumentalities (NAFIS)* (Jan. 15, 2019); Commander, Navy Installations Command Instruction 1710.3, *Operation of Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Programs* (June 14, 2013); Marine Corps Order P1700.27B, *Marine Corps Community Services Policy Manual* (Mar. 9, 2007); Air Force Instruction 32-6000, *Housing Management* (Mar. 18, 2020); Commander, Navy Installations Command Instruction 11103.4A, *Responsibility for Housing Programs in the Navy* (Jan. 31, 2014); Office of the Chief of Naval Operations Instruction 5009.1, *Responsibility for Navy Housing and Lodging Programs* (Dec. 26, 2007); Marine Corps Order 11000.22, *Marine Corps Bachelor and Family Housing Management* (Jan. 22, 2018) (with change 1); and Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery Instruction 1300.2B, *Suitability Screening, Medical Assignment Screening, and Exceptional Family Member Program Identification and Enrollment* (July 27, 2016).

we reviewed the process used in 2018 to designate the Naval Support Activity, Indiana, and 2019 to designate the Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, California, as remote for MWR purposes. For both locations, we reviewed relevant documents and procedures and interviewed officials involved in the process and the final determination.

We found that a key principle of internal control, as outlined in *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, was significant to this objective. Specifically, management documents in policies for each unit responsibility for, among other things, an operational process's objectives and operating effectiveness. Each unit, with guidance from management, determines the policies necessary to operate the process based on the objectives for the operational process. Also, each unit documents policies in the appropriate level of detail to allow management to effectively monitor the control activity. Further, management communicates to personnel the policies and procedures so that personnel can implement the control activities for their assigned responsibilities. We assessed the policies, guidance, and procedures against this principle, in particular that management should implement control activities through policies, and should internally and externally communicate quality information to achieve the entity's objectives. Quality information is current, complete, accurate, and accessible.⁶

To discuss DOD's processes and oversight of installation support services, we met with officials from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Sustainment and the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (Military Personnel Policy). To discuss the military services' management of remote or isolated installations, we met with officials from the Army's Installation Management Command and the Commander, Navy Installation Command. To discuss DOD and the military services' processes for providing specific support services at remote or isolated installations, we met with officials from the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (Morale, Welfare, Recreation and Resale Policy). We also met with officials from the Defense Health Agency, the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, the Army's Medical Command, the Navy's Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, and the Air Force Medical Service.

⁶GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.; September 2014).

To discuss TRICARE's Prime Remote managed health care system, we met with officials from TRICARE's continental U.S. and overseas managed health care offices. To better understand DOD's efforts to provide prekindergarten through 12th-grade education, we met with DODEA officials and officials with the non-profit organization Military Child Education Coalition.

For our second objective, to assess the extent to which DOD established objectives for support services at installations and assess whether current support services are meeting the needs of servicemembers and their dependents, we reviewed DOD and military service policies and guidance to identify what, if any, broad program objectives existed for providing support services at installations, including those that could be considered remote or isolated. In addition, we interviewed installation commanders and relevant support service officials at a non-generalizable sample of remote or isolated installations within the United States to assess the implementation and effect of the policies, guidance, and procedures.

To determine the extent to which support services are provided to servicemembers and their dependents at remote or isolated installations, we conducted virtual site visits at selected military installations. Specifically, we obtained (1) a list of installations that had been identified as remote or isolated for morale, welfare, and recreation purposes from DOD, (2) TRICARE data on installations that are more than 50 miles or a 1-hour drive from a military treatment facility, (3) DODEA data on installations that rely on local public schools for K-12 education, and (4) Census Bureau data to identify installations that are in areas that are designated as rural.⁷

We used this data to select four installations, one from each military service, based on five criteria and interviewed relevant officials about the provision of support services at these locations. Our five selection criteria included (1) the installation being an active-duty location, (2) located in the United States to include Alaska and/or Hawaii, (3) designated as remote or isolated for MWR, (4) having a public school located on the

⁷The Census Bureau defines a rural area as any population, housing, and territory not included in an urban area. An urbanized area consists of a densely settled territory that contains 50,000 or more people. An urban cluster consists of a densely settled territory that contains at least 2,500 people, but fewer than 50,000 people. 77 Fed. Reg. 18652 (Mar. 27, 2012).

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

installation, and (5) servicemembers being eligible for TRICARE Prime Remote.

All four installations selected were active-duty installations located in the United States to include Alaska and/or Hawaii. To ensure representation across the military services, final selections were made using the remaining three criteria. As a result, we selected Dugway Proving Ground, Utah (Army) (5 of 5 criteria); Naval Air Station, Key West, Florida (Navy) (4 of 5 criteria); Clear Air Force Station, Alaska (Air Force) (4 of 5 criteria); and the Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center, California (Marine Corps) (4 of 5 criteria). Although Clear Air Force Station is an installation that does not have dependents (it is an unaccompanied assignment), we selected Clear Air Force Station for geographical representation and congressional interest to include installations from Alaska and/or Hawaii in our scope. We determined that the selection of Clear Air Force Station was appropriate for our design and objectives, and that the selection would generate valid and reliable evidence to support our work.

See table 3 for the site selection criteria and the military installations selected.

Table 3: Site Selection Criteria and Military Installations Selected

	Active duty installation	In the United States including Alaska and/or Hawaii	Designated by DOD as remote or isolated for Morale, Welfare, and Recreation purposes	Public school located on the installation	Servicemembers eligible for TRICARE Prime Remote
Dugway Proving Ground, Utah	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Naval Air Station Key West, Florida	✓	✓	✓	✓	n/a ^a
Clear Air Force Station, Alaska	✓	✓	✓	n/a ^b	✓
Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center, California	✓	✓	✓	n/a ^c	✓

Legend:

✓ = Military installation met the selected criteria.

n/a= [a – c listed below]

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense data. | GAO-21-276

^aServicemembers and dependents assigned to Naval Air Station Key West, Florida, are eligible for TRICARE Prime as opposed to TRICARE Prime Remote.

^bClear Air Force Station, Alaska, is an unaccompanied assignment that is outside of the continental United States. Since it is unaccompanied, no dependent education services are provided.

^cSchool aged dependents living at the Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Center, California, attend public schools located in the local community as opposed to a public school on the installation.

We interviewed the installation commanders and relevant program officials at each of the four installations to assess the processes used to determine the type and level of support services provided at each location and the extent to which support services, if any, are provided by the local communities. We also conducted interviews with relevant DOD, military service, TRICARE, and DODEA officials to identify policies, guidance, and procedures for assessing the sufficiency of the support services provided at remote or isolated installations. We reviewed these policies, guidance, and procedures to determine what, if any, processes exist for installations to assess the support services provided at remote or isolated installations. We found that a key principle of internal control, as outlined in *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, was significant to this objective—namely that management should identify, analyze, and respond to risks related to achieving defined objectives. We compared the processes for installations to assess the support services provided to this key principle of internal control to determine if the processes identified, analyzed, and provided responses to the risks that not providing support services posed to program objectives.

We also conducted a web-based survey of the universe of 756 active-duty servicemembers assigned to these four locations as of September 3, 2020, to document the servicemembers' views on the extent to which the support services provided at these installations met the needs of the servicemembers and their dependents.⁸ We deployed the survey on September 17, 2020, and closed it on November 21, 2020. We also sent reminders to survey recipients on September 17, 2020; October 7 and 21, 2020; and November 6, 2020. In total, we received responses from 212 of the 756 servicemembers we surveyed, for a response rate of about 28

⁸Our survey results are used to provide anecdotal examples concerning the views and experiences of servicemembers stationed at the four installations included in our survey with respect to support services. Moreover, the results cannot be used to draw conclusions about support services at any installations not included in our survey.

percent.⁹ While the survey is not generalizable to all remote or isolated installations, the results can be used to identify issues where support services may not be meeting the needs of servicemembers assigned to the four installations surveyed. After we drafted the questionnaire, we asked for comments from knowledgeable officials. Because this was not a sample survey, but rather administered to the universe of servicemembers at these four locations, it has no sampling errors.

However, the practical difficulties of conducting any survey may introduce errors, commonly referred to as nonsampling errors. For example, difficulties in interpreting a particular question, sources of information available to respondents, or entering data into a database or analyzing them can introduce unwanted variability into the survey results. We took steps in developing the questionnaire, collecting the data, and analyzing them to minimize such nonsampling errors. For example, social science survey specialists designed the questionnaire in collaboration with GAO staff who had subject matter expertise. An independent survey specialist conducted a peer review of the draft survey. Then, we pretested the draft questionnaire with five servicemembers of various grade levels to ensure that the questions were relevant, clearly stated, and easy to understand. When we analyzed the data, an independent analyst checked all computer programs. Since this was a Web-based survey, respondents entered their answers directly into the electronic questionnaire, eliminating the need to key data into a database, minimizing error.

We conducted this performance audit from October 2019 to July 2021 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

⁹Although we surveyed the universe of servicemembers at the four locations, the characteristics of nonrespondents may differ and bias may exist. We did not have characteristics of all servicemembers at each location so we were unable to conduct a non-respondent analysis to assess whether those who did not respond to our survey were inherently different than those who did respond. Therefore, our findings are generalizable only to those servicemembers who responded to the survey.

Appendix II: Demographic Information and Selected Survey Responses

This appendix contains demographic data and responses to selected questions from our survey of servicemembers stationed at the four installations included in our review. In total, we received responses from 212 of the 756 servicemembers we surveyed, for a response rate of about 28 percent. This information is intended to provide additional context regarding the servicemembers included in our survey and their perspectives and experiences related to support services. While the results of the survey conducted by GAO are not generalizable to all remote or isolated installations, the results can be used to identify issues where support services may not be meeting the needs of servicemembers assigned to the four installations surveyed. Table 1 contains demographic information on the respondents, including assigned installation, pay grade, time at current installation, and dependents.

Appendix II: Demographic Information and Selected Survey Responses

Table 1: Demographic Information as Stated by Servicemembers at Four Installations in GAO Survey

Category	Responses
1. Assigned Installation (n=212)	
Clear Air Force Station, Alaska	11
Dugway Proving Grounds, Utah	17
Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center, California	51
Naval Air Station Key West, Florida	133
2. Pay Grade (n=212) ^a	
E1 to E4	39
E5 to E6	104
E7 to E9	27
O1 to O3	23
O4 to O6	19
3. Time at Current Installation (n=212)	
Less than 1 year	49
1 year to less than 3 years	135
3 years or longer	28
4. Servicemember marital status and Dependents	
Spouses	120
Children/Other	95

n=number of respondents

Source: GAO analysis of survey responses. | GAO-21-276

^aFor paygrade, "E" refers to enlisted servicemembers and "O" refers to officers.

Medical Services

Our survey asked several questions related to the medical services provided at the installation, the nearest medical treatment facility (MTF), and within the TRICARE network of providers supporting servicemembers and their dependents at each of the installations.

As shown in Table 2, more than half of survey respondents were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the available medical services with the exception of specialty care at the closest MTF and for their dependents on the TRICARE network. Table 3 demonstrates that survey respondents had similar satisfaction rates with their ability to make appointments for medical services.

Appendix II: Demographic Information and Selected Survey Responses

Table 2: Satisfaction with Medical Services as Stated by Servicemembers at Four Installations in GAO Survey

	Very or somewhat satisfied (percent)	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (percent)	Very or somewhat dissatisfied (percent)
At the installation (n=199)	52	15	33
At the closest medical treatment facility			
Primary care (n=160)	56	14	30
Specialty care (n=155)	24	14	61
TRICARE network			
Primary Care – self (n=123)	72	9	20
Primary care – dependents (n=98)	58	14	28
Specialty care – self (n=116)	53	10	37
Specialty care – dependents (n=95)	48	13	39
Mental health			
Self (n=32)	56	19	25
Dependents (n=27)	52	11	37

n=number of respondents
Source: GAO analysis of survey responses. | GAO-21-276

Table 3: Satisfaction with Ability to Schedule Medical Appointments as Stated by Servicemembers at Four Installations in GAO Survey

	Very or somewhat satisfied (percent)	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (percent)	Very or somewhat dissatisfied (percent)
At the installation (n=198)	57	12	31
At the closest medical treatment facility			
Primary care (n=158)	54	12	34
Specialty care (n=153)	27	16	56
TRICARE network			
Primary Care – self (n=121)	66	13	21
Primary care – dependents (n=97)	60	13	28
Specialty care – self (n=116)	53	10	36
Specialty care – dependents (n=94)	46	14	40
Mental health			
Self (n=29)	59	17	24
Dependents (n=28)	58	11	32

n=number of respondents
Source: GAO analysis of survey responses. | GAO-21-276

Educational Services

The objective of the educational mission within DOD is to provide an exemplary education for preschool through grade 12 to eligible dependents of servicemembers. School options can exist on the installation or in the neighboring communities where the servicemembers reside. For the installations that we surveyed, 52 servicemembers responded that they had school-aged children that attended kindergarten through grade 12.

Appendix II: Demographic Information and Selected Survey Responses

Table 4 demonstrates that the school options provided at the installations we surveyed generally met at least some of the educational needs of the school-aged children. Table 5 however, indicates that there was some level of dissatisfaction with the educational offerings at the school supporting these installations.

Table 4: Extent That Educational Needs Are Met for Dependent Children as Stated by Servicemembers at Four Installations in GAO Survey (n=52)

Extent to which educational needs are met	Percent
Meets to a very great extent	10
Meets to a great extent	35
Meets to a moderate extent	38
Meets to some extent	12
Does not meet	6

n=52 refers to the number of respondents
Source: GAO analysis of survey responses. | GAO-21-276

Table 5: Satisfaction with Educational Opportunities for Dependent Children as Stated by Servicemembers at Four Installations in GAO Survey (n=52)

	Percent
Very satisfied	21
Somewhat satisfied	23
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	27
Somewhat dissatisfied	19
Very dissatisfied	10

n=52 refers to the number of respondents
Source: GAO analysis of survey responses. | GAO-21-276

Housing Services

Our survey included questions concerning the location of servicemembers' housing, the type of housing in which servicemembers live, servicemembers' satisfaction with the condition of housing, the affordability of housing, and the availability of housing. Table 6 illustrates that servicemembers at the four installations we surveyed rely on a number of options to provide their housing needs.

Table 6: Housing Demographics as Stated by Servicemembers at Four Installations in GAO Survey

Location of housing (n=210)	Responses
On base	130 ^a
Off base	80
Type of housing (n=209)	
Government-owned barracks/dorms	42
Government-owned family housing	41
Privatized family housing	49
Civilian/community housing	72
Other (temporary housing, recreational vehicle, sailboat, etc.)	5

Source: GAO analysis of survey responses. | GAO-21-276
^aRespondents from Clear Air Force Station and Dugway Proving Grounds are required to live in base housing. In addition, selected positions at Naval Air Station Key West and Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center may be required to live on the installation because of duty requirements. In total, 51 respondents indicated that they were required to live on the installation.

Appendix II: Demographic Information and Selected Survey Responses

In addition, Table 7 demonstrates that while more than half of the respondents are satisfied with the condition of their housing, the majority of respondents are dissatisfied with the availability and affordability of housing at their current remote or isolated duty station.

Table 7: Satisfaction with Current Housing Provided by Servicemembers at Four Installations in GAO Survey

	Physical Condition (percent) (n=210)	Availability (percent) (n=157)	Affordability (percent) (n=159)
Very satisfied or somewhat satisfied	51	15	6
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	10	11	6
Somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied	39	73	88

n= refers to the number of respondents
Source: GAO analysis of survey responses. | GAO-21-276

Table 8 shows the top five factors that influenced servicemembers' decisions on which housing option to select.

Table 8: Top Factors Influencing Choice of Housing as Stated by Servicemembers at Four Installations in GAO Survey

Factors	Very great extent (responses)	Great extent (responses)	Moderate extent (responses)	Some extent (responses)
1. Affordability (n=159)	90	17	14	16
2. Commute (n=158)	40	35	28	27
3. Safety (n=156)	23	34	33	23
4. Neighborhood amenities (n=159)	27	16	32	33
5. Access to base services (n=159)	25	17	35	27

N= refers to the number of respondents
Source: GAO analysis of survey responses. | GAO-21-276

Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Services

Our survey included a number of questions concerning the types of morale, welfare, and recreation (MWR) services available at the remote or isolated installations as well as the servicemembers' opinions concerning the quality of MWR services provided.

Table 9 shows that satisfaction levels with the availability of MWR services varies by program. Conversely, table 10 illustrates that servicemembers tend to be slightly more dissatisfied with the quality of MWR programs.

Appendix II: Demographic Information and Selected Survey Responses

Table 9: Satisfaction with the Availability of Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Programs as Stated by Servicemembers at Four Installations in GAO Survey

	Very or somewhat satisfied (percent)	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (percent)	Very or somewhat dissatisfied (percent)
Commissary (n=197)	46	14	40
Exchange (n=200)	42	16	43
Recreation Services (n=188)	32	24	44
Travel Services (n=171)	21	34	45

n= refers to the number of respondents
Source: GAO analysis of survey responses. | GAO-21-276

Table 10. Satisfaction with the Quality of Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Programs as Stated by Servicemembers at Four Installations in GAO Survey

	Very or somewhat satisfied (percent)	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (percent)	Very or somewhat dissatisfied (percent)
Commissary (n=186)	40	13	47
Exchange (n=187)	37	15	48
Recreation Services (n=176)	28	28	44
Travel Services (n=153)	22	35	43

n= refers to the number of respondents
Source: GAO analysis of survey responses. | GAO-21-276

Appendix III: Department of Defense Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Categories and Activities

This appendix, as shown in table 4, shows the Department of Defense (DOD) morale, welfare, and recreation program categories and associated activities.

Table 4: Department of Defense Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Program Categories and Activities

Category A – Mission Sustaining Programs	Category B – (continued)
Armed Forces Entertainment	Child Development Centers
Free Admission Motion Pictures	Family Child Care
Physical Fitness	School Aged Care
Aquatic Training	Youth Programs
Library and Information Services Programs	Category C – Revenue Generating Activities
On-Installation Parks and Picnic Areas	Military Clubs (membership and nonmembership)
Category A Recreation Centers (military personnel)	Food, Beverage, and Entertainment Programs
Single Servicemember Program	PCS Lodging
Shipboard, Company, and/or Unit Programs	Recreational Lodging
Sports and Athletics (self-directed, unit, intramural)	Joint Service Facilities and Armed Forces Recreation Centers
Warfighter and Family Services ^a	Flying Program
Category B – Community Support Programs	Parachute and Sky Diving Program
Community Programs	Rod and Gun Program
Category B Recreation Center (military and family members)	Scuba and Diving Program
Cable and/or Community Television	Horseback Riding Program and Stables
Recreation Information, Tickets, Tours, and Travel Services	Other Special Interest Programs
Recreational Swimming	Resale Programs
Directed Outdoor Recreation	Amusement and Recreation Machines and/or Gaming
Outdoor Recreation Equipment Checkout	Bowling (over 16 lanes)
Boating Program (checkout and lessons)	Golf
Camping (primitive and/or tents)	Marinas (resale or private boat berthing)
Riding Stables, government-owned or government-leased	Equipment Rental (party and catering and maintenance and construction)
Amateur Radio	Base Theater Film Program
Performing Arts (music, drama, and theater)	Vehicle Storage
Arts and Crafts Skill Development	Animal Kennels
Automotive Skill Development	Aquatics Centers (water theme parks)
Bowling (16 lanes or fewer)	Other recreation/entertainment programs
Sports Programs above Intramural Level	
Technology Centers	

Source: Department of Defense (DOD) Instruction 1015.10, *Military Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) Programs* (July 6, 2009) (incorporating change 1, May 6, 2011). | GAO-21-276

^aDOD Instruction 1015.10 allows the services to operate Warfighter and Family Service activities as a Category A Morale, Welfare, and Recreation program at the services' discretion. These activities may encompass a variety of quality-of-life programs, including unit family readiness programs for servicemember and family readiness and deployment support. The Navy and Marine Corps include such activities as part of Morale, Welfare, and Recreation programs. The Army and Air Force do not.

Appendix IV: Military Installations Designated by the House Armed Services Committee as Remote or Isolated

In April 1989, the House Armed Services Committee agreed with the Department of Defense criteria for designating military installations as remote or isolated and designated 42 installations in the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii, as remote or isolated.¹ Installations on the list with category C morale, welfare, and recreation (MWR) programs were authorized the use of appropriated funds up to the category B level to support those category C programs.

Table 5 lists the 42 military installations designated by the House Armed Services Committee as remote or isolated in April 1989.

Table 5: Military Installations in the United States Designated as Remote or Isolated in Fiscal Year 1989

Military Service	Installation	Location
Army	Fort Greely	Delta Junction, Alaska
	Fort Wainwright	Fairbanks, Alaska
	Yuma Proving Ground	Yuma, Arizona
	Fort Irwin	Barstow, California
	Pohakuloa Training Area	Hilo, Hawaii
	White Sands Missile Range	White Sands, New Mexico
	McAlester Army Depot	McAlester, Oklahoma
	Dugway Proving Ground	Dugway, Utah
	Fort McCoy	Sparta, Wisconsin
	Navy	Naval Air Station Adak
Naval Security Group Activity, Adak		Adak, Alaska
Fleet Surveillance Support Command Detachment 1		Amchitka, Alaska
San Nicholas Island		California
Naval Air Facility El Centro		El Centro, California
San Clemente Island Auxiliary Landing Field		San Clemente Island, California
Naval Ordnance Test Unit Cape Canaveral		Cape Canaveral, Florida
Naval Air Station Key West		Key West, Florida
Pacific Missile Range Facility Barking Sands		Hawaii
Naval Communications Station Cutler		East Machias, Maine
Naval Air Station Fallon		Fallon, Nevada
Naval Air Station Chase Field		Beeville, Texas

¹U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services letter to the Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management and Personnel), (Apr. 11, 1989). According to a memorandum from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Management and Personnel, these installations would retroactively be considered remote and isolated for MWR purposes as of October 1, 1988.

**Appendix IV: Military Installations Designated
by the House Armed Services Committee as
Remote or Isolated**

Military Service	Installation	Location
	Naval Security Group Activity Winter Harbor	Winter Harbor, Maine
	Naval Radar Station Sugar Grove	West Virginia
Air Force	Shemya Air Force Base	Aluetians, Alaska
	Clear Air Force Station	Anderson, Alaska
	Eielson Air Force Base	Fairbanks, Alaska
	Galena Airport	Galena, Alaska
	King Salmon Airport	Naknek, Alaska
	Gila Bend Air Force Range	Gila Bend, Arizona
	K. I. Sawyer Air Force Base ^a	Gwinn, Michigan
	Cavalier Air Force Station	Cavalier, North Dakota
	Grand Forks Air Force Base ^a	Emerado, North Dakota
	Minot Air Force Base	Minot, North Dakota
	Holloman Air Force Base	Alamogordo, New Mexico
	Socorro	Socorro, New Mexico
	Edwards Air Force Base	Rosamond, California
	Mountain Home Air Force Base	Mountain Home, Idaho
	Loring Air Force Base	Limestone, Maine
	Laughlin Air Force Base	Del Rio, Texas
Marine Corps	Marine Barracks Adak	Adak, Alaska
	Marine Corps Logistics Base	Barstow, California
	Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center	Bridgeport, California

Source: GAO analysis of Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management and Personnel) Memorandum, *Remote and Isolated Installations* (Apr. 24, 1989) and U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services letter to the Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management and Personnel) (Apr. 11, 1989). | GAO-21-276

^aK.I. Sawyer Air Force Base, Michigan, and Grand Forks Air Force Base, North Dakota, were not requested for remote or isolated status but received the designation.

In November 1989, the U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, reviewed the list of military installations designated as remote or isolated and added six installations, as shown in table 6.²

²U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services letter to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Military Manpower and Personnel Policy) (Nov. 20, 1989).

**Appendix IV: Military Installations Designated
by the House Armed Services Committee as
Remote or Isolated**

**Table 6: Military Installations in the United States Designated as Remote or Isolated
in November 1989**

Installation	Location
Naval Station, Barbers Point	Hawaii
Kilauea Military Reservation	Hawaii
Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Training Center, 29 Palms	29 Palms, California
Marine Corps Air Station, Yuma	Yuma, Arizona
Marine Corps Recruit Depot/ERR, Parris Island	Parris Island, South Carolina
Marine Corps Air Station, Beaufort	Beaufort, South Carolina

Source: U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, letter to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Military Manpower and Personnel Policy) (Nov. 20, 1989). | GAO-21-276

In April 1996, DOD's Executive Director, MWR and Resale Activities, approved Marine Corps Support Activity, Kansas City, Missouri as remote or isolated, stating that the installation meets the remote or isolated criteria established in DOD Instruction 1015.10.

Appendix V: Financial Data Required for an Installation to Be Considered for Designation as Remote or Isolated

Table 7 shows the financial data required to be submitted by an installation to the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness for that installation to be considered for designation as remote or isolated for morale, welfare, and recreation purposes.

Table 7: Financial Data Required for an Installation to Be Considered for Designation as Remote or Isolated for Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Purposes

- Appropriated funding support as a percent of total expenses for Category A (minimum 85 percent) and Category B (minimum 65 percent) programs.^a
- Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) appropriated funding such as cash, receivables (30-day), current liabilities, acid test ratio (cash plus receivables and/or current liabilities), total revenue (including exchange dividend), MWR fund net income before depreciation or net income after depreciation, and net income before depreciation and after depreciation as a percent of total revenue, net income or loss.
- Category C total revenue including exchange dividend, Category C revenue before net income before depreciation or net income after depreciation and net income before depreciation or net income after depreciation as a percent of total revenue, net income, or loss.
- Nonappropriated fund capital improvements (e.g., equipment, information systems, minor construction, major construction).
- Cash in bank at the beginning of the fiscal year and projected net income or loss.
- “Must fund” capital requirements (those capital items that are required to maintain Department of Defense and Service standards that provide programs, facilities, and services typically found at other military installations or are identified as a customer feedback deficiency in a survey and not available in the local civilian community).
- Cash in bank end of the fiscal year.
- Minimum cash required to maintain military service or major command acid test minimum.
- Excess cash or cash shortfall.
- Monetary assistance provided by major command and military service.

Source: Department of Defense Instruction 1015.10, *Military Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) Programs* (July 6, 2009) (incorporating change 1, May 6, 2011). | GAO-21-276

^aPer DOD Instruction 1015.10, DOD’s three categories of Morale, Welfare, and Recreation programs are mission-sustaining programs promoting the physical and mental well-being of servicemembers (Category A), basic community support programs for servicemembers and their families (Category B), and recreational activities for servicemembers and their families that are revenue-generating (Category C). In addition to financial data, non-financial factors are assessed in determining whether an installation is remote or isolated.

Appendix VI: Comments from the Department of Defense



MANPOWER AND
RESERVE AFFAIRS

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

1500 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-1500

6/28/2021

Ms. Brenda S. Farrell
Director, Defense Capabilities Management
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Farrell:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) Draft Report, GAO-21-276, "MILITARY INSTALLATIONS: DOD Should Consider Various Support Services when Designating Sites as Remote or Isolated," dated May 27, 2021 (GAO Code 103838). DoD concurs with the recommendation, and provides the enclosed comments for consideration.

Sincerely,

HEBERT.LERNE Digitally signed by
HEBERT.LERNE.S.J.1121185934
S.J.1121185934 Date: 2021.06.28 16:13:48
Lernes J. Hebert
Performing the Duties of the Assistant Secretary
of Defense for Manpower and Reserve
Affairs

Attachment:
As stated

cc:
Director, Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency
Director, Joint Staff
Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army
for Military Personnel and Quality of Life

**GAO DRAFT REPORT DATED MAY 27, 2021
GAO-21-276 (GAO CODE 103838)**

**“MILITARY INSTALLATIONS: DOD SHOULD CONSIDER VARIOUS SUPPORT
SERVICES WHEN DESIGNATING SITES AS REMOTE OR ISOLATED”**

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS
TO THE GAO RECOMMENDATIONS**

RECOMMENDATION 1: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of the Defense in collaboration, with the Secretaries of the military departments and the Commandant of the Marine Corps, should develop policy for designating installations in the United States as remote or isolated that includes a process for considering support services for Service members and dependents in areas besides MWR.

DoD RESPONSE: Concur. The Department will review its policies to designate installations in the United States as remote or isolated including those that address support services such as MWR.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of the Defense in collaboration, with the Secretaries of the military departments and the Commandant of the Marine Corps, should systematically assess the risk associated with not having needed support services for Service members and their dependents stationed in remote or isolated areas and develop strategies to better meet those needs as appropriate.

DoD RESPONSE: Concur. The Department will review risk assessment processes associated with the services provided to remote or isolated locations and the means by which military family needs are met.

Appendix VII: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Brenda S. Farrell, (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov.

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Kimberly Seay, Assistant Director; Taiyshawna Battle; Samuel Blumenthal; Gabrielle Crossnoe; Alexandra Gonzalez; Amie Lesser; John Mingus; Marcus Oliver; Brian Pegram (Analyst-in-Charge); Richard Powelson; Terry Richardson; and John Wren made key contributions to this report.

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